

"Go the Way Down" Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Acts 8:1-5, 26-31, Luke 9:23-26

① 【By scattering】

The first Christian martyr was Stephen. His martyrdom triggered a great persecution against the Jerusalem church, and all but the apostles were scattered to Judea and Samaria. Judea is the area from Jerusalem to the sea to the west. At the end of it is Gaza. Why did the apostles remain in Jerusalem? Perhaps it was to protect the newborn Jerusalem church. However, when we look at Acts chapters 6-8, we see that those who were scattered did more remarkable work than the apostles. It is written. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the gospel. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to the people." (Acts 8:4-5) The 12 apostles must have been desperate to manage the growing Christian church and to protect it. But God's work did not appear much there. Rather, it seems that the scattered believers were able to work for God more than the apostles.

We very much dislike this "scattering". To scatter is to become weak. The first time the word "scatter" appears in the Bible is in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people who built the tower that reached to the heavens said, "Let us not be scattered over all the earth" (Genesis 11:4), but the Lord God scattered them from there over all the earth (Genesis 11:7). (Genesis 11:7) Throughout history, God has scattered the Israelites many times. They were slaves in Egypt and Babylon, and were released from there to return to their homeland and rebuild it, only to be destroyed again by the Romans and scattered throughout the world. In order to keep their Jewish identity intact, they wrote the stories of their ancestors, collected and edited the prophecies of God, and created the Old Testament. That is how Judaism came to be. The same is true of the Church. The Church grew by being persecuted and scattered throughout the world.

② 【more to lose than to gain】

● During World War II, Japanese church leaders believed that Christians must be protected from persecution, so they cooperated with the military. The chairman of the Japan Christian Church at the time paid a visit to Ise Shrine, and the church raised money to build the Zero fighter plane. In response, the father of a man named Nobumichi Tsuji, who was a pastor of the Japan Christian Church, was arrested by the police for not bowing to the emperor's picture. After that, believers stopped coming to the church, and he received annoyed looks and cold stares from them. He said that his family alone attended the services. Eventually, his father became ill, but he was not able to bring any food to the church. The believers felt

sorry for him, but they could not do anything because they would be arrested if they approached him. Finally, the notice of my father's death came from the prison. When I went with my mother to pick up his body in a cart, we found his body on the cold concrete. No one came to the crematorium. I buried him with only my mother and a small child. The little child, Nobumichi Tsuji, later became a pastor and the chairman of the Japan Christian Church. On the other hand, the denomination, which was very considerate to its followers at that time, compromised by saying that the God of Japan and the God of the Bible were the same, which was incomprehensible. So there was no persecution, but the true faith died.

I also found this story in a book by Pastor Yasuro Enomoto.

●A missionary evangelized the Inuit (Eskimo). That year there was a famine. The Inuit thought that the Christian missionary had brought a god different from their own and that the local god was angry and caused the famine. So they went to the missionaries and said, "Pray to your god and give yourselves whales. If you don't give us whales, we will drop you off a cliff and kill you to appease God's wrath. The missionaries prayed fervently day and night, but could not catch any whales. The Inuit became angry and killed the missionary by throwing him off a cliff. The next day, they went down to the beach to look for the missionary's carcass and found a large whale lying beside it. They saw it, repented, and became Christians.

The Christian faith is not something that can be communicated to people so easily. It is not something that can be explained and understood. Faith cannot be conveyed unless we put our bodies on the line and put our lives on the line to convey it. Martyrdom is a sad and scary thing, but in a mysterious way, it gives birth to children of faith. Paul, who saw Stephen's martyrdom, eventually became a great evangelist. Timothy, who saw this, became a Christian again and devoted himself to it. Thus blood was shed and the church became immobile. We must think about giving rather than receiving. Giving to the extent that it doesn't hurt or itch is not giving. It is not giving if giving does not hurt you. We must really think about discarding rather than receiving. That is what it means to take up your cross and follow.

③ **【Communicating the Kingdom of God is something only the church can do】**

Now let's look a little at Philip's evangelism. Philip said, "Leave here and go south to the road from Jerusalem down to Gaza. It is a lonely road" (Acts 8:26). (Acts 8:26). As if waiting for Philip, who had returned to Jerusalem from Samaria, the angel commanded him to take the road down to Gaza. It had always been a deserted, deserted, and lonely road. What in the world was he going to do by going to such a deserted place? But Philip obeyed immediately. Believers follow God's

commands even when they are unacceptable according to human judgment. On his way, Philip met a eunuch who was returning to Ethiopia after worshiping in Jerusalem. Philip preached the gospel to him, and he believed it, was baptized, and became a Christian. It is said that through him, Ethiopia became a Christian country. This is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. God has a plan. Just as He saved Ethiopiaa through Philip, He wants to make us do something and save someone through us.

Every year, Dr. Enomoto's church held a citizens' Christmas party, inviting people from the community for a Christmas pageant and worship service. This took a lot of preparation, effort, and expense. One year, a suggestion was made to cancel the citizens' Christmas party this year and use the money to buy rice cakes and distribute them to senior citizens' facilities. However, Dr. Enomoto replied, "You don't have to be a church to distribute rice cakes. But only a church can preach Jesus Christ. He continued to hold the Christmas party. Proclaiming Christ is a holy duty and mission entrusted to the church. When the mission is lost, the church loses its life. Let us be empowered by the Holy Spirit and continue to walk the path of preaching the Lord Jesus Christ according to the Word of God.