

“Are you willing to accept a punishment for sins you have not committed?”

We learned about Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife, in Genesis. They lived in the garden of Eden receiving inexhaustible blessings from God. However, they ate the fruit which God forbid them to eat; the only restriction they had in the garden. After this incident, Adam blamed both God and Eve for what he had done. And Eve blamed the snake for her mistake. We can easily imagine that this couple's mutual trust was damaged by blaming each other. It happened in the garden of Eden under the perfect environment. We now learn that problems can be created even in a perfect environment.

Then a son was given to them. He was the first child of mankind. He was named Cain. Eve was happy to have her son and said **“With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.”** The name “Cain” means “man”. And Eve's husband's name “Adam” also has the same meaning. Well, Eve was pleased with the birth of her son because she was able to have a replacement for her unreliable husband who blamed his faults on her. Without saying, Eve's distrust of her husband must have affected their marital relationship.

Then Adam and Eve had a second son. They gave the name Abel to the child. It means “vanity”. I wonder why they named him such a sad name. The bible describes the relationship between a husband and wife as, “two become one flesh”. In spite of this principle, the rule was despised because Cain, their first son, got involved between Adam and Eve. This distorted relationship created the problem to the couple. Furthermore, this scarred the family relationship.

If the couple had kept having the characteristic of blaming others, it would have been inherited in their children. When Cain, who was the first son of Adam and Eve, had his fault pointed out by God, he got very angry and turned his face away from God. Then he took his brother to the field and murdered him. Cain's fault was his own, but he took his brother's life as if Abel had a responsibility for it. Yes. The price of blaming others was killing his own brother.

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Last week, we read these verses written about Cain. God asked four questions to Cain “why are you angry? (6) Why is your face downcast? (6) “Where is your brother Abel?” (9) “What have you done? (10)

When Cain was asked by God four times, each time he had a chance to confess by saying, “It was not either Abel's or God's fault. It was my fault” But Cain assumed a defiant attitude and didn't admit his fault. He shifted his responsibility onto others and never said that he was wrong. He had been very stubborn.

Last week, I ended the message at this point with no hope in sight. Brothers and sisters in Christ, everything I said last week are written in five pages from the beginning of the Bible. But don't you notice that the cause of all problems we have today is there. The biggest problem is that we don't realize what the root cause of our problem is. What is worse, we never realize that our problems are in our own hearts. Like Adam and Eve, we accuse other and believe that others are at fault. And people around us also think the same way. So a problem becomes more and more complicated. Even if we were to find that problems are in us, we wouldn't know how to solve them.

Let's see Cain. What happened to him after murdering his brother? God told him **“10The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”** (Genesis4:10-12)

Since then, although we were created to live with God, we, like Cain, have also been wanderers on the earth. This is why it is difficult for us to get the kind of results we want. Even now we are still struggling for nothing. Cain replied to God in this way.

13 Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence;I will be

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a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Not so[e]; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.16 So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod,[f] east of Eden. (13-16)

When Cain was accused by God, he finally knew his awful act, and realized that he had to carry the burden as a result of his behavior. He grieved and said, “My punishment is more than I can bear.” He murdered a younger brother, but now he had to live with the fear of being killed by someone.

“My punishment is more than I can bear” Cain's grief didn't come to an end here. Instead, innumerable people continue to have such cries in their hearts like Cain. After a long period of time, finally, this topic was recognized and brought to the surface. It was the apostle Paul who pointed out this fact. He paid attention to what Adam, Cain's father, had done. He wrote.

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned-- (Romans 5:12)

For the last three weeks, I talked about human nature, “shifting the responsibility onto others”. This way of thinking that “it is not my fault” is called sin in the Bible. Paul wrote how sin came into one person. It said, “**just as sin entered the world through one man**”. Man in here means Adam who is the father of Cain. At the moment when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, sin definitely began to flow from him. It also flows into our hearts. Surely, sin entered all mankind. The story about “Adam and Eve” or “Cain and Able” doesn't sound new to us. It is because the story reminds us something we already knew or something we had experienced before. Why do we think so? As Paul pointed out, it is because sin already exists in our hearts.

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Against the fact that sin entered the world through one man, Paul wrote about another man who brought something to the world.

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! 18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. 20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:15-21)

Paul compares Jesus Christ with Adam here. As it is written in Genesis, the trespass of one man resulted in the death of many people. But we can gain life through Jesus Christ. Paul said that all people became sinners through the sin of one man, but Jesus Christ justified our sins and made us righteous. And everyone can have his righteousness.

Cain said, “my punishment is more than I bare.” Yes. He was overwhelmed by the punishment for the sin he committed, and his sin was from his father Adam. He cried out that he couldn't compensate for what he had done. But Paul wrote that Jesus Christ gave the light for us who have the same cry like Cain in our hearts from that time on Adam. Yes. This is the cross of Jesus Christ.

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We have various thoughts about the cross. Theologians and pastors will explain the cross in many different ways. I am one of them. Recently, I have been thinking about something that I can't get out of my mind. It is very simple. It is that "Jesus Christ received a punishment for sins he hadn't committed". Adam didn't take responsibility for what he had done. Instead he blamed others, Jesus did quite the opposite. He was willing to accept a punishment for sins he had never committed. He did it not by force but with his will, and he walked to the place where he was crucified. The Bible keeps telling us that Jesus bore our sins. Surely, we cannot bear our sins at all.

