

July 19, 2020

KIBC Sunday Worship Service (Open Church Worship)

Message by Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda

Title of the Message: "A Life Running Forward"

Text: Philippians 3:13~16

3:13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3:15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

3:16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Introduction

Today, we have **an open church worship service**. I would like to give you a simple message, especially those who have come to church for the first time. I hope you will open your heart and feel relaxed.

We experience painful things, sorrowful things, and unbearable events in our life.

The pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 has seriously damaged so many people. As of June 23rd, the number of the infected has reached 17,974 and 974 people have died. That figure is four weeks old, so it has surely increased from then.

In America, the number of the infected and the dead are beyond compare with the one of Japan. The infected has reached 2,270,000 and the dead reached more than 120,000. In Brazil, the coronavirus overwhelmed hospital capabilities and the dead have reached more than 50,000. On top of that, the government restarted economic activities without waiting for its decline. We are worried what will happen.

Thankfully, medical workers in Japan worked extremely hard in the crucial pandemic situation as well as Japanese people who voluntarily quarantined. Adults and children avoided nonessential and nonurgent outgoings and stayed home. As a result, it seemed like that we have successfully controlled coronavirus.

However, it is true that various problems have resulted such as corona related depression, corona related stress, corona related bankruptcy, corona related evacuation, corona related divorce, and so on. The corona related crisis is not over yet.

When we experience sad things one after another, we eventually get depressed and we sometimes get sick. Therefore, it is very important how we look at things.

Then, how should we look at things? Let us think **how we should live**, that is very important for us.

Let us study the following two points about life of Paul, who patiently lived through his life.

Main Points

1 . Straining Forward to What Lies Ahead

1) Living Forward

Firstly, it is important to run forward. Paul, who was an evangelist of the first church, compares our life to a runner who is running in the athletic stadium.

He said,

3:13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

My friends, forgetting what lies behind means **not to be trapped in the past**.

We cannot go back to the past; however, we can learn from the past. If we can learn something from the past it will be helpful for us. The Bible advises us to go forward and study.

By the way, there are two types of thinking: positive thinking and negative thinking

A certain person always thinks negatively. They probably have something that is the cause of that.

However, man can run forward if he can see the light ahead even if he is under a dark and painful situation.

{Illustration}

Spring finally comes after a long and cold winter. It is the season of beautiful fresh green. Fresh green leaves and shoots make us excited. We feel the energy of the green leaves.

Actually, as the daylight hours are getting longer, plants perform active photosynthesis. They absorb CO2 and provide us with precious oxygen. It is God's blessing. No one can buy oxygen. Photosynthesis is a strange phenomenon. When the plants are exposed to the sunlight, they naturally begin performing photosynthesis. It is God's grace that is given for nothing.

My friends, the God of the Bible is the One who creates the sunlight. He created heavens and the

earth. Therefore, plants, flowers, and everything that we touch in nature are created by God.

2) God the Creator is Present

We are created by God. We are called creatures. However, we are not taught about God who created all of nature. It means that we really do not know about God.

Even though we don't understand God who created all creatures, we understand that He has an **awesome existence**. Therefore, human beings made gods by imitating the true God. You may hear a phrase called, "yao yorozu no kami" (eight million gods) in Japan. In that sense, we are religious people.

For example, Japan is one of the countries where many disasters are caused by natural phenomena. Earthquakes, typhoons, and floods hit Japan ever year. The coronavirus pandemic that occurred over the world seems like a natural disaster that human beings cannot control.

It is said that more than 8,500,000 people have been infected over the world. On top of that, the **coronavirus** is spreading in South America and Africa. However, they have not developed a vaccine yet even though the progress of medicine has been remarkable in the 21st Century. Many people pray to the existence (religion), that is superior to human beings, for help. Human beings have religious feeling.

Corona means a **crown** in Latin because the sun is shaped like a crown. A crown symbolizes authority and glory. However, this crown is a dreadful thing that makes humans die.

On the other hand, God prepares another crown, **the crown of glory** that is full of hope. It is given to only people who faithfully run their journey of life.

3) The Crown of Glory is Prepared.

The Bible teaches as below—

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
1Peter 5:4

The crown of glory promises us a hopeful future. It looks like the light far ahead. Yes, indeed. The brilliant light is prepared for our life. The Bible teaches that there is the light ahead no matter how dark the world becomes.

The source of the light is God the Creator. Jesus Christ said approximately 2000 years ago as below,

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but

will have the light of life.”

His Word gives us hope.

I have met God in my teens. Since then, even though I was unfaithful, God has been really faithful. As the Bible teaches, He guided my life until now.

Paul, who was with the One of the light of hope, said as below —

3:13 ...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

How blessed he is who runs like Paul!

This is the way of our life. The next important thing is to run toward the goal.

2. Running Toward the Goal (Glory)

1) Running Toward Glory

Paul said,

3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's goal of life was to receive glory from God. My friends, what goal do we run toward? How do you run now? Where do you run toward? We are allowed to live only once. We can never repeat it.

