

Sunday Sermon 100123 Exodus 17:1-7, Matthew 21:28-32

“Is the Lord among Us or Not?”

Professor J.K. Galbraith was a famous American economist in the 1970s. In his book, “The Age of Uncertainty,” he wrote, “No economic theory exists that can give us assurance of economic success like we had in the past.” Certainty is something that all of us desire, is it not? We want certainty because it gives us a sense of security and predictability. We do not want surprises, especially when it comes to things like our finances, jobs, or health.

Living in the 21st century, can we say that we are living in “a certain age?” I do not think so. Although there are certain aspects of life that are more certain now than in the 1970s, life seemed to be a touch simpler back then, at least to me. Despite our longing for certainty, I believe that people have and will continue to live with uncertainty until the second coming.

Looking at the Old Testament scripture today, which was set around 1,500 B.C., the Israelites made an outcry because of their uncertainty about their present reality. They always wondered, “Is the Lord with us or not?” Of course, from our point of view, we all know that the Lord is certainly with them. The issue for the Israelites was rather a question of whether they rejected God or not.

People today are groaning because of the uncertainty of the economy, public health, and our security, are we not? However, we must not let these worldly issues blind us to the true crisis: the uncertainty of living a life without a relationship with God. Let’s look into ways to solve that problem.

I. Hold onto the words of the Bible.

The Israelites likely thought that once they escaped Egypt, their problems and difficulties would be over. Perhaps they believed that the path to Canaan would be short and easy. But, as we all know, God had different plans. He wanted them to be trained, to become stronger, and to follow His instructions. As a result, they could welcome God as their master in their hearts.

However, they placed themselves as the masters of their hearts instead of putting the one who delivered them there. Therefore, there was a conflict. That is why, even through the pillar of fire, the manna from the heavens, and the parting of the red sea, they could not be swayed into putting God first.

Instead, they were fixated on their personal discomforts and complaints instead of marveling at the wonder of his miracles and placing their faith in him. That is why they were anxious and complained about God. Even though God assigned Moses as his spokesman, they could not feel assured despite the wonders performed.

God wants His people to grow in their faith. Why? Because strong faith in him will allow us to overcome all the problems and pains that we face in our lives. It can be difficult since we are programmed to believe in what we can see, just like the Israelites were. However, just like the Israelites, our complaints can blind us to the miracles and works of God already present in our lives.

How do we grow in our faiths? It's simple: the word. When we read the Bible, we can experience his presence, and all acts in which our faith grows can be traced back to his word. God gave us the Bible so that we could experience him, his character, his miracles, and his love for us. Church, we need to eat the words of the Bible.

There was a singer who was once the most popular singer in the country. However, at some point in time, he felt his popularity decline. He started his own business, dreaming of another great success. But his business went bankrupt due to a severe economic downturn. Furthermore, he was accused of a crime and put in jail.

One day, when he blamed the world and himself for being in jail, a guard called to him. The guard read the Bible to him as usual, from Romans 10:17, which said, "So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ." At the moment of hearing this, the singer was moved, and through Jesus, he gained the realization of being forgiven of his past, present, and future sins.

At that moment, he shed endless tears and made a vow to surrender his future to God. After reading the Old and New Testaments 16 times, he was released from prison and is now a pastor.

I hope that we pray to God to give us that same excitement and enthusiasm when we read his word, because we know that doing so will lead us to everlasting life!

II. Fight your circumstances with your faith.

Throughout history, there have always been an endless number of threats and temptations. Do you ever wonder if, had we continued to live in the Garden of Eden, things would not have been so hard? However, we need to remember that even in the Garden of Eden, there was temptation.

Even among the plants and bounty in the garden, he still gave them rules and regulations that they had to comply with to enjoy the garden, just like we have to do so today.

I would like to share my experience of faith in the process of obtaining my doctorate in ministry.

