

① [The miracle of water flowing from a rock]

When the Israelites camped at Rephidim, they had no drinking water. The miracle story recorded here tells how, when the people complained to Moses, he struck the rock and water gushed forth. A similar account appears in Numbers, but that event occurred at a different place called Kadesh. The Israelites had no drinking water, so they gathered together and rebelled against Moses, complaining, "Why did you bring the assembly into this terrible land? Is it to make us die here? There is no food or water here!" When Moses prayed to God, God told him, "Take your staff, assemble the community, and command the rock before them to yield its water. I will bring water out of it for them, and you shall let the community and their livestock drink." So Moses gathered the community before the rock and said, "Listen, you rebels! Must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10) Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff, and water gushed out. The community of Israel was able to drink. But afterward, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor my holiness in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:12) When we read this account, we wonder what exactly in Moses' actions God considered unbelief, resulting in His wrath. One possibility is that while he struck the rock the first time as commanded to bring forth water, the second time, despite being told to "speak to the rock," he struck it twice in anger. This was likely a sin of disregarding God's word. Another point is Moses' words, "Must I bring water out of this rock for you?" This implies, "Why must I serve such faithless people as you?" It reveals his anger toward the people, and striking the rock twice represents Moses venting his frustration. In other words, it was a sin of failing to reflect God's patience and mercy. Since "holy" means "to set apart," it was sinful to portray God as someone with human-like impatience. The Psalms describe this event: "They provoked the Lord at the waters of Meribah; and he was burdened because of them. For they embittered his spirit, and he spoke rashly with his lips. (Psalm 106:32-33). The misfortune Moses bore was being barred from entering the Promised Land. Reading this, one wonders how demanding the world of faith is—who could possibly obey? We easily become angry and let it slip from our lips. "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, gently instructing those who oppose him." (2 Timothy 2:24) People of this world look at Christians to see God. If you complain about everything and are quick to anger, they will think, "Ah, this is what the Christian God is like." We bear the sign of Christ.

●During my rescue efforts from a cult, I visited one person's place 24 times. Just when I thought I couldn't go on, that person left the cult. When I asked what teachings were wrong, the answer wasn't about the content itself. Instead, they said, "We were taught that we were the true embodiment of love. But we couldn't do what you do. We wanted to meet the God who moves you." Hearing that made me feel ashamed. I had been going reluctantly, without any love at all, yet unknowingly, I had been used as an instrument of God.

Even if our emotions lag behind, let us show God's love through our actions. That is enough. Just as water flowed when the rock was struck, through Christ's being struck, we were given to drink the Holy Spirit, the water of life. Let us remember that struck Christ, always consider what Jesus would do, and speak and act accordingly.

② 【Hands raised until sunset】

When the Israelites camped at Rephidim, they were ambushed by the Amalekites. So Moses summoned Joshua and said, "Choose men and go out to battle against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." As long as Moses held his hands up, Israel gained the upper hand, but when he lowered them, Amalek gained the advantage. Yet keeping his hands raised was exhausting labor. Gradually, Moses' hands grew heavy and began to fall. So his brother Aaron and Hur brought a stone and had Moses sit on it. They stood on either side of him and supported his hands. Thus, Moses' hands remained firmly raised until sunset, and they prevailed in the battle. Raising his hands was a posture of prayer to God, and holding God's staff signified that this battle was God's battle. The Israelite soldiers fighting below the hill, seeing Moses' hands raised above them, would have been encouraged, realizing, "Ah, we are being prayed for! We are fighting this battle in the name of God!" While one can pray without raising their hands, this posture was necessary to signal that prayer was being offered.

●Father Mssayuki Shilieda tells this story in his book. "I have a friend, an Italian priest named Ferruccio... From morning onward, mothers, young people, daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law come to him nonstop. They tell him everything—the mother-in-law complains about the daughter-in-law, the daughter-in-law complains about the mother-in-law... The priest listens to it all. Then, at night, he wraps up the stories he's heard in a furoshiki cloth and sits down in the seat closest to the tabernacle. Then he unwraps the cloth and reports everything he heard—though it's all trivial stuff, really—to Jesus, saying things like, "Today so-and-so came and said this and that." He keeps reporting like this for a long time. Sometimes the door behind him opens, and villagers peek in. Seeing that their stories are being properly heard by Jesus, they feel reassured and go home.

People find comfort in believing they are always being prayed for. I think showing someone your back as you pray is very important.

Moses alone could not sustain prayer. His brother Aaron and Hur were needed to support Moses' prayer. Reading this reminds me of Jesus' words: "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:19-20) In emergencies, praying alone is necessary, but usually, praying alone makes me sleepy. However, when others are present, I feel alert and can concentrate on praying for them. After all, we need people who pray with us.

●A pastor named Masafumi Sato wrote a book titled "A Life of Prayer," in which he states that prayer is physical labor.

"Prayer involves physical difficulties that the body cannot endure spiritually. One constantly waits for prayer to end. Therefore, there is no other way but to drag one's body forward into prayer. ...Many of the Psalms' prayers begin in difficulty and end in victory even amidst hardship... Therefore, what is absolutely necessary in prayer is endurance." Furthermore, it is written that prayer is the power to conquer difficulty.

"Whatever the event, as long as it remains merely an event, it is truly difficult. But when it is entrusted into God's hands, the difficulty has already lost the very quality that makes it difficult. ...Generally, those who pray much possess vitality. Those who do not pray are listless. Those who pray constantly have a kind of freshness, filled with a resilience that strives to overcome anything. ...When one does not pray, difficulties appear large; but after prayer, difficulties seem somewhat smaller."

Those who do not pray do not know how powerful a weapon prayer is for Christians. When you pray, Christ's power becomes clearly visible, and the problems and affairs of this world appear small. Prayer gives people courage, hope, and joy. No matter what difficulties come, if you pray to God, you can overcome them. Let us come to know the power of prayer and be those who practice it.