

*"Know what God is pleased with" Gen 1:31, 1 Kings 3:9-12, 1 Cor 1:18-25 Matthew 26:39 (09/29/24)*

After my high school graduation in New Zealand, I decided to go back to South Korea to study in the seminary. I was looking forward to going back to South Korea because I heard from my family that my parents had become Christians. I was so excited that I thought I could go to church and live a spiritual life with my parents. However, the reality was not the same as I expected. When I came back to South Korea from New Zealand, the relationships among my family were broken and not good. My father was in despair because of several business failures. My mother could not sleep without alcohol. My sister was overwhelmed because of the relationship between our father and mother, so she did not care for the family anymore. This was a deeply disappointing situation for me.

I was so disappointed by my situation. I expected to go to church with my family together and do a lot of church work for God. Once I came back home, I encountered many despairing situations. And the broken relationship of my family also disrupted my theology study and church work. Even though they decided to go to church, my family did not understand why I decided to become a pastor. They did not understand why I spent so much time and energy in the

church. They were not supportive of me. I was not happy at that time.

So, I prayed to God. “God, my classmates have a lot of support from their families. Their families are so proud of my classmates. But look at me. I need to learn much more than my friends in seminary. But my family is not the best supporter. They are the worst disrupters of my life. I should move forward, but my family is disrupting me.” That time, God just answered my prayer with a very short message. “Take care of your family.” So, I decided to solve my family's relationship problem. Restoring my family's relationship took about 4-5 years. I cannot share all the stories in today's preaching. Today, I just want to share one funny story that happened during the restoration of my family.

To start to restore my family's relationship, I started to have a conversation with my father. Because of the Confucian culture, Korean fathers do not have a lot of conversations with their children. A static says the average time of conversation between a father and children in a Korean family is 15 seconds. It is not even a conversation. It is a time just ask a question. “Daddy? Where is mom?” I also grew up in this culture, so I also did not have a lot of conversation with my father. However, I learned a very different model of parents of Christians, so I tried to have a conversation with my father. I was surprised that my father said he

tried a lot to restore the relationship with my mother, but my mother did not accept my father's efforts. So, my father said, "I don't know what I should do." That time was near my mother's birthday, so I asked my father. "Dad, did you do anything for Mom on her birthday?" He said, "No. She always gets angry if I do something." So, I said, "Dad, you don't know woman. Let's prepare a surprise for mother this time. She will like it." So, on my mother's birthday, my father and I prepared a surprise. Because my mother was at home all the time, we silently prepared everything in front of the door. We prepared a gorgeous cake, candles, and a very beautiful flower bouquet. I was so excited. I thought, 'Yes, everything happened because my father didn't do anything for my mother. This will be the start of the restoration. This surprise event will touch my mother's heart.' I confidently rang the bell after finishing preparation. When my mother opened the door, we shouted, "Surprise! Happy Birthday!" Once my mother saw the beautiful cake, candles, and flowers, she got angry and shouted at my father. "How many times have I told you! I don't need anything! I just want fried chicken and wine on my birthday!" Yes, the surprise was totally failed. My father and I did not know what my mother liked. We did not know what my mother was pleased with. The problem is my father still does not remember fried chicken and wine on my

mother's birthday. Yes, husbands do not listen to wives. So, it has become a tradition in my family that my sister and I remind my father to buy some fried chicken and wine for my mother's birthday.

What is God pleased with? This is one of the very important questions for Christians. I believe that pleasing God is the most important purpose of our lives. Not only Christians but human beings also have a history of pleasing their gods. Since ancient times, human beings have tried to please their gods to avoid the god's wrath and to receive the blessing. Some gods were pleased with sacrificial offerings and some ways of worship. So, in history, humans made a sacrificial offering to gods and worshiped gods. However, we clearly know that our God will not be pleased with that kind of sacrificial offerings and worship. Then, what is our God pleased with? The Bible tells us several things that God is pleased with.

Firstly, God is pleased with us. God is pleased with just us. In Genesis 1:31, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." The word "good" is translated from the Hebrew word "טוֹב" (tôwb). This Hebrew word also has a meaning of "pleased." So, God thought everything God had made was very good, and God was pleased with what God created. This means that God was pleased with the human that God created. God created us, so according to

Genesis, God is pleased with us.

Secondly, God is pleased with our repentance. Let us think about what the repentance is. When people hear the word “repentance” in the church, they usually imagine “Confess sins and forgiveness.” Yes, “Confess sins and forgiveness” is the most important matter of repentance. However, it is not the main meaning of the repentance. The main meaning of repentance is “Returning to God.” We confess our sins to return to God. God forgives us to make us return to God. Then, what should return to God? Should we return our bodies to God? Should we return our souls to God? The most important thing is that we should return our thoughts of self-righteousness. The thoughts of self-righteousness, “I can live my life the way I want.” “I can save myself.” “I can live my life without God.” The broken relationship between humans and God started from the temptation. “You can be like God if you eat the fruit. You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Humans left God because of the broken relationship that caused humans' self-righteousness of wish to be like God.

In today's Scripture, 1 Kings, it says, “The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.” The other translation of the Bible says, “It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.” Then, what did Solomon ask for? In 3:9, “So, give

your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The other translation of the Bible translated the words "right and wrong" as "good and evil." This means that Solomon asked for the wisdom of God to distinguish between "good and evil." Solomon was a king who could do everything that he wanted. But Solomon wanted to govern God's people as God's will. This heart of Solomon pleased God. Humans' arrogance to know "good and evil like God" returned to humility to know good and evil by relying on God. The confession of Solomon, "I cannot do anything without you, Lord," pleased God.

Thirdly, God was pleased to save "those who believe." In 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." Paul said, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." Then, what is the foolishness? In 1:18, Paul said, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing."

Jesus showed humility himself. He wanted to avoid the cross, if possible, but he prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." It is foolishness if we do not know the cross. Jesus was able to avoid the cross. Jesus could have been a human

king of Israel with his crowds, but the almighty Son of God chose the way of the cross. How foolish it is! However, Jesus knew the will of God. Jesus knew his sacrifice was the only way to save all human beings. Jesus showed how humans' self-righteousness returns to humility. God was pleased to save people through this foolishness of the cross. Paul said, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified." Now, people demand money, people look for fame, but we preach Christ crucified. No matter who we are, "to those whom God has called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Because we believe Jesus is Christ and his sacrifice saved us, we know the cross is not foolishness but is the power and glory.

These are what God pleased with. God is pleased with us. God is pleased with us, who are sinful and full of weaknesses. God is pleased when we return to God. God will be pleased if we give up our self-righteousness and invite Christ as the Lord of our lives. We should show and preach the power and glory of the cross to please our God. Even though people say we are foolish, we should walk the way of the cross to please our God. Amen.