

Rejoice in the suffering of Christ

(98 World Mission Conference in Seoul)

Key Verse: 1 Peter 4:13

“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

The people of the modern world are inclined to enjoy an easygoing way of life. They want to live in the world forever. The people of the world are most afraid of suffering or the possibility of suffering. Today Peter says, “Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ...” May God help us to know that the sufferings of Christ make us truly strong and glorious.

First, Jesus suffered to teach the word of God to people. When we study the Bible, from the beginning to the end, Jesus prayed. Most importantly, Jesus taught the Bible to the people wholeheartedly all his lifetime. When Jesus’ Bible teaching ministry was widespread, he could not stay in Judea because of the Jews’ jealousy. Jesus had to retreat to Samaria. However, Jesus did not have a wagon to go to Galilee. When Jesus and his disciples walked all morning in the hot Middle Eastern weather, they were thirsty and hungry.

Jesus and his disciples came to a place name Sychar, Samaria. There was a well. Jesus sat beside the well while his disciples went to the village to get some food. Jesus’ reverie about the Bible history of that region was running in his mind like a panorama. Somebody disturbed Jesus’ reverie. It was the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands; now she had a roommate. Obviously she was beautiful and foxy. Probably, before marriage she had had more than twelve boyfriends. After marriage, when her physical pleasure was not satisfactory to her, she married another one. Divorce is a tragic event to any person. Nevertheless, she underwent this tragic event five times. She had indulged her pleasure-seeking life, but she was not happy. She was sorry. Since people isolated her, she had to suffer from loneliness. They say that loneliness is the most unbearable suffering. Prison life is a life of torture due to loneliness.

Jesus saw she was walking toward the well. Jesus saw she was a thirsty woman. Jesus wanted to teach the word of God to her. So he humbled himself and said, “Would you please give me a drink?” In this way, Jesus opened her heart. Finally she asked Jesus, “Give me living water welling up to eternal life.” Here we learn that pleasure-seeking life makes a woman thirsty and lonely, and that whoever drinks living water welling up to eternal life quenches her thirsty soul. Jesus taught the Bible to this smelly woman until she accepted the Messiah. Praise Jesus!

There was a handsome and diligent young man. His national situation was downtrodden by the invasion of the Roman Empire. But he studied hard and finally became a Pharisee. And he was a

Sanhedrin member. He was also a man of fame and wealth. So he should have been happy. But Nicodemus was very unhappy. It was because, in the course of time, he became a burden to him. In addition, he was suffering from the power of death. He was envious of his family dog, "Mike", when he was wagging his tail looking at Nicodemus. One night he was going somewhere, but he did not know where he was going. Later he found that he was going to the place where Jesus was. As soon as Jesus saw him, he learned that Nicodemus was under the power of death. So Jesus gave him the most precious words, "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn3:16)

There were two sorrowful sisters and a sick brother, Lazarus, in the village of Bethany. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, poor Lazarus had died two days before. The two sisters, Mary and Martha, were crying. All the village people were crying. It was not because of the death of poor Lazarus, but because of their own sorrow under their torment of sin and death. Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:25, 26). Jesus taught the Bible regarding eternal life and resurrection to these sorrowful sisters. Praise Jesus!

Finally Jesus went up to Jerusalem to become the Paschal Lamb for the sin of the world. Jesus was bracing himself for the upcoming crucifixion. Nevertheless, he went to the temple area from early in the morning and taught the Bible to whomever he met (Lk 21:37, 38) It is indeed heartbreaking that Jesus taught the Bible when his crucifixion was near. He did not think of himself. He thought about the flock of God's sheep and gave them the word of life in his last days.

Jesus knew that his disciples were very tired. He crossed the lake by boat and landed on their feet on the soil of Gerasa, one of the towns of the Decapolis. There was a man possessed by 6,000 demons. Originally he was a one and only son of a well-to-do family. He studied well. He looked so handsome and many girls liked him. He lacked nothing. But when he had to prepare a college entrance exam, doubt came into his heart. He was frustrated by the doubt. Since then he gave up and began to enjoy a carefree life, because he did not find the meaning of life to work so hard for his future. When he began to live a carefree life, the demons began to creep into him one by one until he was possessed by 6,000 demons. Finally he did not want to see anybody. So he came among the tombs and lived there. But he could not rest, not to mention enjoy a carefree lifestyle. So he was angry and cut his body with sharp stones and cried out, "Meaningless!" His most grievous suffering was that he could not sleep. So he shouted at the top of his lungs, going up and down the graveyard. As soon as Jesus saw him, he asked, "What is your name?" (Mk 5:9) Then he came back to his senses. He began to know that his meaning of life was Jesus. The man learned that he could become a man of mission. So he volunteered to become one of Jesus' disciples. But Jesus made him a UBF director of the region of Decapolis. The grace of Jesus was indeed amazing.

