

## Thanksgiving in Christ (Eph. 1:15-17)

Now we come back to the series of "In Christ" studying Ephesians. Today we will look at 1:15-17, the theme is "Thanksgiving in Christ."

### 1. Thanksgiving in prison

#### 15-16

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

It is Paul who is speaking this. Where is he now? It sounds like he is in his office in headquarters. Actually he is in prison. Because of his faith in Christ, he was caught and chained in prison (Eph. 6:20).

If anyone were in Paul's shoes, it is natural for him to complain about his suffering in prison, as a result of serving faithfully to the Lord, proclaiming the gospel.

However Paul didn't give in to the temptation. Instead, he continued to give thanks to God for one thing. That is how the church in Ephesus is doing. In prison with chains, whenever he thought about the church, his heart was filled with thanks-giving. And he was encouraged, comforted and strengthened by knowing what was happening in church in Ephesus. The church was still advancing, growing in faith and love. That fact encouraged and supported Paul.

He knew very well how difficult it was to show faith and love, living based on the word of God in this world, because Paul himself was caught in prison because of his faith. He knew very well how difficult and costly it is to live faithfully and truthfully in the Lord in the society.

That was why it was unspeakable joy for him to know that the church

was showing faith and love. He couldn't help but thank the Lord that the Lord was surely in that church and working among them.

It was *not* just Paul who was in the battle of faith. But the church was also in the same battle. The church was also facing the same hardship and difficulty. Paul knew very well that was the reality. So, he not only thanked God, but also kept interceding for the church.

He wanted the church to continue to be victorious with love, faith and truthfulness. And he wanted the church to keep shining in this world. All the more because he knew how hard the battle was, he kept interceding for the church.

We also experience the battle of faith in our lives. Perhaps many of the people you daily meet do not have faith in Jesus. So when we want to walk faithfully before God and show the love and righteousness of God, we will face challenges. We will face the adverse wind blowing against us. If anyone claims there is no battle of faith in his life, perhaps that is because he is not fighting the battle of faith. If there is no battle, there may not be difficulty. But then there won't be victory either. Either you evangelize the world or the world evangelize you.

In this world, there are Christians who are fighting much more difficult battles than we have. *They* are interceding for other brothers and sisters in Christ. We are receiving their intercession.

I have met Christians who were facing persecution. While they themselves were experiencing severe persecution, they often prayed for brothers and sisters in cities. And when they found how small the number of Christians is in Japan, they also prayed for the churches in Japan. They know the importance of the Lord's support more than anyone else, because they are in the hard battle. And they know how real the Lord's support is. That's their everyday life. They naturally wish and pray that the same Lord will also work for other Christians.

The more we come to know the Lord, the more our heart will be overflowing with thanks-giving. When we give thanks, we will receive strength.

When we give thanks, we will show the Lord's faithfulness, greatness and power to others. When we give thanks to the Lord even in the midst of hardships, we will testify how real and valuable our relationship with the Lord is.

## 2. Come to know the Lord

### 17

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation will be given to us so that we will know God. By the Holy Spirit, we can know God. We can see, recognize and know Him as truly God who is real, living and active in our lives.

We cannot come to know God with our head, no matter how hard we try. We cannot know Him unless God himself reveals himself. No matter how much we study the Bible and understand its theory, we cannot believe God. There is a gap between understanding and believing. There is a theoretical jump when we believe. Some people will make a big jump when they believe. Others make just a little jump. Anyway, we cannot have faith in God without a jump.

Just look back how you came to know him and believe him, trust him. For a long time, the Bible stories may have sounded like somebody else's business. You heard about Jesus, but couldn't really relate to him. But one day, suddenly "Oh, I see" you came to the point where you can fully trust him and submit yourself to him. Now you know he is your savior and Lord, and you are very happy about it. If you are a believer, you may have that kind of experience.

### Matt. 16:15-17

"But what about you?" he [Jesus] asked. "Who do you say I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man,

but by my Father in heaven.

Jesus is saying to Peter. "Hey Pete, it is not by your own understanding that you found I am the Christ. It is my Father in heaven who revealed to you that I am true God, the Christ." It is the Holy Spirit who tangibly does the work.

In the same way, God helps us to encounter Jesus. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John1:14)" Through His Word, Jesus reveals himself to us. He will show us who He really is.

