

**"Know Who We Are " 1 Kings 19:1-15, Gal 3:23-29, Luke 8:26-39 (09/7/2024)**

When I was in the last year of the seminary in Korea, I had a chance to visit New Jersey for a ministry tour. Some of the United Methodist Church in New Jersey directed a 3-week program and invited some students from Korea. So, thankfully, I could come to the US only by paying for a flight ticket. It was my first visit to the United States.

While my ministry tour team was visiting some churches in New Jersey, one of the missionaries in Haiti heard that we were in New Jersey, and she invited my team to visit Haiti. So, my team decided to go to Haiti for a week.

When I visited Haiti, it was a year after the big earthquake in Haiti. Haiti was one of the poorest countries in the world. And because of the big earthquake in 2010, about 250,000 people were dead or injured, and most infrastructures were destroyed. Politics was corrupt, and security was not good. The government intercepted supplies sent by the world, and gangs also took the supplies. The country was not safe. People lost their homes and were exposed to danger.

Since the government could not function to distribute the supplies, so many missionaries helped the United Nations to distribute supplies safely. So, my team joined the work of distributing supplies. Since we were observers of the work, we

worked in some safe places, such as women's prisons and orphanages. Even though we were in safe areas, we could see many desperate situations. The female prisoners competed to eat the bread. They tried to have even the worm-eaten bread. The orphan children kept following my team to get one more piece of food.

In addition, one distribution team missionary brought me into Haiti's dangerous area because I could speak English. He said he needed an interpreter for his missionary work, so he took me to his mission place, which was in a dangerous area. So, among my ministry tour team, only I could see worse places in Haiti. When I arrived at his place, I was really shocked by the situation of people in Haiti. There were countless bullet marks on the wall, and I could not breathe because of the trash and human excrement smell. After I came back to the safe place, one of other missionaries told me that in the place I visited, there were gun shootings every day, gangs raped girls every night, and no toilet because all waste disposal system was destroyed. Because I might feel hard tension in a dangerous place, I was sick and lay down in bed until we came back to New Jersey. I had been sick for about three days.

I experienced many horrible things in Haiti and saw and met many painful situations of Haiti people. However, after I returned to New Jersey and Korea, the situation in Haiti had nothing to do with me. Even though I experienced, could

remember the memories of those days, and could do something for the people in Haiti, the problems in Haiti had nothing to do with me directly because my identity was Korean, not Haitian. On the other hand, when Haitians heard the news about North Korea's nuclear missile test, they could be concerned about peace, but it had nothing to do with Haitians because they are not Korean.

In today's Gospel Scripture, a man of the city who had demons said to Jesus, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" Because of the identity of demons, Jesus had nothing to do with him. **This Scripture shows us that knowing our identity is very important for having a relationship with God.** Because demons captured this man, he had the identity of demons. Demons could not stay with Jesus, the Son of the Holy God. So, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus?"

In the Bible, we can see the human being's identity changing. **Firstly, our identity started as a creature.** Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." So, the first identity of human beings was that of the creature of God, who was created by God in God's image. Because of this identity, God had something to do with humans. God was the creator of humans, blessed humans, and was the source

of human life. This identity was caused by the creation. However, this identity had been changed because of the sin.

**The human being's second identity was the sinner.** This identity was caused when human beings ignored the identity of creatures. In Genesis 3:4-5, "But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The serpent tempted humans by saying "you will be like God." Since humans wanted to be like God, they did not need God anymore. The sin was caused by arrogance, and the sin broke the relationship between God and human beings. Because of the sinner's identity, God's blessing was cut off, and human beings were in pain and suffering.

**The third identity of human beings is the righteousness of God.** In Galatians 3:11, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for "The one who is righteous will live by faith." And 3:24 says, "Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith." Human beings could have this identity of righteousness because of justification. God justified human beings as righteous because of Jesus Christ. So, we could be justified by faith.

During the time of the Roman Empire, Jews had a strong power in the Galatian church. Jewish Christians in the Galatian church argued that human beings could not be saved if they did not follow the Law even though they believed in Jesus Christ. This argument caused the division of the church between Jews and Gentiles. So, Paul argued and taught them that people could be justified by faith.

This is the reason why Jesus Christ had something to do with us. If we could be justified by the Law, Jesus might have nothing to do with us because we are not Jews who inherited the Law. However, since we can be justified by faith, we can be called righteous by God.

Then, what is the relationship between the justification of God and Jesus Christ? What is the relationship between the faith and Jesus Christ? And how does Jesus Christ have something to do with our salvation?

In Galatians 2:19-20, Paul said, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." There is only one way to solve the problem of sin and restore our identity from sinners to righteous. It is death. Indeed, Jesus died for us on the cross, and he became a sacrifice to solve our problem

of sin. Then, how does this event of 2000 years ago have something to do with us? This death of Jesus Christ could have something to do with us because of our faith. We should believe that our sinful identity was dead on the cross with Jesus Christ, and we are living in the identity of righteousness with Jesus Christ.

We should know those three identities of human beings to have this faith. We should know that we are creatures of God, and then we are able to know that we cannot live without God, who is the source of life. We should know that we are sinners who have no choice but to die. Then, we will pursue and find the salvation of God. And we will desire the way to be saved from eternal death. And we should know that we are righteous and justified by God. Then, we will realize that God is the only One who can justify us, and this justification came from the sacrifice of Jesus and our faith.

When the justification of God restores our identities, our lives will be dramatically changed. The man who had demons found his identity as human when he met Jesus Christ. Then, he became a person who proclaimed God's work. Elijah, who was afraid and ran for his life, restored his identity as the prophet when he heard the voice of God. Elijah was the person who had a battle with 450 of Baal's prophets. And he revealed the greatness of God and killed all the prophets of Baal. Elijah was

in fear when he heard that Jezebel would kill him, and he gave up his life and was about to die under the broom tree. The voice of God restored Elijah's identity. Then Elijah became a prophet who anointed the king of Israel rather than a prophet who killed people.

Getting to know our identity is important to get to know God. When we know about ourselves well, we can start a relationship with God. Do we believe that we are justified by God? Do we believe that our sinful identities were dead on the cross with Christ and our righteous identities live with Christ? Do we believe that Jesus can change our lives? Today, God is with us no matter how we answer those questions. God has already decided to call us to be righteous of God. To call us to be righteous, Jesus died for us, and God poured the Holy Spirit on us. I hope we can experience the grace of God that restores our identity and leads us into a life of righteousness. Amen.