

Sunday Sermon (Passion Sunday) 03242024 Isaiah 50:4-9a, Mark 15:6-20

“God Is My Help”

One Saturday in the spring of 1981, in Korea, Euni and I had a wedding. That afternoon, we checked our bags at the airport and waited for our honeymoon to Jeju Island, the southernmost part of Korea. However, because of the strong winds blowing on Jeju Island, the airline canceled our flight. The following Sunday morning, upon arriving at the airport, we discovered that the airline had canceled our flight once more. Unavoidably, Euni and I attended worship services at my home church with my family.

Since the honeymoon, disturbances have plagued my marriage. How do you feel about a marriage like this? During the service, I thought it would be better for me to fast, pray with Euni, and go on our honeymoon. At that time, we were willing to obey God's word, but in fact, we knew nothing about marriage. We desperately needed God's help.

We went to the prayer house in the mountains, finished fasting prayer for 3 days, and then flew to Jeju Island. Even though our honeymoon began with fasting prayer, we, who married 25 days after meeting each other through a matchmaker, have been married now for 43 years.

In today's Bible scriptures, let us look at the lessons of God's help to his only begotten Son, Jesus and his children.

How glad and thankful are we when we receive absolute help in moments of despair? There is no human being who can live alone. Human beings give and take help from each other to survive. If we cannot live without the help of fallible humans, how much more can we not live without the help of God? But how often do we think that we can live on our own, with our own strength? This pride is what causes humankind to live in despair.

Today is Palm Sunday and also Passion Sunday. How can we give two names in one day? It is because the events for redemption through Jesus were developed continuously. Jesus entered Jerusalem as the King of Peace, and "the entrance of the king" leads directly to the path of suffering. He was executed as a sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of mankind.

Let's learn more about Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday is a celebration of the official entrance of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem for the crucifixion as the humble king of peace. It is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the first day of the week of Passion Week among the modern church feasts.

In the Bible, the palm tree symbolizes righteousness, beauty, and victory. The first day of Passion Week is called Palm Sunday. It comes from when the people waved palm branches when welcoming the Messiah Jesus as the King of Triumph when entering Jerusalem. It was once called "Dominica Hosanna (Hosanna Sunday)," which is also derived from the cry of "Hosanna," which is what the people were saying as he entered.

Some Greek churches counted Palm Sunday as the day the Lord was glorified and excluded the day from the week of Passion. However, the Son of God, King of Kings, showed his humility by entering the city on a young donkey in the form of humble humans. Jesus' entry also signifies the beginning of the trial he will face in the last week of his life. Therefore, both Eastern and Western churches include Palm Sunday in Passion Week.

Let us think here about the driving force behind Jesus' suffering on the cross. I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the phrase "born with a silver spoon in his mouth." People typically use the phrase 'silver spoon' to denote earthly wealth or power, often in the context of envy or jealousy. Was Jesus born with a silver spoon? Definitely not by earthly standards. Look where he was born. In a shabby manger! That would be pretty much unheard of today.

Let's pay attention to the Isaiah text. The Lord's servant here refers to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. Through the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah, he says that God will give him wisdom to endure the attack of the enemy in the future. What does he particularly emphasize in verses 7 through 9? He confesses, "Because the Sovereign Lord helps me."

Throughout his ministry and life, Jesus will endure suffering, including beatings, having his beard plucked out, facing aggression, and enduring the insult of ambiguous accusations. Ultimately, he will bear the sins of mankind and undergo crucifixion (Isaiah 53:12). But the prophet Isaiah testifies that he is able to endure all that suffering and death because God the Father absolutely supports and helps his Son, Jesus.

Jesus was not born with earthly wealth but was born with the guarantee that God was in his corner. So, he was always able to maintain a firm trust and knowledge of God's promise that he could walk the path of sacrifice for our salvation.

