

## Who Are We Loyal To?

(Eph. 4:1-6, 14-15)

August 2, 2015

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A few of weeks ago, I watched a drama called "The Sandglass." It was a rerun of one of the most popular dramas in Korea's TV history. First aired 20 years ago, the story centered on the ties between politics, the business world, and underworld organizations during the society's turbulent period spanning from the 1970's to the late '80's. The drama was so popular that it was called "the Return Home Hourglass," since most bread earners hurried home after work to see how the intrigue of the drama unfolded.

In the show, there's an episode about a mid-level boss of a gang who ended up in a very cruel boot camp during a crackdown on organized crime. Let's call him Jim for convenience's sake. The crackdown was enforced by a new military government. Later he meets his boss--THE BOSS--of his gang who was arrested too and transferred to the camp. Life there was so harsh that some died and some even committed suicide. So they plot a prison break.

When they almost got out of the barbed wire, suddenly searchlights beamed, and the sounds of the whistle and guards shouting broke the quiet of the night. At that moment, sensing that it was impossible for them ALL to escape, Jim decides to remain and distract the chasers so that his boss can escape. (Here, I'd like to remind you that at that time Korean mafias were not normally involved in murder or other horrendous crimes than gang fights with fists and wooden clubs, mainly to maintain or expand territories, although there were racketeering, threatening, and it was violent.)

The boss reluctantly disappears with his friend, and towards his back, Jim bows deeply, knowing that this is his last homage he can pay alive. To me this was almost a holy moment. It was shocking to see him do that! In a little while, a gunshot is heard from a distance, indicating that Jim was killed.

I was both deeply moved and shocked: "What loyalty! What a sacrifice!" "How could he do that?" Jim showed genuine honor and respect to his boss, and was faithful to the point of death. To him the boss was like his Lord and Savior. Maybe he might have saved Jim and his family from the depths of despair. Perhaps Jim might have found hope and the warmth of a family in the fellowship of his gang under the boss's umbrella. He even might have found the purpose and meaning of his life through his boss.

That story directed me to look inside of me: "Am I that loyal to my Lord who saved me?" "My Lord Jesus gave up his life on the cross to forgive me all my sin and gave me eternal life. Then what have I done for him?" "Can I be that faithful to Him even to the point of death?"

I don't approve or beautify the mobster's life. Obviously he chose the wrong lord. But what gripped me was his wholehearted devotion and resolution to lay down his life as a sacrifice to save the life of his boss--"Oyabun" in Japanese. In so doing he didn't think twice; he didn't even show a tinge of regret.

However, his loyalty was misguided. I felt so sorry for him because he had to die not knowing his Creator and Savior. The Apostle Paul, who was a fierce opponent of the sect called "the Nazarenes," now became a zealous proponent of the way of Jesus the Nazarene. He says in Ephesians 4:4 "For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious

hope for the future.” Notice he said, “one glorious future,” *not* a variety of futures, *not* a bright and blissful future according to human standards. He goes on to say in v. 5&6: “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.” It is clear that there is only one God, YHWH, who alone can never die, and who lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him.

The Apostle James, a brother of Jesus, says in James 1:16: “So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.” And the one and only good and perfect gift is Jesus Christ.

Still, his death made me reflect upon my heart attitude towards God and my calling as his minister.

Life without loyalty to anyone or any cause is empty and meaningless. However, life dedicated to an ephemeral object, or a mere human being--however great he or she might be--or even a god other than the Creator and Triune God—All this is horrible, because it attains only nothingness. So who or what are you loyal to?

Now I’m going to introduce to you a missionary named Ki-poong Lee. He was one of Korea’s first 7 ordained ministers during the early Korean church history. Before that, he was a hoodlum, and was famous for head-butting in the city of Pyongyang, now North Korea’s capital.

It was during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time Korea was in a dire situation both politically and economically. Although he was a learned man, young man Ki-poong was angry at the social injustice, and that’s why he became a leader of those who were in trouble or discontented.

Around that time, an American missionary named Samuel Austin Moffett was sent to Korea. He was father of the late Samuel Hugh Moffett who went to be with Jesus last February. Last year when my wife Sarah and I had the opportunity to visit with him and his beloved wife Eileen in Princeton, he kept saying that he missed Pyongyang, because he was born and raised there. We are deeply grateful for the Moffett family’s commitment and sacrifice to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Korea. I confess that thanks to those early missionaries’ dedication, I can stand here to share these stories with you.

For a missionary to come to Korea during that time was perilous. Many risked their lives to come and preach the kingdom of God. At first, people called them “Western demons” and rejected them. Among them was Ki-poong. One day while Missionary Moffett was on his way preaching the Good News, Ki-poong threw a rock towards him seriously injuring his left jaw. The scar lasted long. But Moffett was invincible. So was Ki-poong. He even set fire to the church under construction. What was amazing is that Moffett did not resort to the authorities but kept forgiving him and waited patiently for God to intervene so he could be converted.