Jesus also suffered much to heal the sick. Once Jesus was in Galilee. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees. "If you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mk 1:40) He looked wretched and was full of a dirty smell. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

Second, Jesus suffered much to train his twelve disciples. As we know well, most of his disciples were uneducated. But they were very pure and loyal. They were good in quality. At the beginning of his messianic ministry he began to choose his disciples. Finally he chose twelve and the top one was Simon Peter. Simon Peter always talked big. When Jesus predicted his death on the cross and resurrection, Peter said, "I will lay down my life for you" (Jn 13:37). But he betrayed Jesus three times during Jesus' trial and crucifixion. He was only a man of a big mouth. Once Jesus was on the transfiguration mountain with Peter, James, and John. Suddenly Jesus was transfigured as white as snow. Then Peter was inspired to live there gloriously and happily without any suffering. So he said, "Lord, let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not say, "One for me." But he said it in his heart. He was a man of an easygoing mentality. Jesus did not give up on him and continued to teach him about his suffering and death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. But Peter was not listening. After the crucifixion, one night Peter and his coworkers were hungry. They had worked hard all night on the night sea but caught nothing. So they were even more hungry and tired. The Risen Jesus made a delicious breakfast and invited Peter and his friends. Peter and his friends ate to their fill. Then their spiritual eyes were opened and they looked up and saw Jesus...he was the Risen Jesus. Jesus suffered much to train Peter and the others, who were men of the easygoing mentality, until they loved God and became men of mission. For this Jesus suffered much. Praise Jesus!

Third, Jesus suffered much on the cross. The Jews stirred up the people to think that Jesus was an evil man, and people in authority bribed many people to stand against Jesus. Then they became the puppets of the devil. The crowd of people shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" So they crucified him on the cross. In order to crucify him, the executioner drove nails through his hands and feet and then lifted him up and stood the cross. Jesus shed much blood when someone pierced his side with a spear. People ridiculed him, saying, "Save yourself, as you saved others. Come down, man, from the cross." Jesus really wanted to live, not die, as everybody wants to live. But he did not save himself in order to save others.

On the cross Jesus saw his mother Mary and other Marys standing beneath the cross, crying endlessly. To Jesus, watching these faithful women's crying was an unbearably painful moment. Nevertheless, Jesus made his mother cry beneath the cross with the other Marys. In the midst of pain on the cross Jesus was not sorry for himself. Rather, he prayed for these sinners, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a) Isaiah foresaw the messiah's suffering and cried, "Why? Why, oh God, are you going to punish your Son in this way?" (Isa 53:1) God punished his one and only Son by pushing the crown of thorns onto his head. God let him take up our infirmities and carry

our sorrows. He was crushed for our iniquities (Isa 53:4-5) He was oppressed and afflicted for our sins (Isa 53:7) But Jesus did not save himself in order to save others. Praise Jesus!

Once the prophet Habakkuk complained to God that, “You make the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. What’s the meaning of this?” (Hab 1:12-17) God answered Habakkuk, “The righteous will live by faith”(Hab 2:4) “The righteous will live by faith” means that we must live by the truth of God. Originally, hard work was God’s utmost blessing to mankind. Genesis 1:28 says, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” To a man, to keep his family is busy enough for him. Additionally, to steward God’s world seems to be two full-time jobs. However, it was a very joyful and creative task and God’s blessing. But through one man’s disobedience, this joyful hard work became a curse. Men could eat freely of everything in paradise. But after the curse, in order to eat three meals a day, man had to sweat on his brow all his lifetime. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us the true meaning of suffering. Jesus showed us examples that, even if we work hard for the glory of God, there is joy, peace, love and the meaning of life. God gives us mission to conquer the world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we must know that there is a clear purpose and meaning for our sufferings. As Jesus showed us, we must suffer much in order to teach the Bible to our rebellious sheep. Even if our sheep are rebellious, we must wait patiently until they come back to study the Bible and grow as children of God. We must have compassion on those who are sick so that they may come to know the love of God. Most of all, in this generation, divine disciples are lacking. Therefore, with the word of God we must raise many disciples of Jesus as of first importance. Sinful people dream to live an easygoing life. But we Christians must rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ, following the footsteps of Jesus. Peter said, “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ.” Today we learn that human sufferings are nothing but a curse. But when we participate in the sufferings of Christ, we become strong. Our country is divided to two parts; North Korea and South Korea. When we participate in the sufferings of Christ positively, this tragic division will be solved by God’s grace. And we can come to know the true meaning of life. And we can live for the glory of God. Finally, we receive the crown of life and the kingdom of God. May God help us overcome our sinful desire for an easygoing life. May God help us to participate in the sufferings of Christ.