Let me share about my experience. It happened a little over a year ago. One day, my wife called me while I was working in my office. She was driving on the way home from her friend's house after Bible study. She was about to come out to the main street from the residence area, when one car, which was parked on the street, suddenly backed up and hit her car. She wanted me to come to the scene because she had an argument with the driver. When I arrived there, I found my car with the right front glass window broken and the other car with a left rear dent.

My wife told me that she couldn't avoid this car because he backed up all of a sudden. But the driver said that my wife hit his car which was parked on the street. One of the church members and my younger son were in the car with my wife and witnessed the accident. Both of them said that the car backed up suddenly and hit our car. Who wants to hit a car which is parked on the street? I understood that the driver wanted to lay the blame with my wife.

Of course I would have apologized if she had been to blame. But evidently, this driver lied. So I told him that my wife had no fault. But the driver never admitted his fault and kept saying that he was the victim. He wanted the insurance company to take care of this matter. Then he left the scene. Later, my insurance company contacted us to tell us not to worry. They said that they were billing the driver's insurance company for damage.

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It was not a big accident. No one was injured. I thanked God that there weren't any injuries. It was just a minor accident and both cars had only a minor dent. But to tell the truth, I forcefully argued with the guy. I was so mad because my wife was considered as the one who responsible, although she wasn't to blame at all. Through this incident, I experienced unpleasant emotions and it was so unbearable to be accused as one who did something wrong in spite of being innocent.

What would you do if someone accused you of something you had never done this morning? Furthermore, if they came to a wrong conclusion for what you hadn't done, what would you do? Can you simply ignore it? We would probably try to prove our innocence as much as we can. Your family and your friends may support you to prove it. I wonder how many law suits are processing in this country this week. People don't like to be told “it is your fault.” It is unbearable.

Brothers and sisters. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ means that Jesus accepted a punishment he never committed. On top of that, he didn't even say a single word to prove his innocence. He never argued. This is Jesus, who was already prophesied by Isaiah 750 years before it happened.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. (Isaiah 53:6-8)

Yes. Jesus bore all of our sins and walked towards the cross. Jesus was not a sinner. Jesus was burdened by all the transgressions we committed. We are

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all sinners and succeeded this character from Adam. Jesus accepted punishment for sins he did not commit. He was put on the trial. It was not a fair trial. Jesus could have argued to prove his innocence even if the trial was unfair. However, he didn't say anything to defend himself. He didn't say even words such as, “ It is not right” or “I am innocent” He was taken to the place to be executed like a lamb to the slaughter. His hands and feet were nailed and he was killed. Who did he die for? I wouldn't say that it is for “us” because it sounds like that it is not my business. So I dare to ask you again. Who did Jesus die for? Yes, it is for you.

Jesus prayed so earnestly in the garden of Gethsemane several hours before it happened. He also said something unbelievable on the cross. “ Farther please forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.” I will tell the truth. You are included among them for whom Jesus asked for forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters. Cain said “My punishment is more than I can bear” But the Bible says, “ Don't worry. You don't have to pay your penalty.

As I told you before, the problem was created even in a perfect environment. It means that we have problem anywhere. As long as we have hearts, we create problems. We are so helpless because we have no way to prevent sin from spreading to the next generation. The problem originated from Adam and Eve and was inherited by their children. The chain of sins continues. But now, we know there is only one way to stop it. That is Jesus' love on the cross. Because of his love, he willingly accepted all our sins although he had never committed any sin. His love made him say, “ forgive them because they don't know what they are doing” . This is the power of God's love.

Cain said that his punishment was more than he could bear. Jesus said, “Come to me all you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Jesus has been honest to keep his promise. That is why he took the burden of our sins in place of us and accepted the punishment for us.

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The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve became ashamed for the first time when they ate the forbidden fruit. At the same time, sin came into their hearts. Since then, we, human beings, have both “shame” and “sin” to this day.

Jesus was crucified as a criminal. People don't pity a criminal. For that reason, his clothes were removed and he should have been almost naked when he was crucified. Remember Adam and Eve. They covered themselves with fig leaves. How about Jesus? Even his clothes were stripped off. His arms and feet were nailed. For whom did he accept such an awful punishment? He did it for you. In order to accept the punishment for our shame and sins, Jesus bore both of them.

I wrote an article about “a person whose sin and shame were removed” on the column in the program this week. High education, high income or hard training don't help for removing sin and shame. But accepting Jesus' incredible love is the only way to remove them because Jesus dared to accept our sins in place of us.

Sin started from the first man, Adam. But Paul wrote that we are justified to be righteous before God through Jesus Christ who came to the world later. I can tell how much Paul was awed by this precious Jesus' salvation while writing Romans. The word Paul wrote also became the word for us to rely on.

1What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 3 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”37 No, in all these things we are more

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than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:31-39)

Don't hesitate to believe in Jesus as our Lord and walk with him. Repent your sins you can't bear, and believe and accept the fact that Jesus died on the cross 2000 years ago. Let's start a new life by believing in Him. Let's pray.

Translated by Takako Nishii