The day finally came when God intervened. One day Jesus appeared to despondent Ki-poong in a trance with the crown of thorns on his head, and asked, “Ki-poong, why are you persecuting me?” That was his turning point, when he repented with tons of tears in contrition, and he became a

completely changed man. After meeting with another Presbyterian missionary (William Leander) Swallen, he immediately went about streets proclaiming, "Believe in Lord Jesus and be saved!" He eventually graduated from PyongYang Theological Seminary, which was the first one in Korea and was established by Missionary Moffett.

Upon graduation, he volunteered to go to Jeju Island in the southernmost part of Korea. The island has now a thriving tourist industry, and there are many Christians there, but in those days going there was almost like laying one's life on the line. People there were deeply involved in shamanism and superstitious beliefs, and in 1901, 7 years before he went there, indigenous people even killed 300 Roman Catholics.

Ki-poong was hit by a stone, and many times his life was threatened. There is an amazing story: In a certain village in Jeju, there was a tradition that came down hundreds of years, where people offered every year a virgin as a human sacrifice to the serpent god. When that day came, in the twilight after townspeople left, he snuck into the cave where a virgin girl was offered. He approached where the hissing sound came, and lo and behold, a huge snake was about to wind itself round the girl! He grabbed a rock and threw it towards the "snake god" and fought with it and killed it!

And that incident almost cost him his life, not by the "serpent god" but by the furious villagers. Before that, into several months in the Island, he decided to give up and wrote a letter of resignation to Moffett because he had no convert and his life was constantly in danger. However, Moffett answered in the brief reply saying, "the scar on my jaw is still not healed yet, so you need to stay there longer."

After all these hardships, God started doing miraculous works through him, and people began to open their hearts to Christ. But in order to harvest hundreds and even thousands of souls, he had to pay the costly price. During all those years of his church planting in remote southern areas including Jeju Island, he lost three of his six children. When he lost a son the second time around to Cholera, Ki-poong suffered from a period of aphasia, a spasm of serious arthritis, and rupture of an eardrum.

I am telling you this story to remind you and myself of how many men and women of God sacrificed themselves to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without them, we would still be living in darkness, despair and under Satan's power. But God so loved us that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. And the Holy Spirit urged those who were saved first to go into all the nations and preach this Good News to everyone. They obeyed Jesus's mandate, and this heavenly news has been reaching to the ends of the earth even to you and me.

In the forefront of these missions, so many missionaries, lay leaders, and local Christians are being challenged and persecuted. They risk their lives, and many lose them but they are faithful to the Lord Jesus to the point of death.

Now the frontline is not only Islamic or communist countries. It is in our own land. Year after year keeping genuine faith is becoming more and more difficult. This current administration is

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labeling traditional Christian beliefs as “prejudice” that should be “eliminated.” The problem is that in the name of tolerance and human rights, rooms for disagreement are being pushed out, and Christians who hold onto the Biblical teaching are being more and more marginalized. The Truth is being compromised and relativized. It’s like in the time of Judges. The last verse of Judges reads: “all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” (Judg. 17:6).

It seems to me that America is driving God out of its life. And many Christian leaders are putting the lamp of Jesus’s light under a basket for fear of offending other religions. It was refreshing, however, and a great encouragement to see a Pastor named Lee Stoneking, standing behind the pulpit in the UN General Assembly, testify to Jesus Christ and preach the Gospel. He proclaimed quoting Acts Chapter 2 verse 38, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’

Some must have been offended, some would have even mocked at him in his mind, and most people would be back to their own way of life by now, as nothing ever has happened. But who knows if there is one soul that’s been saved because of his testimony?

Now I am wrapping up my sermon. The Bible clearly declares that whoever believes in Jesus the Son of God will not perish--meaning face eternal judgment and unspeakable suffering, but have everlasting life--meaning experience eternal bliss and joy unspeakable.

Ki-poong finally died a martyr’s death. His life on the earth was far from blissful. His was full of sorrow and suffering. But hear the promise of the Scriptures:

“[God] will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”(Rev. 21:4).

Jesus exhorts us: “If you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10).

While we are living this earthly life, we need to love, embrace, respect others, and be compassionate. I believe that is what this church is doing. But at the same time we have to remember that when we are forced to choose between faith in Christ and denial of it, we do need to stand firm and choose the way that leads to eternal life, even though that may cost our earthly life.

I earnestly hope that no one here do not have to see that day come. But in many other parts of the world Christians are still facing that kind of life and death decision. I saw a video clip of Rabbi Jonathan Cahn, who is a Messianic Jew, addressing the United Nations about Christian ‘Holocaust’ that’s been currently going on in the world. Towards the end, he recounted a story of ISIS ordering four Christian children to renounce Jesus and follow Muhammad. “NO,” they said. “We love Yeshua. He has always been with us.” “Those are the last words the children ever spoke on this earth as ISIS beheaded them,” he said. Following Jesus is costly.

I will reread Paul’s letter: Ephesians 4:4-6: “For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.”

Who are you loyal to? Who is your Boss? Is He your Lord and Savior? Are you willing to pay the price for Him even if it costs your life? As those children did?