

“God's Light Shines in Our Hearts”

What did you think about when we read the Old and New Testament scriptures today? There are some outlandish happenings—such as horses and chariots on fire and Jesus speaking with men who have been dead for hundreds of years—that may be difficult to accept at face value. People say that reality is only that which we can see and touch. Is there anyone here who can change or define the boundary of our “reality”? No, there isn't.

But the Bible says in Hebrew 11:3b, “What can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.” God's reality includes not only the things that we humans can see and touch, but also those things that are unseeable and untouchable by us. This is the truth given to us.

On Sunday, February 12, 2023, most of you may have watched the broadcast of the Super Bowl LVII game on TV. The game was a reality at State Farm Stadium, Arizona, 343 miles from here, and we would have to drive 5 hours and 15 minutes by car to get there. The other day, I watched a documentary about World War II. There are 70 years between that war and our current time. However, there is no denying the reality of World War II.

Modern technology has allowed us to experience and acknowledge reality despite distance and time. It can also contribute to the growth and maturity of our faith by supplying plentiful Christian resources and explanations that would be hard to get otherwise.

However, if we use modern technology in the wrong way, it can greatly debilitate our faith. Don't deny it, but there are probably people here who have chosen Facebook too often instead of reading the Bible. Modern technology is not inherently bad, but as the apostle Paul stated, the evil god of this world can use it to keep our minds in the dark. For us, the only way to understand and accept the Bible is through faith. Hebrew 11:3a says, “It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word.”

Today, we read three scriptures. The Old Testament revealed how God cared for those prophets who fulfilled His work faithfully. The Gospel of Mark introduces to his disciples that Jesus is the Savior God sent to the world for mankind. And in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul testified how God planted the Good News in our hearts through Jesus Christ.

Through today's scriptures, I want to provide more insight on the background and basic structure of which the Bible was written. By having that understanding, we are able to have a more clear and solid faith in God.

I. When you read the Bible, remember that God is not restricted by time because He is the controller of time. That is the reason why the prophet Elijah appeared and met Jesus on the mountain, overcoming a 900-year gap.

We are able to repent before God for our wrongdoing in the past, but we also consult and entrust our present and future lives to Him. The Bible says, "There is no difference in the Lord's sight between one day and a thousand years; to him, the two are the same."

II. When you read the Bible, remember that God is not restricted by space. His scope of activity includes everything under ground, on earth, and above the sky, so that He rules all over hell, heaven, and earth. There is no such thing as the unknown or the uncontrollable for Him. As such, we can believe that God sent Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire, pulled by horses of fire.

God has no barriers and can open infinite space for our thoughts and dreams, our activities, our rest, and our lives as a whole. Why wouldn't we want to entrust our lives to Him, who has no limitations? Our today, tomorrow, and even our death are in His omnipresent hands. Give thanks to Him for how blessed and joyous our lives are.

III. When you read the Bible, remember that God is not restricted by any relationships. The Bible deals with the world of humans, gods, and even Satan. It also includes the relationship between ourselves, our neighbors, and God. The Bible recognizes in today's scripture that evil power blinds people from seeing the light that comes from the Good News.

However, despite the hold that Satan may have over us, God made his light shine in our hearts to bring us the knowledge of His glory through Christ. God can always reach us, no matter how deep of a relationship we may be in with Satan or anything else. Satan may invade us with lies and evil, but our God can break any ties that blind us. He can shine a light in our hearts so that we choose to live in righteousness and truth as His children.

# # When I enrolled in seminary, one of my seniors told me something as a joke, but it felt like truth to me at the time: New seminary students, as freshmen, have the hearts of a pastor. As they enter their second year, the students have the hearts of a lay leader. In their junior year, their hearts change to those of just an inquirer. Finally, when they graduate from the seminary, they have the heart of an atheist.

Why? Because these seminary students just concentrate on studying the theology of the Bible, they do not spend time cultivating their faith. The Bible is not just for learning knowledge and truth. Genuine faith is needed to accompany the practice of living life on the basis of Biblical knowledge. Therefore, we need to have a paradigm shift in our practical, inclusive reading and understanding of the Bible.

Let's revisit what the apostle Paul says in today's scripture. How are believers different from non-believers? 2 Corinthians 4:6 says that God "made his light shine in [believer's] hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

So then, what does Paul say about non-believers? Verse 4 says, "They do not believe because their minds have been kept in the dark by the evil god of this world. He keeps them from seeing the light shining on them, the light that comes from the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God."

Our God is the almighty creator. His plans and affairs include everything and everyone in all of the universe, and He allows no obstacles or traps before Him. However, human beings cannot hear or see any of the dealings that happen below us in hell or above us in heaven.

Why? Because the evil god of this generation puts blinders on us. But remember, when we have faith and belief in the creator God, His power lifts the blinders off of our eyes and allows us to see beyond this realm.

I'm not proposing that we become mystics; we don't need to be. However, we need to acknowledge that our Christian faith is mystical in some sense. Of course, it is! We believe in a man who rose from the dead! We also don't need to be transcendentalists, but we could learn a thing or two about Christian piety from them.

We may not see a fiery chariot and team of horses blazing from the Wrightwood sky, nor the transfiguration of Jesus on top of Table Mountain. But if we do not believe God's word written on the pages of the Bible, we are only believers whose faith never extends past our heads. That means we are powerless, inexperienced, and dead believers.

However, when we believe that God accomplished those miraculous works, He fills us with the same power, joy, and mysterious experience within our hearts as Elisha and the disciples felt while on this earth.

# Currently, almost all Korean immigrant churches in the United States hold prayer meetings for five days each week at 5:30 a.m., following the tradition of Korean churches in Korea. This meeting has a full form of worship, where the pastor preaches a short sermon. After the service is over, the attendees have a private prayer time, whether long or short. On the one hand, this system was a very heavy burden for prospective pastors. Of course, for American churches where this meeting is not institutionalized, this is not a problem at all.

When I was enrolled in seminary, I had an internship at a Korean American UM church. The church's senior pastor, Rev. Lee, gave me the assignment to lead the morning prayer meeting every Tuesday. So I thought Rev. Lee wanted to skip the morning prayer service every Tuesday. But he still attended all morning prayer meetings, being the first to come to church and the last to go home. He continued to pray at that time.

I first went to the prayer meeting only on the day I was in charge. For me, a full-time seminary student, even that was considered time-consuming. But as time passed, I began to experience the power of prayer. Having focused on seeking wisdom because of my studies, I gained boldness and security through prayer and left my worries about financial and language problems entirely to the Lord.

From some point on, I started to go to the early morning prayer meeting every day. Apparently, prayer became the driving force behind my studies and life. And through prayer, I gained the joy of fellowship with the Lord. When I was ordained as a pastor of UMC, I was prepared as a person of prayer who had already relieved the fear of the early morning prayer meeting but rather enjoyed the early morning prayer meeting.

Now, although our church does not ask me to pray at dawn, I still desperately need my prayer time. It is because the light of God's glorious grace shines on the field of faith that was formed in my heart at that time. I bless you that we will all be filled with the light of knowledge of the glory of God through fellowship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:***

- 1) What changes do you experience in your faith or perception of the universe by acknowledging God, who is free from the constraints of time, space, and relationships?
- 2) Of all the things you have learned about God's character through the face (or words) of Jesus Christ, what gives you the greatest joy? Why?
- 3) What new challenges do you face in the religious decisions and actions you have been putting off because of knowing and trusting in the transcendent God?