

**“Participate in the work of the Gospel” Philippians 1:3-11 / Luke 3:1-6 (12/8/24)**

After I became a Christian, I really wanted to devote my life to Jesus. I especially hoped to introduce Jesus and Christianity to people well because I met many Christians who did not introduce Jesus to me well, and I misunderstood Jesus and Christianity when I was not a Christian.

I went to the seminary right after I was baptized, and I spent most of my time at the church while I studied in the seminary. So, I did not have many chances to meet unchurched people. However, when I started my military duty after graduating from the seminary, I met many unchurched military people.

I served as an officer in the Air Force for military duty. My position was a company commander. I hoped to show Jesus’s love to my soldiers. Even though I was their commander, I decided to serve them as Jesus served his people. Unlike US soldiers, Korean soldiers are prohibited from leaving their base even on weekends. Korean soldiers cannot use restaurants other than the soldiers' cafeteria unless accompanied by an officer or sergeant. So, I delivered McDonald’s meals if they wanted to eat hamburgers. Sometimes, I visited soldiers' buildings at night with Sushi boxes to encourage my soldiers even when it was not my working day. And I used my personal money for a soldiers’ steak and beer party.

While I served my soldiers, other companies' soldiers were jealous of my company. Other company commanders started to complain to me and told me to stop serving the soldiers. I was happy to have the complaints because I believed it was a good sign that I served my soldiers well, as Jesus served people.

However, one day, a soldier came to my office to say goodbye to me. That day was his discharge day. He was a good soldier and was close to me. But he was not a Christian. He said I was a good commander, and he expressed gratitude for my serving the soldiers. And I asked him a question, “You know that I am a Christian. And I served you and other soldiers to let you know Jesus’s love. Did you feel any of Jesus’s love through my service?” And his answer shocked me and totally changed my perspective. He answered, “Oh, I did not know you served us to show the love of Jesus. I just thought that you were a good person.” I thought I was participating in the work of the Gospel that spread out Jesus’s love to others. However, in the end, I was shown up as a good person through my service, but Jesus was not shown at all. Before this event in my life, I just thought that participating in the work of the Gospel was being a good person to others. I realized that participating in the work of the Gospel was more than that being a good person.

Then, what is participating in the work of the Gospel? Before we know about participating in the work of the Gospel, we should understand what the work of the Gospel is.

As I shared before, I was a Buddhist until I was 17 years old. So, I still remember the days when I visited the Buddhist temple with my parents. In my memory, every Buddhist temple had at least one Buddha statue in its sanctuary. Buddha statue always had a merciful smile and welcomed people who came to the temple. However, when I visit a temple, I should pass a gate to go to the front of the Buddha statue. Most of the big and famous temples in Korea have this gate. The gate was called “the gate of the Four Devas.” Buddhists believed that The Four Devas were protecting this gate and the temple. These Four Devas were the kings of evil, but they were impressed by the teachings of Buddha, so they became protectors of Buddha and his temple. If you look at their faces, you will see that they have very scary faces stamped on evil people. Buddhists believe that the Four Devas judge good and evil people on this gate, so only good people can pass this gate to go to Buddha.

Even though Buddha had a merciful smile and welcomed me, I always felt that Buddha was so far from me. I should have passed the scary gate to see

Buddha's face, and I made a lot of effort to become like Buddha, but I always had doubts in my heart. I did a lot of good works, I worshiped Buddha, and I brought many offerings to Buddha. But I always asked myself, "Is it enough to become like Buddha? Now could I be free from my sin?" Buddha taught me many good things, but he was so far from me that he was not in me. He could not solve my concern about sin.

When I came to the church and heard about the Gospel, I really was impressed and shocked by one word, Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us." I could not believe that God came to the earth with the human body. I could not believe the incarnation. It was really amazing when I heard that "God is with me"! When I was a Buddhist, I should go to Buddha to meet him. I believe not only Buddhism but also many religions have similar doctrines that humans should come to gods. However, Emmanuel is the unique character of Christianity. God came to us in the human body to meet us. God came to us to be with us.

Yes, the Gospel, the Good News, is that "God is with us." So, the work of the Gospel is to "let people know that God is with us now." So, we should participate in letting people know that God is with us. In other words, we should participate in letting people know Jesus because Jesus is the representative of

“God is with us.”

Then, how can we participate in the work of the Gospel? Firstly, we should proclaim the Gospel. We should proclaim Jesus to the people. In today’s Gospel Scripture, John the Baptist participated in the work of the Gospel. He was proclaiming the coming of Jesus. The message of Isaiah was fulfilled by John the Baptist. John proclaimed Jesus and prepared the way for Jesus. I served my soldiers to show the love of God. However, I did not tell them about Jesus. I did not proclaim Jesus. I just did good work for them. Then, they could not know who Jesus was through my good work. As John the Baptist did, we should proclaim Jesus in our lives to participate in the work of the Gospel.

Secondly, we can learn how to participate in the work of the Gospel through the Philippian church in the Scripture. In today’s Philippians Scripture, Paul mentioned that the Philippian church participated in the Gospel from the first day until Paul wrote this letter.

In the time of the Roman Empire, Philippi was positioned on "Via Egnatia." "Via Egnatia" was a very important Roman road connecting Rome and Asia Minor. So, the Roman Empire used "Via Egnatia" to transport special

products of Asia Minor, such as gold. Because of this position of the Philippi, Philippi was considered an important stopover place for trade and transportation. Many merchants and diverse people used and stayed in Philippi during trade and transport. So, Philippi became the center of many cultures and religions. Especially in religion, Philippians worshiped various gods. They worshiped Thracian gods and goddesses, Egyptian gods, and Roman gods. And as I mentioned before, the Philippians were rich. They had many benefits from Roman citizenship. And many retired Roman soldiers settle down at Philippi. So, they were confident that many gods protect them and give them their good lives.

In this context, Paul planted the Philippian church, and Christians in Philippi only worshiped God who came to the earth with the human body. Paul mentioned the partnership of the Philippian church because they supported Paul's mission work a lot. However, we can see how the Philippian church could participate in the work of the Gospel through verse 6. In verse 6, we can see that Paul was very confident God in the Christians of Philippi would carry good work on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. The Philippian Christians were people who desired Christ's coming. Since they had faith and desired the day of Jesus, they could support Paul's mission work. Therefore, I hope to say that

participating in the work of the Gospel is having the desire for Jesus's coming.

Paul wrote this letter during his imprisonment. He was not guaranteed that he could survive after the trial. However, he wrote this letter full of hope and joy. This letter is famous for describing Paul with his thanks, praise, hope, and joy. I believe that he could be confident with hope because he had the desire for the coming of Jesus Christ. Christians should have hearts of hope and joy, which comes from the desire for Jesus Christ's coming. We are having the season of Advent now. We have this season to remember the incarnation of Jesus Christ and share and celebrate the joy of the coming of Jesus Christ. So, even though our lives are not easy, we can be joyful. Even though we are suffering, we can be hopeful because Jesus Christ is coming. And we have this season to participate in the work of the Gospel. Because we have the desire for Jesus's coming, we can proclaim the Good News to the people. This week, as John the Baptist did and as the Philippian church did, I hope we can participate in the work of the Gospel. Through our desire for Jesus's coming, I hope we can proclaim our Emmanuel God, Jesus Christ, in our lives. Amen.