In 1998, I was serving in Camarillo, Ventura County, and it was the last year I had to complete my project for the Doctor of Ministry degree. I decided to skip leading the early morning prayer meeting, which meets every day during the week, for two months to have time, and I got permission from the Administrative Council for my plan. However, when I submitted my first draft of the project, it was rejected by the thesis review committee.

Luckily, the committee allowed me a two-month grace period to revise my project. This time, I continued leading the early morning prayer meeting without skipping. It wasn't a decision I made because I no longer wanted to damage the prayer meetings. Of course, by conducting a prayer meeting every morning, I was chased by time and could easily get tired. However, it is because I wanted to continue my fellowship with the Lord even during busy times and to continue praying at dawn in order to gain wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

As a result, I was able to pass all the subsequent steps without problems. It is very difficult for us to be in a situation where there is no one

to help me except God. However, we must remember that that very time and place is a great opportunity for us to truly meet the absolute God.

III. Ask God to give His wisdom.

Let's move to the New Testament scripture of the gospel of Matthew and listen to the word of Jesus in verse 31b: "Truly, I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." How would you feel if you were one of those in the audience who were told that prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God before you? That would probably be something that you could neither understand nor accept.

God gives us very simple laws to follow: believe and trust in Him, and believe in Jesus Christ as our savior. However, human beings set their own laws and reject the laws of God. Perhaps it might be harder to believe in Jesus for those who are prideful and are captured by self-righteousness. The Jewish leaders were righteous but proud. The tax collectors and prostitutes were unrighteous but humble.

Which group of people will enter heaven? The righteous and proud? No. On the contrary, those unrighteous ones are going to enter heaven, not because they are unrighteous but because of their humility, which leads to their faith in Jesus. One thing we need to be aware of is the condition "ahead of you." This is him telling us that he wants to give us time to repent and humble ourselves.

Robert Ingersoll was a U.S. lawyer and nicknamed "the great agnostic." One day, he finished his speech supporting atheism and took out a watch from his pocket and said, "According to the Bible, God killed those people who insulted him. Everyone, I am going to insult him now and give him 5 minutes. We will see if he kills me and drops me and my soul into hell."

While the first minute passed, people were so fearfully quiet. In the second minute, their nerves were on edge. In the third minute, one lady fainted. In the fourth, Ingersoll pouted scornfully. When the fifth minute was passed, he snapped the cap of his pocket watch.

"All right, everyone, you saw clearly. There is no God. If there were a God, he would never allow me to live when I have tested him like this." What do you think about his conclusion?

Do you think that Ingersoll's statement bears any truth? Ingersoll's statement was a prime example of humans putting God in a box and putting human in the same sphere of reasoning and thought as God's.

The people of the modern generation ask the same question today, "Is God with me or not?" as the Israelites did in Massah and Meribah. However, the reason they could not see God then is the same as why people do not see him now. That is because they decide not to see God in their hearts. God promised, "You will find me if you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13, 14).

In the desert, the Israelites cried out when they were in desperate danger of lacking water and said, "God is not with us; where are you now?" Even after water poured out of the rock, did they fully experience God's presence? No, they did not. They were so focused on their personal satisfaction that they did not realize the gravity of the miracle right in front of them. It is only when we humble ourselves that we can see and experience God and his works.

If we have security, public health, and economic stability, will our faithfulness to God become unshakable? No way. Hardships and temptations will always come. But God will be with you always through Jesus Christ. You will be in His presence right away when you rely on Him. The God who made water come out from the rock at Mount Sinai will also quench your thirst and fulfill his promises to you when we walk with him in faith. Amen.

****Reflection and Application for Today's Sermon:**

1) This evening, please sing hymn #600 and try to gauge the power of the word of God through its lyrics.

2) Please share two spiritual struggles you have faced in order to grow your faith and the principles of victory you have achieved as a result of those struggles.

3) Daniel, who was taken captive to Babylon, also grappled with uncertainty. However, in that dire crisis, Daniel attained certainty. What was the cause? (Refer to Daniel 6:10).