

Sunday, July28, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「"Those who have scattered"」 Pastor : Takaaki Inoue
1 Kings 21:2~7, Acts 7:54~8:8

① 【If you stop fighting your sins, the church will crumble】

The early church started out as a very powerful and exemplary beauty. The Bible says: "The multitude of believers were united in heart and mind, and none of them claimed to have their possessions as their own, but shared everything. Among the believers, there was not a single poor person. ... for the money was distributed to each according to their needs." (Acts 4:32, 35) I think it's amazing. This is what the ideal church looks like. The other day, a Christian told me, "The image of Christians in the Bible and the appearance of Christians in reality are so different that I don't understand the Bible," but I wonder if such a church could really be built, and why it was possible in the early church. This was modeled on "Communist Thought." In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution occurred, and the disparity between capitalists and workers became prominent, and the problems of capitalism became apparent. Therefore, Karl Marx is said to have written the "Theory of Capital" with the ideal of the early church.

However, this ideal state of the early church did not last long, and as time passed, many problems arose from both inside and outside, and it crumbled. These include the issue of cheating on the donations of the Ananias couple (Acts 5) and the distribution of meals complained about by Greek-speaking Jewish Christians to Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians (Acts 6). Human beings naturally have egoism and self-centered thoughts that want to be a little easier than others and to have something as good as possible. I don't want to be too hard. Communist life is ideal, but if the problem of human sin of self-centeredness is not solved, an ideal society will never be realized by the system alone. Whether it's communism or capitalism, it's impossible with a system conceived by humans.

●A historian named Toynbee said that communism did not make a mistake, but overlooked it. What he overlooked was that he overlooked the problem of human weakness and sin, and that was the great mistake of communism.

Only God can solve the problem of sin. It is impossible for humans. Therefore, if we do not live a God-centered life, we will not be able to live such an ideal life. The reason why the early church had an image of the kingdom of God was that at first everyone lived their lives around God. If the number of self-centered

people increases more and more, the image of the kingdom of God will crumble. The monastery is probably the closest to the early church. This is because they give up their possessions of their own volition and live their lives with God at the center. So, in fact, the church was and still is the same. The apostles before the descent of the Holy Spirit were also a mass of egoism. But Christ forgave them, gathered them again, and the Holy Spirit descended on them, and a beautiful church was born. The power of God has created the ideal church. Those who always look at their sins, fight against them, and pray for God will make the church beautiful.

② **[The martyrdom of Stephen]**

To solve this problem of distributing food, the Apostles decided to choose seven reputable ministers who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Thus were Stefano, Philip and seven others. The phrase "to care for, to serve" (Acts 6:2, 4) appears, but in Greek it is called "diakonos." So they came to be called "Deacon" (deacon). Because he prays and lays on his hands (Acts 6:6), we know that he is a priest and not a laity. In this way, the clergy system of bishops (bishops), elders (priests), and steward (deacons) was born in the church. This Deacon, Stephen, became the first martyr of Christianity. He was accused of blasphemy, defiled the temple and the law, and was stoned to death. His face "looked like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). He looked to heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. When I was dying, I prayed and went to sleep, just like Jesus, "Don't let them bear this sin." He was truly a wonderful Christian, full of the Holy Spirit. At the time of Stephen's martyrdom, Saul was the keeper of the clothes of those who threw stones at him. This Saul would later become the great evangelist of Christianity.

③ **[Scattering]**

Stephen's martyrdom led to a great persecution of the Jerusalem church that day, and everyone except the apostles scattered to the provinces of Judea and Samaria. I think the reason why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem was because they wanted to protect the Jerusalem church. However, if you look at chapters 7~8, you can see that it is not the apostles who took care of the daily believers, but the Deacon and the scattered believers who are doing remarkable work. It reads: "Now the scattered people went about preaching the gospel, and Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ to the people." (Acts 8:4~5)

Weren't the 12 apostles desperate to run the growing Christian church and to protect the church? However, God's work did not appear much there, and it seems that the scattered believers were able to work for God more than the apostles. Eventually, the apostles left Jerusalem and became martyrs.

●Church leaders in Japan during World War II cooperated with the military, believing that Christians must be protected from persecution. The chairman of The United Church of Christ in Japan at the time visited Ise Jingu Shrine. On the other hand, the father of a man named Nobumichi Tsuji was a pastor of The United Church of Christ in Japan, but he was arrested by the police for not bowing to the emperor's photo. After that, the believers stopped coming to the church, and the believers looked at me with annoyance and cold stares. Among them, it seems that the family kept the worship service alone. Eventually, his father fell ill, but he couldn't even give him in. The believers felt sorry for them, but they couldn't do anything because they would arrest them if they approached. Finally the news of my father's death came from prison. When my mother and I went to pick up the body in a rear car, the body was placed on cold concrete. No one came to the crematorium. He was buried with only his mother and small child. As a small child, Nobumichi Tsuji later became a pastor and became the president of The United Church of Christ in Japan. On the other hand, denominations that were very considerate of their followers at that time compromised by saying incomprehensible things such as that the God of Japan and the God of the Bible are the same. So there was no persecution, but the real faith was dead.

Persecution is horrible, and martyrdom is sad, but in a mysterious way, they give birth to children of faith. After seeing the martyrdom of Stephen, Paul eventually became a great evangelist. This time, Paul was persecuted in the same way in the restructuring, and was severely injured by being stoned, but Timothy, who was watching it, became a Christian again and became dedicated. Thus the blood was shed, and the church became immovable.

●Pastor Yasuro Enomoto writes: "I don't think faith is just lip service, so we make sure that family members and friends who have not yet been saved do not stumble. But at that time, will you not hide the severity of your faith and let them enter without resistance? As a result, will there be any compromises or distortions of faith? Can such care lead a man to faith?" "My father had a fear that was not the fear of slapping or scolding. The sight of a father prostrating himself in fear and worshiping the Absolute inspires awe in the heart of a child."

Oh, I think that's true. Isn't it too good to be an insect to try not to lose the things of this world and get the things of the next life, and in the end it is half-hearted and nothing can be gained? Our goal as Christians is in heaven. To the eyes of the world, it may seem like a ridiculous way of life, and you may think that you

are a boring person who does not take jokes. However, we can walk together with people who have different goals in life, but we cannot walk together forever. When you gain the things of this world, you lose the things of heaven. The seniors of faith let go of the things of this world, and at one point, they let go of their own lives and returned to heaven with a firm grasp of the eternal things of heaven. I would like to follow suit. Today's church does not talk about the kingdom of God, but only about this world. I feel that I am not focusing on obtaining the life of Christ, but only on protecting my own life. There will be no life there, and there will be no faith. Let's be a consistent believer.