

Being with Him, with others (Mark 2:15-17)

What is salvation? How do you explain? Let me try. By the cross and resurrection of Christ, through faith, our sins are forgiven, we are born again, receive eternal life and can go to heaven as a child of God. How about it? Sounds quite good. Right? Probably, in most evangelical churches they've been teaching like this, and we understood like this and have been teaching like this. More or less something like this.

However, in this explanation, the main point cannot be recognized as the main point. And it can hinder our growth as a Christian.

What will we do for eternity when we go to heaven? We will have fellowship with God together with other Christians. What has changed when we became a child of God? Our relationship with God has been changed. Our self identity has changed. What happened when our sins were forgiven? We are reconciled with God. Our relationships with God are restored. Our relationships with others are being restored. Our relationships with ourselves are being restored.

Today's topic is "Being with Him, with others."

1. Who were with Jesus?

Mark 2:15-17

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Who were with Jesus? What kind of people flocked to Jesus? Who joined the fellowship with Jesus? Sinners. Who had problem with Jesus? The Pharisees, the teachers of the law.

Who need a doctor? The sick. Why? Because they know they're sick and they want to be healed. Whom is Jesus calling? Sinners. Who will respond

to Jesus' call and come to him? A person who knows he needs salvation.

One day, I realized I was a sinner. I heard the gospel of Jesus. "If you believe, you will be saved. There is no condition! You can come just as you are. Come to me. It is not by works, but by grace, you will be saved." I believed it and was saved.

I rejoiced over salvation for a while. However, there must be something wrong! I still have sin! So I shared this in church. They said "Do you read the Bible?" "Maybe you don't pray enough." "Don't be absent from meetings." "Your will is not strong enough." "You don't believe enough."

One week later, I come back to church again. They asked "How was it last week?" When I shared honestly, they said "You must do this, you must do that. You must try harder." Whenever I was in church, I always felt they marked me, I was grade.

"How was it last week?" There are two choices. Either you answer honestly, and be condemned, hurt and be depressed, or you lie. "Ah... Yeh, I had victory in the Lord..." Nobody wants to be condemned, nor hurt. So what happens is most people choose the second option, and decide to pretend in church.

I'm going to pretend I don't sin, I'm going to pretend I'm better than other people, I'm going to pretend I have victory in my life, I'm going to pretend I have faith, I'm going to pretend my marriage is great, I'm going to pretend I don't have problems with my children, I'm going to pretend I don't worry, I'm going to pretend I don't have bad habits, I'm going to pretend I have strong self control. Then, we become great pretenders.

Is Christianity about pretending? Is church where we point out one another's faults and mistakes, and grade each other, and put a label who is holy, who is not? Is church where we pretend that everything is going well in our lives? Is that the church Jesus said he would build? Something is wrong.

2. Believing God's love in our heart

I think the problem is not with the gospel. I think the problem is with the church. And the problem in the church is that we believe in our head but not in our heart God actually loves me and accepts me the way I am.

John 8 records about a woman who was caught in adultery. "Hey Jesus, this woman was caught in adultery. Moses said stone her." "What does the bible say? What does the bible say?" "Let's find out the principle in the bible, how to do that." "Okay, give me the biggest rock and I'll smash her right away because that's what the bible says." He didn't do that, did he? He said get real, get honest, be authentic. "Which one of you doesn't have sin? Which one has never done sexual immorality in your life?" They walked away. Jesus forgives her. He heals her, he restores her.

John 4, here is a woman at the well. "Give me a drink." "Why are you asking me a drink? You are a man, I'm a woman. You are a Jew and I'm a Samaritan." "If you knew who I was you would have asked me living water." She asked for water. He said get your husband and come here. He could have said, "You, filthy woman. Divorce, divorce, divorce, divorce and living with somebody. Repent!" He could have been really cruel to her. He could have been so mean. But he wasn't.

You know the bible says Jesus came with full of grace and truth, or full of truth and grace? I think full of grace and truth. Actually I'm positive the bible says grace and truth came through Jesus. (John 1:14) If truth came first, the truth is God is holy and perfect, you are a sinner. So you go straight to hell. What about grace? Finished. The truth is you deserved eternal punishment. Then here you go. No time for the second half of the message.

Sometimes we just think about what is the truth, talk about the truth, the truth and the truth. Well, if you want the truth, you and I should go straight to hell. But Jesus brought grace first.

Which part of me he gives grace to? God loves me, including the most broken part of myself. God forgives me, including the darkest time of my life. If the grace of God has not touched you at the deepest point of shame in your life, it'll be very difficult for you to ever love yourself, and if you can't love yourself, it'll be very difficult for you to ever love other people. You will try. You will try harder. But you can't. You may feel you are a failure. You don't want to feel you are a failure, so you begin to blame others.

The secret of loving others is when you start loving yourself. The secret of loving yourself is when you started understanding that God loves the most broken part of yourself, and you feel it again and again and again.

Let's imagine here I have a block of pure gold. It's very valuable. If I drop it in a basket full of rotten smelly fish, is the value changed? Does it lose its value? No. It becomes smelly, may look bad, but it still has the same value. Sin is bad stuff. But it doesn't change our value as human being in God's eyes.

If I polish up the block of pure gold, and keep it in a gorgeous glass case and put ribbon around it, will its value increase? No. It looks much nicer. Maybe someone wants to pay more. But the actual value of the gold itself is the same. Being taller or shorter, more muscle or less fat, got suntan or fairer, longer hair or shorter hair, they might help you to look nice. But they don't change your value as human being in God's eyes. Education, money, status, position, title, degree, they might make life easier and more comfortable. But the actual value of us as human being is the same in God's eyes.

