

Vision of Praise

May 2023

From the editor

For this May issue, we will introduce the impressive testimony "Jesus Has Never Forsaken Me" by Miwako Kobayashi, a regional staff worker in Indiana, together with "What Is Lacking in Christ's Afflictions" by Mitsuko from the appendix of "The White Dove IV."

Jesus Has Never Forsaken Me

Miwako Kobayashi

Every year when spring comes, I remember the special night that I encountered with the deep love of God through Sakura, cherry blossoms. I still remember the sparkling air, and the excitement filling that night.

I had suffered a skin disease for over 40 years. It is called Psoriasis and even the doctors didn't know why it happened and how to treat it. Once you get it, it never goes away. I tried many medications but it didn't work. In fact, it got worse and worse. At the end, I was covered with many scabs from head to toe. I was constantly suffering from itchiness. Around that time, in 1988, I went to Toronto, Canada to study English, and there I encountered Christ.

One day, I heard from my Japanese Christian friend that there was a special service by someone who had a healing power, and I went there. After the service, they called for people who wanted to be prayed for the healing. So, I went up to the front. When this person placed his hand on my head, I

fell backwards. And that was it. Nothing more. So, I asked him to pray for me again. Then he asked me, “Do you believe Jesus as your savior?” I believed in God’s existence but I didn’t know if it was Jesus Christ or not. I couldn’t speak any English except “Yes” or “No” at that time, so in an instant, I said “Yes.” Then he said, “OK” and left. I thought nothing happened but something did happen.

On the way home, when I walked along the road, everything was shining. Even the weeds looked shiny and rejoicing. That was the first experience of true joy in my life. After the prayer, I heard that they called for people who wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And I knew I was truly filled with the Holy Spirit. And naturally I came to believe in Jesus as my savior.

After I received the Holy Spirit, I believed Jesus Christ is my savior, but I still struggled with my disease. So, I prayed and prayed, but was not healed. First, I thought it was because of my sins. So I confessed my sins before the Lord. But I was not healed.

Around that time, I joined the joint retreat for the Japanese churches in Toronto, where Pastor Peter was invited as a guest speaker. He spoke about the story of the White Dove, and I was very curious about it. I wanted to receive healing. So, I returned to Japan, and met Mitsuko.

I saw many miracles around her. She prayed for me several times as well but I was not healed. I thought God can heal others, but not me. Only me, He couldn’t heal. Thinking so, I felt pain in my heart.

But a major turning point came in my life. In 1993, at the Kohitsuji no Mure Kyushu retreat, Pastor Peter set up a Q&A

session for the first time. One of the questions was: What does it mean that “in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”?

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

(Colossians 1:24)

After the retreat, Mitsuko wrote about it and said, “This means that we still crucify Him.”

2000 years ago, Jesus was crucified just once, and it was enough. On the cross, He took all our sins, all our sufferings, all our pains and all our sicknesses. But because of our flesh, we still want Him to be crucified, and keep crucifying Him.

Reading it, I was truly shocked. This was me. When I said, “Why can I not be healed?” I nailed Him on the cross. Whenever I said to Him, “You cannot heal me,” I nailed Him again and again.

Truly, when He was crucified, I was there. I spat on Him and I nailed Him down.

Then I prayed to God, “Thank You, Lord Jesus. 2000 years ago, when You were crucified, You took every suffering and sickness. Nothing was left. But I didn’t know it and crucified You again and again. Please forgive me.”

Then a miracle happened. Gradually, I was being healed. All the scabs came off and were gone. Then I knew that He had never forsaken me, He just waited for me until I knew His cross was perfect.

This conviction of the cross became far greater healing, which goes beyond healing of my body, as it gave me the

assurance that nothing is impossible with God.

God will never leave me alone. This conviction has been given to me from this time forward as the foundation of my faith.

Actually, a little bit of my disease is left. But for me, His healing is more than 100% perfect. By His redemption, I know He took all sickness on His cross once for all, but the reason He has left a little bit of my disease is for me to remember that His redemption is perfect. He has put seal on me that His love is perfect.

