

## "Faith: The bridge between God and man"

<sup>14</sup> I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. <sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:14-17)

If we can become a Christian by paying some money, that will be easy. If we can become a Christian by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that will also be easy. If we can become a Christian by fasting for three days, that will be easy as well.

There is only one bridge that connects between God and ourselves, and we call that bridge, **faith**.

Most people in this country know about Billy Graham. He is the most respected preacher in this country. He is also the most well known evangelist in the world.

When Billy Graham was young, he had a partner in ministry named Charles Templeton. He was the right hand man of Billy Graham and was expected to become one of the greatest preachers like Billy Graham. But he doubted his faith, and he became agnostic. An agnostic person is someone who thinks it is impossible to know God.

Templeton used to stand in the same place as Billy Graham, but he started walking a different way.

The front cover picture of Life magazine became the cause of his lost faith. An African woman looked up to the sky as she held her dead baby. The land was in serious famine at that time. When Templeton saw this picture, he understood that what the woman needed was just rain. If there was rain, her baby could have survived. He had a question, why did a merciful and loving God not give her a drop of rain?

Paul wrote a very important truth in today's scripture verse; I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The verses tell us that our salvation depends on our faith in God. It is not the matter of money, a pilgrimage or penance. Just believe and then we will be saved.

We do not have the answer about our reality which we are facing every day. There is not a man who knows all the thoughts of God and is capable of explaining to us. Yes, no one can do that!

The book of Proverbs said "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight". If our knowledge and understanding are worth our entire trust, we are to depend on these. But in reality, it is not. The Bible says, "lean not on your own understanding. Of course, this does not mean that we should not trust in any of our experiences or knowledge, but that we are not to depend on them as they are perfect and instead put our full trust in God.

As it has been for the past hundreds of years, the contents of the Bible will remain unedited. The verse is pointing to the truth that the only bridge between God and us is faith.

Believing is fair. Anyone can believe. We can believe now. Anyone can do that now. There is no difference in one's ability to believe based on nationality, gender or age. But sometimes, to believe is the most difficult thing for us.

Christian psychiatrist, Dr. Nobuo Kudo wrote interesting things in his book. He suggested that maybe it is ok to accept the existence of a healthy disbelief". He confessed about his faith in the book, "Now I share my thoughts honestly, my twenty years of Christian life was not

supported by the Bible verses such like Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

He said, I always got lost and had trouble in the real world. I wondered if God is really related to everything in our life. But now I realized that these questions and my pursuit made me face God and built the strong relationship with Him. So I can say now, even though, it sounds funny, but my complaints enriched my faith.

Paul said "righteousness that is by faith from first to last" We are living now between two things. Do you remember God rescued Israelites from Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, Canaan through the wilderness. During that time, the Bible said they showed their disbelief to God. Yes, they kept journeying through their belief and disbelief. We are also living now between Egypt and Canaan.

Paul wrote about our father of faith, Abraham in Romans 4:18, he said "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed. It was impossible to believe but he believed. Originally, we cannot believe God. We want to believe God but still we cannot believe Him sometimes. We are living between belief and disbelief. And by living between them through our life, we are learning about the power of faith. To tell the truth, our disbelief makes our faith grow.

The interview of Templeton continued. He was asked "What is your evaluation of Jesus Christ?" His face looks calm for a moment, and he said, "Jesus was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically (イントリシカリー) the wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my reading. What could one say about him except that this was a form of greatness?"

He was told "You sound like you really care about him" He said "Well, yes, he is the most important man in my life", came his reply. "I...I...I," he stuttered, searching for the right word, "I know it may sound strange, but I have to say...I adore him!" "Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Just look at Jesus.

Abruptly, Templeton cut short his thoughts. There was a brief pause, almost as if he was uncertain whether he should continue. "Uh...but...no," He said slowly, "he is the most..." He stopped, then started again. "In my view", he declared, "he is the most important human being who has ever exist".

That's when Templeton uttered the words we never expected to hear from him. "And if I may put it this way," he said as his voice began to crack, "I...miss...him!" With that, tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face. His shoulders bobbed as he wept.

Templeton lost his faith by the picture of Time Magazine. The woman held her dead child because of the famine in Africa. With this reality in front of him, he could not believe in God.

Some of you might be thinking, when will I answer the question about the picture on time magazine. I am sorry but I do not know the answer.

But one thing I know is that one day, as the Bible promised, our eyes will be opened when the time comes, and I believe in that promise.

I met my mother in Japan this summer. As you know, we had a plan for her to move here and live with us. That was what she wished for, but now it is impossible because of her physical condition. I know how much she had wished for that, but her wish did not come true. But we still believe God is love. If God is the greatest one, we should not force Him in our plan and wish list.

My mother holds Romans 8:28 as her life verse.<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been

called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). She always said this describes her life. When she was in good health, "All things God works for the good" meant to move here in San Diego and live with us, but God's plan was different. God is still accomplishing his promise in these verses. Surely we cannot observe His whole plan for her but we have the faith to believe that.

God's priority is not to accomplish our wishes. Dear brothers and sisters, please do not misunderstand this. If we misunderstand this, we use God as our tool to accomplish our wishes. God is wishing to lead us towards faith and trust in God rather than making our wish come true.

1 Corinthians 13:12 said, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known". We believe someday this verse will be accomplished and we will understand everything happening in our life.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight".

Our annual theme of this year is "For we walk not by sight, but by faith". If our hope is only in visible things, we will not have peace in our heart because peace is always with our trust in God. Therefore Jesus left these words to his disciples.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid". (John 14:27)

Indeed, the Lord places our faith for the bridge between Him and us.

<sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:5).

Let's pray.