

"Until the End" Joshua 6:15-20 / Act 2:1-4 / Luke 24:45-49 (07/28/2024)

Because South Korea is currently and officially under ceasefire, all men have the duty to do military service. I hoped to do this military duty as an Air Force officer, so I applied for the Airforce officer course. After I passed all the exams and interviews to be an officer candidate, I finally joined the Air Force officer training base. I started the officer training with 524 candidates. Because it was officer training, we had much harder training than soldiers. We not only had hard physical training but also learned how to make battle plans and how to teach and train soldiers. During the training, the instructors had no mercy. They always shouted and challenged us by saying, "Just give up! You can go home now! Give up!" We had to overcome the hard training and also had to overcome the temptation to go home anytime when we gave up the training. The training to be an officer was really not easy.

In the last part of the training, we all had to pass one of the most challenging missions in training. It was marching training. All candidates had to march about 67 miles with 80 pounds of full gear in 3 days. And on the second day, we had to march with only one small bag of snacks and 1 quart of water. They did not provide any other meals or drinks.

This marching training was really challenging for me. I was one of the

shortest candidates. My walking speed was very slow compared to other candidates. I had to walk 3 steps while other candidates walked 2 steps. However, I completed the training well and did not fall behind until the second day. But, on the last day, my stamina ran out, and I started to fall behind. Eventually, I fell behind too much, and I could not see my platoon. From behind, I began to fight the temptation while walking. 'Should I give up here? I cannot see any hope. It is impossible to catch up with my platoon.' However, I decided to walk until the end, no matter what the result. Finally, when I arrived at the gathering point, I could see my platoon's instructor. I was so scared and worried. I was sure the instructor would blame me because I was behind. But I was so surprised because the instructor welcomed me with a big smile. He said, "Paul, you are late, but you did a good job." I could not understand why he smiled and welcomed me.

When all the candidates returned to the training base, I could know why the instructor welcomed me when he saw me. The commander of the training base said that about 80% of candidates passed the marching training. 20% of candidates gave up the marching training in the middle of marching. The marching training was pass-or-fail training. The instructor gave a high training score to all the candidates who passed the marching training. So I could get the training score even though I was late. I could not get a high score if I did not walk until the end.

In today's Scripture, we can see the people who obeyed God until the end. In Joshua 6:15, "On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times." Let us imagine this situation together. In this ancient time, Jericho was famous for impregnability. God ordered Joshua to let Israel march around Jericho. It was not an acceptable order. God did not give them an excellent battle plan, which could be understandable. God just ordered Israel to march around the impregnable place. I can imagine Israel could follow the order one day. But nothing happened until they did what God ordered on the seventh day. There was no shacking on Jericho's wall on the first day. There was no crack on the wall on the second day. Nothing happened until they marched seven times and shouted on the seventh day. If Israel had given up before the seventh day, they would not have seen the miracle of God.

In Acts 2:1-4, the disciples of Jesus received the Holy Spirit. When we read the New Testament, we should know that Christians in the early church believed that Jesus would come again very soon. Jesus just told them, "Wait for the promise of the Father." Jesus did not provide details on the date and time. And it took 50 days. The disciples waited and prayed for 50 days to receive the Holy Spirit. If they had stopped to pray and wait, if they left Jerusalem before 50 days, the gospel would not spread out to the world.

Let me tell you more about my experience on the island. The island is the largest island in South Korea, famous for its beautiful nature and tracking course. Many tourists come to this island for vacation and tracking. I also used to go to that island when I needed to rest. When I arrived at the airport, one of my friends who lived on the island helped me to go to the tracking course. I explained to my friend why I came to the island this time. I said, “I will not use any money or make any decisions by myself to survive. I will listen to the voice of God this time. Otherwise, I will die here.” Then my friend said, “Then I want to be the first provider. Let’s go to the market. Grab whatever you want. I will pay for it.” If I had known it would be the last chance to have some food, I would grab some food as much as I could. But, I did not know that was my last chance, and I was confident that God would provide food with another more dramatic event. So, I grabbed a few pieces of bread and milk packs.

I started to walk the tracking course. I did not plan anything. I decided to be hungry if God did not give me food and decided to sleep on the street if God did not provide any shelter for me. While I was walking the course, I met a group of three middle-aged ladies. We had many conversations while we walked together. They heard my story, and they were impressed by my story. At dinner time, one of the ladies said, “We should go back to our room. Do you want to come with us? I can

let you sleep in my room, and I will treat dinner for you.” At that time, I did not know it was a temptation. Much later, after my trip, I heard that some women travelers tempt young men for a bad purpose on that island. However, I was so much hungry at that time. I only had a small piece of bread and milk for the whole day and walked about 5 hours. So, I lost my reason to think. I only focused on the word “dinner.” I prayed to God. “God, is it your guidance?” My heart was not comfortable to follow that woman. So, I did not follow her and continued to walk.

Then, just right after I started to walk, the rain came down hard. I thought, ‘Oh, that was the guidance of God to provide me shelter and food. I was so stupid! I kicked the chance that came from God because I was spiritually deaf!’ I was so angry with myself that I kept thinking about the chance. I was so caught up in that thought. I did not even know I was walking the wrong path and the sun had set. When I realized I had lost the way, I was in the middle of a bush in the darkness. When I looked back, the way was covered by a bush. I could not find the way I came. I was so scared. I was hungry, in the bush, the darkness, and the hard rain. That time, I found a light far from me. I started to run toward the light. I passed the bush, and I do not know it was a cattle shed or a pigpen, I passed an animal shed. I was bleeding on my legs because of the bushes, and I was covered by mud and dirty things. I was so despaired and disappointed in myself. I started out saying that I would die without

God's voice very bravely, but when I faced death, I was very scared. I wanted to stop the travel and go back home. Later this event, God sent me helpers to finish the trip. The next day, I finally heard God's voice, saying, "I gave my only Son to you for you. I died for you on the cross. Now I am with you." If I had given up the trip that night, I would not hear God's voice and assurance of God's presence.

Then, how can we go until the end? How can we continue our journey of faith until the end? I am a young person here, but I am old enough to know that life is not easy. We meet many painful situations and challenges in our lives. Then, how can we do and go until the end while we encounter many challenges? We can continue our faith journey until the end, not because we are strong but because God is with us.

Before God ordered Joshua to march around Jericho, God emphasized several times that God would be with Joshua. Joshua 1:5, "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you." Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." God was with Joshua. God was with Israel while they marched on the first day, the second day, and until the seventh day. Because God was with me, I could not follow the way of

temptation. Even when I lost the reason to think, God was with me and guided me to the way of life.

Last time, I expressed gratitude that God gave me the heart that you are God's people who stayed in the church during a challenging season. I want to say thank you again. However, we should know that God was with us. When we suffered from Covid, God was with us. When we were disappointed by disaffiliation, God was with us. We could overcome this challenging time because God was with us. So do not give up here. Do not stop our church's journey here. Let us walk until the end. God just opened a new chapter of our church. I hope we can continue our journey of faith until the end with the presence of God. Amen.