A few years passed, Pastor Peter said Kohitsuji no Mure believes that everything is completed in His praises and that Christ alone is sufficient. And I have truly come to believe it. For me, Christ alone is sufficient means that He will never forsake me. And this is true.

Since I knew His redemption was perfect, whatever happens to me, I no longer think, “Why me?” Instead, I give thanks to the Lord. My pain is not mine anymore. He took all my pain and became the pain itself. He knew everything, that is why I can praise Him.

This is an irreplaceable healing. I give thanks to the Lord from the bottom of my heart.

June 11, 2022

What Is Lacking in Christ's Afflictions

from "The White Dove IV"

Mitsuko

On the second evening of the Kyushu retreat Pastor Peter set up a Q&A session for the first time. Although hesitating, I sat in front along with Pastor Peter in the hope that I could at least share my thoughts or experiences. The audience must have been amused listening to us: a veteran pastor and a total amateur. To my surprise, young people and newcomers made a remark, "It was very interesting and easy to understand."

One of the questions was: What does it mean that "in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"?

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

(Colossians 1:24)

Since I assumed the question was for Pastor Peter to answer, I kept silent and listened to his response. While pondering on Paul's words, I found thoughts welling up in me. Whenever reading the Bible, I overflow with thoughts and enjoy finding meanings of the scripture, which always opens my heart to the love of the Lord.

It is said, "The Bible is the love letter of the Lord to you," and I wholeheartedly agree. Receiving His love confession, my heart is aflame all the more. This fire will never be extinguished.

In the Q&A I simply said, "It must mean that we still now continue to crucify Christ on the cross." Now let me elaborate further on my comment.

The words of Paul open my eyes to the depth of the love of God just as the words of Jesus do. I feel Jesus' words are

filled with His love of giving, while Paul's with his decision to love the Lord.

Now back to "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Is there anything lacking in the cross of Christ?

The answer is "No." The cross of Christ was completed once for all. There is nothing lacking in Christ's afflictions. Yet Paul dares to say, "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." What drives him to such an expression? What does he mean?

Nothing lacks in Christ's afflictions. Paul knows it more than anyone. Nevertheless, he says something is "lacking" in Christ's afflictions, because he has seen the weakness and limitation of man's flesh. Although nothing lacks in Christ's afflictions, we in the flesh are unable to fully comprehend His afflictions, and mistakenly think that something is insufficient in His afflictions. This must be Paul's point.

As long as having the flesh, I continue to crucify Christ on the cross. Nevertheless, I can only be saved by the cross, which means that the salvation of my flesh thoroughly depends on the cross. And yet I cannot help but live in the flesh as if not yet saved, though I have already been saved.

The more I die to the flesh, the more I live in the life of the Lord. Because of the flesh I appreciate His salvation, and at the same time I realize that the very flesh is alienating me from the joy of salvation. My flesh draws me to the love of Christ, and the same flesh distances me from His tangible love. I believe Paul sees through this struggle between flesh and salvation, death and life.

In my own understanding, "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" translates to "what is still making Christ suffer." This is our inability to see Christ's afflictions as complete and sufficient. Christ was afflicted and died on our behalf, yet we neither fully understand nor accept why He had to suffer and

die.

The cross of Christ was completed once for all. Nevertheless, we continue to crucify Christ on the cross, making Him bleed. We have not brought Him down from the cross. We cannot help it because of the flesh, for we are placed in such a contradiction. Paul must have stated this verse, facing man's predicament of being controlled by the flesh.

Paul says, "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." It may just mean that he is working for Christ, but his words imply no such over-eagerness as, "I am doing this for the Lord," or "I have the capability to do this for Him."

Neither do his words imply his wish, "I want to carry Christ's afflictions." Here I see his decision of faith that he would live only for the sake of the Lord and never nullify the cross. He is well aware that he is living by the Lord's mercy in spite of his flesh which continues to crucify Him on the cross.