Unfortunately, the promise was never a guarantee that God would make the cost of the sacrifice of Jesus light, short, and easy. As we all know, Jesus had to endure unspeakable pain. However, God assured him that He would keep Jesus from suffering shame and death so long as he relied on Him.

The way of the Atonement to save mankind from sin is full of suffering, mockery, and contempt. No one could bear the amount of physical and emotional pain that Jesus had to endure for our sins. There is a reason why God did not remove the pain of the cross for the Son, even though he knew the pain and the situation. It was to completely pay the penalty for mankind's sins and make us whole children of God.

Today's New Testament scripture from the gospel of Mark testifies that Isaiah's prophecy was actually accomplished through Jesus' sacrifice. I want to think about the incident in which Jesus was treated as a subhuman being in that text.

Pilate asked the crowd, "What did this man do wrong?" However, the crowd was obsessed with their political interests, not justification. And they cried out, "Do not ask why, but crucify Jesus." How could they condemn a man who has not broken any laws and, rather, free a man who was a convicted murderer? Even to Pilate, this did not seem like the logical choice.

So, what did Jesus have to die for? It was not because of His own sins but because of the sins of man. Jesus is introduced in Philippians 2: "God, who was incarnated in the human body, died on the cross as a sin offering for human sins, while even human character was ignored."

Why did Jesus, who could see and judge all the circumstances, endure the pain? It is because he wanted to fulfill his Father's wish to save mankind while Almighty God helped him.

In John 19:10, Pilate said to Jesus, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified." Do you think Jesus was unaware of that? He clearly knew it. But he denied that authority. Why? For he knew that God the Father was the only one who had the true power to help him.

Why did Euni and I fast and pray? Without God's help, what would it be like for us to fast and pray? God helps us, but why don't we ask? "Fasting prayer" is a form of spiritual sacrifice in which we honestly and humbly confess our weaknesses before God and ask for His help. The Bible introduces a variety of ways and methods by which the Creator helps human beings and creatures, as well as the ways and methods by which humans ask God for help.

Between God, the Almighty Creator, and human beings full of weakness, there is a beautiful and powerful spiritual channel of "help." Under the plan of the Heavenly Father, this instrument permits his children to use it freely and abundantly. Euni and I still ask our Heavenly Father for help.

Where do your power in life and faith come from? Remember, God promised to help you in faith, and He wants to help you today. But no matter how much you want spiritual integrity and a life of purity, you will be unable to do so without his help, and if you cannot even remember the promise and ask for help, it becomes an irreversible spiritual failure.

#504 "The Old Rugged Cross" verse 3. (Euni will sing)

"In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, a wondrous beauty I see, for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, to pardon and sanctify me. (Refrain) So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown."

Human sins crucified Jesus, but the power of death could not take Jesus' spiritual silver spoon. God's promise to help us and protect us is the spiritual silver spoon that all of his children are born with and that cannot be taken away by anyone. But we must ask God to help us see that spoon, grasp it, and never let go. If we neglect the absolute help and safeguards of faith guaranteed by the Creator, it is serious blasphemy.

God, the same God who helped Jesus bear the cross, is our God. With the same hands, the same power, and the same love with which He helped Jesus, God helps His children today. Whenever we look at the cross of Jesus, we must confess that we are going to bear the crosses given to us to the end of our lives and confess to the Lord a new determination of faith. This is the spiritual structure of help that exists between the Lord and us. Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

- 1) To whom and to what situation would you like to apply Jesus' confession, "Because the Sovereign Lord helps me..." that appears in the text of Isaiah (50:7, 9) today? Then, complete the sentence by stating the necessary phrase.
- 2) In Mark 15:12, Pilate asked the crowd, "What then do you want me to do with the one you call the king of the Jews (Jesus)?" To his question, what would you like to answer today?
- 3) When you remember Jesus, who endured the whippings of Roman soldiers and the insults of the crowd before carrying the cross, what kind of patience is required of the church and Christians today, including you?