### Phi. 2:6-8

[Christ Jesus] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

When Jesus was born, he was laid in the manger. He was laid in the container to hold food for cattle. There was nothing else. He knows the worst poverty human can experience. Right after he was born, he had been marked for death by Herod. Because of that, his parents couldn't live in their own country. He knows the greatest danger man can experience. Two judges both declared his innocence. But public opinion rejected him. He was crucified. He knows the worst unfairness man can experience. For the Jews, "being hung on the cross" means "being cursed". He knows the worst curse and humiliation man can experience.

Why did he bear all these things if he is really God? That was all for our sake. He received the poverty, danger, unfairness, curse, humiliation we human can experience. Moreover on the cross he took our sins and God's wrath in our place. There is no one else in this world who did it for us, besides Jesus. It is because he is the Christ. Because he is the Savior God prepared for us.

### 3. The intercession by the Lord

And, most of all, we should remember that Jesus himself is interceding for us in heaven.

#### Heb. 7:25

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus went back to heaven. And he is *not* saying, “I finished the race of faith. From now on, I will sit back and see who else will finish the race.” Jesus experienced the weakness as a human just like us. And there is no one who received persecution, attack, misunderstanding and false accusation because of faith as much as he did. So he knows very well how difficult to finish the race is. And this Jesus himself is interceding for us to finish the race. Not a mere man, but the Lord of glory himself is our intercessor. There is no greater encouragement than this.

So, no matter what the situation is, no matter how difficult the battle of faith is, no matter how strongly the world flows against faith, no matter how weak we may feel we are, we can have hope.

When we continue to live in faith, love and truthfulness even in the midst of the difficult battle, that will encourage other Christians who are also fighting their battle. That will demonstrate to those who don't know Jesus, that our faith is not just words, but have life and power.

#### Col. 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

- 1) Remember Jesus when we face difficulty, persecution and unfairness. Jesus experienced all these as a man. So he understands our pains, he will carry our burdens. Invite him in our situation and thank the Lord.

Everyone's experience with God's work is different. Paul became blind for a while when he was saved. I don't think there is anyone among us who had experience like that. But we know for sure that we have experienced God's work, the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot say we haven't experienced God's work just because our experience was not as dramatic as some other people's.

If we just focus on dramatic things or phenomenon, we will fall into a pit. But God is with us in our ordinary situation, everyday life. The point is this. Are we aware of his presence in our ordinary situations? When we are aware of his presence, we can recognize his voice and work. Then, we are encouraged and strengthened by Him in our everyday life. And we thank God, praise God.

- 2) Practice the word of God in our daily lives, workplace, school, relationship with friends and family members.

Jesus speaks to us through the Bible. We can hear his voice through the Bible. We can recognize Jesus' presence in our daily life, when we are working, when we are doing house works, or talking to our friends. We can apply His word and practice it in our daily life. If we don't apply the word of the Bible in our lives, and reject the Word the Holy Spirit speaks to us and reminds us, we are practically separated from God. We may have experienced wonderful work of God in the past. But that was then. The question is how you relate God now; how you would respond to God, welcome God who is working mightily in you.

No matter how fervently you study the Bible and understand it, if that remains just head knowledge and not connected with your life, God's power cannot work. "The Bible tells me wonderful things. That's a good story or theory." Close the Bible. That's it. Then, we cannot live by faith or live by the Word.

When we apply the Word spoken to ourselves, then we can experience it,

share how great and faithful our God is. We encourage and strength each other. "Experiencing the Life, changing lives."

The more we come to know the Lord, the more we will be overflowing with thanks-giving. When we give thanks, we will receive strength. When we give thanks, we will show the Lord's faithfulness, greatness and power to others. When we give thanks to the Lord even in the midst of our hardships, we will testify how real and valuable our relationship with the Lord is.

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For Lifenet groups and personal reflections

Do you remember what God has done in your lives, things you are thankful about? Share it with one another. (Is there anything you can be thankful to God about NLIF?)

Why did Paul give thanks while he was in prison? How did his thanks-giving affect him?

Why could the church in Ephesus make Paul so thankful? Pray to the Lord that NLIF will become a church like that.

What do you think is the reason why our knowledge of the Bible and our actual life can be separated? How can we keep them integrated?