Perhaps out of ardent love for the Lord we may wish to carry at least part of His suffering. Or by thinking that we are participating in His pain, we may feel His love more deeply. However, I do not think it is the will of the Lord for us to make an effort to carry or share His afflictions. His death on the cross has been completed, and I believe He desires that the completeness of His redemption shall be achieved here on the earth.

My conviction is that when we believe in the death and the resurrection of Christ, we are already included in the crucifixion of the Lord. Those who wish to live in the risen life of Christ are crucified together with Him and carrying His death in their bodies. I too am crucified on the cross.

At the same time I have the flesh that hinders my co-death with Christ. I wish to die with the Lord if possible, but I cannot (though I see His love and mercy there). Through this

predicament I realize that Christ is being crucified and suffering for me still now.

Although unable to die completely, I further realize that I am actually bearing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions in my flesh just like Paul. Meditating upon Paul's words, "in my flesh I complete what is lacking," I am moved to recognize how deeply he sees the cross of Christ. To look and gaze at the cross of Christ is to see the love of God. To see His deep love, in other words, is to have the eyes of faith. Paul knows the true meaning of the cross of Christ, and knowing the cross he deepens his decision to follow the Lord.

Paul says:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

For Paul it is quite natural and self-evident that it is not he but Christ who lives. Here is neither his desire for Christ to live in him nor his claim that Christ should live. He says that he lives in the flesh by faith in Christ. In this confession, I see his "faith" to keep looking only at the cross of Christ.

In saying, "It is no longer I who live," he seems to stand far beyond the desire, "I want to live just the way I am." He is even beyond the desire to rejoice in the risen life of Christ. The man who seeks his own joy is no longer here. Although he still lives in the flesh, he is no longer conscious of it, for Christ lives in him.

It was probably last year. When meditating on the words, "It is no longer I who live," I heard a voice:

*It does not mean that I live instead of you,
nor that I live for you.
It means that I live you.*

When Paul says, “It is no longer I who live,” it means that Christ lives Paul entirely, including his flesh. To such a degree as to so declare, it is not Paul but only Christ who exists in him.

Looking at “myself” objectively, I feel there are two selves: “the one in the flesh” and “the one in the Lord.” As for Paul there is only one self. He no longer lives, but Christ alone lives his life.

Paul further says:

(We are) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:10-12)

He says, “Death is at work in us, but life in you.” Why is death in “us” but life in “you?” Even though it may be a rhetorical difference, I am caught by the words, “us” and “you.” Before this he says, “so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” So it is plain that Paul does not exclude himself from the word “us.” In saying, “Death is at work in us,” however, he who has been crucified with the Lord knows well that he is allowed to live in His life, and yet he dares to say that life is at work in “you.” Why does he make such a statement?

What does he mean? I suppose for Paul it is irrelevant whether he is alive or dead. Here is his extraordinary faith: He has decided to live thoroughly in the will of Christ. This is his confession of faith.

In his declaration, “Death is at work in us, but life in you,” I see the same decision of faith as in his words, “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”

“I will not nullify His afflictions and death. No longer will

I live according to the law or the tradition. I will not avert my eyes from the cross of Christ.” This is his decision and his confession of burning love for the Lord.

I die. I die the death of Christ.

Flow, Life!

May the love of Christ who has risked
His own life be completed on the earth.

May His will be realized here on the earth.

There is no other path for Paul.

“I do not want to nullify the death of Christ even slightly.”
This is his only desire.

Pondering on Paul’s faith, my heart burns. Paul lives so solely for Christ, or in my words, Christ lives Paul so totally, that he can flatly declare, “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” At the same time, because he lives for Christ to that extent, he cannot help seeing the power of the flesh. And the more he sees its power, the deeper he understands the cross of Christ and decides not to nullify His death on the cross.

Paul’s love for the Lord and his decision echoes in me, and the love of the Lord who chose him and captivated him is ever echoing in me.

We all have a Paul in us to some degree because we are enthralled by the Lord as well. And I feel Paul strengthening and encouraging our desire to respond to the Lord and live for His will. I am delighted to know that the love of the Lord who seized Paul and never left him is also poured upon me.

September 7, 1993

Kohitsuji no Mure Christian Church