God loves you, including the most broken part of yourself. You can't achieve more of God's love by what you do, because he loves you with his perfect love. God forgives you, including the darkest time of your life. Your sin doesn't change your value in God's eyes. You can't increase your value in God's eyes whatever you do, because he already says "You are precious in my sight. I love you" and he sent his only son to redeem you.

3. Whom did Jesus die for?

Whom did Jesus die for? Did he die for me who reads the bible every day, prays every day, and preaches and who is a missionary and pastor? Yes. But he died for me who has bad temper, or has lust, or has all kinds of bad habits? Yes, he did.

You see, there is two "me"s at least. There is a Godly me who reads the bible, prays and serves. Then, there is not nice me who gets upset with my wife and taxi drivers, and does this and says this that I shouldn't. I'm both. There is part of me that is dark. There is part of me that I know I should walk in the light but choose to walk in the dark. That's true. God knows it. My wife knows it. I know it. But it's part of me.

If I reject the part of me, now I reject that part of you also. If I reject the broken part of me, and I can't love and accept and be gentle with the broken part of me, I will never be gentle with you. If you are doing things right, good for you. If you are doing them wrong, I will hit you hard just like I hit myself hard. Because

I don't really believe God can accept me just the way I am. That's how it is when I reject part of me.

Is it the truth, when I pray a sinner's prayer, suddenly I don't sin anymore? If so, how can the apostle Paul say I'm a chief of sinners? (1 Tim 1:15) Why does Paul struggle with sin living in him? (Rom 7:17) We too still struggle with sin. Welcome to the club. We all do.

But we have a good news. There is God who forgives our sin, is in the process of cleaning it up. But it doesn't happen instantly.

Phi 1:6

⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

We are works in progress. Tell the person next you, "I'm a work in progress." This is still happening. Until the day Jesus comes to me, I'm still going to deal with my humanity. The reason I have courage to do that is because God knows our problem but he still loves us and he can fix it. Since Adam and Eve, there is a big problem, and we all have it. And we can't fix it. But God said, "I can." So he came to earth for sinners. You might think "Oh Yah, that's people out there." Or "That's the bad people in those churches." Yes and no. That's you and me.

I'm not as bad as I used to be. But I'm still a pretty "good" sinner. I'm not trying to be a bad sinner. But it just comes naturally to me. I have to work on it. I have to be aware of my dark side and broken part. I have to be aware of sin that lives in me. Because if I ignore it and pretend that I don't have sin, and say "I do all for the glory of God, I don't have ego any more, it's all about Jesus, nothing is about me", that is a lie. Because the reality is sin still lives in me, and it affects me. I still have broken part, and it affects my thought, my emotion and my action. But as long as I realize that it keeps me humble to come to Jesus and deal with those bad stuff. I have to be careful with my dark side. I have to face it. When we honestly recognize about our dark side, then we can start to deal with it, then start changing.

4. Walking in the light

1 John 1:5-10

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

This letter was written to Christians. This passage describes about Christian life. Christians live in fellowship with God. God is light. If we have fellowship with God, God's light illuminates us. It will shine not only on the outside which is visible, but also on the inside, and illuminate even things which we ourselves had not been aware of. While having fellowship with God, if we try to avoid this light, turn our back on it, and pretend not to see what the light shows, we are walking in the darkness. If we say "I have no problem, no sin nor shortcoming," that is a lie. If we say "I have no sin", we are actually saying "God, you are wrong. You are a liar saying I have sin."

When we talk about sin, we often think of moral sin. But sin is not just murder, stealing, adultery, misconducts. Unbelief is also sin. Judging others in our hearts is also sin. Coveting, envy, wasting money or resource, they are also sins. Pride and self-hatred, they are also sins.

In our fellowship with God, in his light, we come to know Jesus died for me who did these sins, and experience how great is his love and forgiveness. And we will know that God is working on our sins. There is no sin which God cannot deal with.

We experience God can cleanse all kinds of sins. As we have fellowship with God like this, although we sometimes have some conflicts, confusion in our relationships with others and even get hurt, we will continue to have fellowship with them. I am a sinner. They are sinners too. We are all works in progress. In our fellowship with one another, we will experience forgiveness, acceptance, love and healing. And we receive encouragement and comfort. In our fellowship with one another, we will come to know more about our sin in ourselves. And,

even when we may feel, "I am finished," we will remain in our fellowship with God. Because somebody is praying for you.

So, it's all about relationship. The relationship with God, the relationship with others, and the relationship with you, yourself. Being with Him, with others.

Actually today's message is a part of "Foundations Class." Foundations Class helps you to build solid foundations for your Christian life. And it is also the opportunity in which you can check your spiritual health. It's better for you to do it before your life collapses, like the house fell with a great crash in the storm. Sooner or later, whether you like it or not, the storm may hit your life. It would be too sad if you recognize your foundation is not strong enough after your life collapses. Yes? Am I right?

And I also want to remind you that the point is not to gain new understanding of the theology or to enjoy new teaching, but to live out His Words, to make the gospel our life style. "Experiencing the Life and changing lives." Amen?!

"Foundations Class" took its original form in 1993 by Pastor Eric Dooley who is the founder of New Life Fellowship. This material has been used in Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and now in Myanmar. In NLF, Ho Chi Minh City, it has ministered to people from over 20 countries. Pastor Eric often said, "Foundations Class is the front door of NLF." Welcome to New Life Fellowship!

Lesson 1 is "Five Christian Essentials." In short, a Christian is to live in the right relationship with God, and that relationship reflects the relationship with others. There is the study material on the table at the back. You can take one set each. My message notes are available on the church website.

Next time, I will talk about how God deals with our sinful side. So, you must come back. God bless!