The Bible teaches that the life of the Kingdom of God in Heaven is prepared with the crown of glory that is a precious treasure.

{Illustration} Testimony of Bob Wieland

Bob lost both of his legs in the Vietnam War when he was hit by a mortar mine. After he returned home, he got a certificate of a physical education teacher. He began participating in the sport of powerlifting. He finally walked 4500km across the American Continent on his hands, taking three years, eight months, and six days. During that time, he asked donations for the poor and the contributions amounted to 310,000 dollars.

Bob came to Japan 18 years ago and participated in a turtle marathon. The marathon is very unique. The ordinary persons and the disabled persons run the same course. There were 4,500 participants in the marathon. The courses were a half marathon, 10 km race and 5 km race. Each participant entered according to his/her ability.

Bob entered in 5km course. The sponsor wanted to close the event by at half past one, so he started early in the morning. He appeared at the Arakawa riverbed course at 5 a.m. It was still dark. About 10 Christians supporters came together and prayed for Bob.

He put on specially made shoes on his hands. He lifted his body up and moved on by using those shoes. He also put on a buttock covering seat that was made of leather. He finally started at 5:15 a.m. He walked forward about 20 steps which was about 15m at a time. Then a buzzer of a heart rate monitor sounded as a warning. It told that his heart was close to danger. If his heart rate increased to about 160, it may become fatal. Therefore, he waited there until his heart becomes normal. Surprisingly, his heart rate dropped to the 120s within about 15 or 20 minutes. He has a phenomenal heart. Those who watched his 5km walking from the beginning to the end must be moved to tears.

Let me get to straight to the point now, Bob crossed the goal by 2p.m. The opening ceremony was held during the marathon. Therefore, taking off the opening ceremony time, he took seven hours and 21minutes to walk 5km. I was very impressed.

We see the following 4 points about Bob's running.

- ① He never looked back. An ordinary man would probably look back, but he kept moving forward.
- ② He never spoke negative words. He was always positive. On his way to the goal, his heart rate did not go down, so he became exhausted. He had to regain his breath by taking 2 or 3 minutes after walking about ten steps. At the time like that, he said, "Hang in! Be patient! I should not be impatient. Prayer gives me strength. Prayer is power. I cannot make it by myself, but there is nothing impossible for God." And he kept going forward.
- ③ He kept focusing on his goal. He walked for a while and said, "Show me a map." Looking at the map, he said, "How far should I go?" He often said, "I like to look at the map." I really understand how he felt. He looked at the map every 10 minutes when he came to the last part of the course. At any rate, he did not think about anything except for crossing the goal.
- ④ Bob was very kind to the weak and the aged. When he looked at a disabled person, he kindly said something even though he was exhausted. When he looked the aged person who was running, he waved and greeted them. He must understand how the weak feel because he himself is handicapped.

Being watched by a large crowd, Bob crossed the glorious goal before 2 p.m. At that very moment, the crowd burst into cheers and a great applause occurred. It was an impressive moment. A middle-aged woman followed him while crying for the last several hundred meters. She entered the 10km marathon.

That woman said, “You are great. Great! You are really great.” She said only that word and it also refers to other peoples’ feeling.

That day, Bob relayed the message, “Nothing impossible with God,” with his body and soul. Many Japanese people witnessed his testimony.

What do you think about Bob’s story? I was very encouraged by his testimony and taught a lot about it. He taught me what it means, **running toward the crown of glory**. I give thanks to him. Let us think another point: efficient running.

2) Running Efficiently

The important thing for a runner who runs toward the goal is to eliminate the waste and to run efficiently. He should be lightly dressed. It means to run as lightly equipped as possible.

Nobody runs carrying baggage. He runs lightly dressed. However, many people run their life course carrying a lot of baggage. The baggage is anxiety, worry, fear, debt, sin and so on.

Jesus said,

John 14:1 “Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

Our life is like a runner who is running on the athletics stadium. We should run efficiently. In fact, Jesus Christ helps us, so we can run efficiently and run toward the crown of glory. Jesus came to this world to help us.

Jesus was crucified as a criminal. He shed his precious blood and was buried. However, Jesus defeated the wall of death and was resurrected. He won the victory over death. It means God’s authority.

Jesus took all of our burdens and shed his blood and paid for them. He took unnecessary burdens in our life (anxiety, worry, fear, debt, sin and so on).

The reason that Jesus came to this world as the Helper is not that we should feel sorry and are depressed. No, it is not. The reason is that we receive the crown of glory from God. What do you think about the runner? Don’t you want to leave your burdens to Jesus’ hands and become a light-dressed runner who runs toward the goal of glory?

Conclusion

Title of the Message: “A Life Running Forward”

3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- 1 . Straining forward to what lies ahead
- 2 . Running towards the crown of glory

* God bless you!