

Last week's sermon (22nd January 2023) from Pastor Ben

"Rejoicing Church and Non-Rejoicing Church" 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

Today's bible verse is a letter to the Corinthian church from Paul. According to 1st Corinthians we could assume that sin was spreading inside the church, disputes happening and even non-believers could point their fingers at them. So Paul got worried and sent a letter urging them to repent of their sins. Out of the few churches mentioned in the bible, it's no exaggeration to say that the Corinthian church was the least pleasing church for God. Therefore, today we wish to learn from the negative example of the Corinthian church so that we can avoid their attitudes and behaviors and seek to be a church that rejoices in God.

1. To be a church that rejoices in God is a church that repents sins.

Spiritual life was lost inside the Corinthian church because sin was vastly spreading. Obviously, we are all weak humans so we can make mistakes and be sinful at times. But God knew enough about us and He saved us. Jesus' disciples also made many mistakes, but still Jesus didn't abandon them. To be rejoicing in God doesn't mean we are to be sinless nor perfect. However, whether it's personal or in the congregation, if we commit sins and just let our lives go on without repenting, we put ourselves spiritually vulnerable. But if we come to Jesus for forgiveness, He will not only cleanse our hearts but also fill us with His love.

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." Isaiah 43:25

To be a pleasing church and to become a Christian you are not to leave a problematic sin behind but to be forgiven by Jesus' Cross, as well as to change our direction and to move forward.

2. To be a church that rejoices in God is to be a humble church.

The Corinthian church didn't listen to Paul's warning but on the contrary they criticized Paul's letter that was written with love. As we go on reading the bible, arrogance is the sin that God hates the most. To not repent our sins is a manifestation of arrogance. Nevertheless as Japanese, there is something we must be careful about. In Japanese culture, religions exist to prosper people's lives. Every new year, lots of people go and visit shrines, yet does anyone say "this year I will serve this God"? 100% of the people who visit the shrine wish for prosperous business, home safety and good health. Japanese cultural view on religion is that gods exist to prosper our lives. Even after we become Christians, this kind of religious ideas lasts, and they ask God to do something good for them. Of course, it

is nothing wrong to ask God to help you, but when this idea becomes center of your faith, your whole direction of following Christ will be ruined. God is the King of kings and Lord of lords and He is the one we are to serve to. Jesus taught us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and what is given as the answer of this is, of course, the kingdom of God. It's not our necessities in life of "what to eat and what to wear". That is given to us as a present from God. Indeed many Christians understand that if you put God first your lifestyle would go smoothly.

As to the worship service, we come to the church to give Him glory, not to receive blessings. Though we do receive blessings from God, but it is because we offer ourselves as living sacrifices. To use God for the purpose of our own convenience is arrogant. God hates arrogance. Let's examine our act of faith if it is used to make ourselves content or not and ask God to shine the light of the Holy Spirit to us.

3. To be a church that rejoices in God is to love one another.

In the Corinthian church there was division, though we are to love one another especially inside the church. Jesus said "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34 The Old Testament tells us to love one another and why did Jesus say it is a "new covenant"? That is not to love others from your own strength, it's the love through Jesus' love that we are to love one another and that is the new covenant.

Besides loving each other is to support each other. Isn't it natural when you love a person that you want to do something good for the one you love?

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God ". 1 Peter 4:10

Since there's love for each other, we'd like to help each other with our gifts and serve each other. If everyone comes to the church wanting to be loved, there's no one to love. But if everyone seeks to love, then everyone will be loved. To serve each other is a way we can let our church grow as the one pleasing to God.

When the first letter was written in the Corinthian church, it was in a corrupted state. And yet, Paul called them "saints" (1:2), because they are still people Jesus called to be Christians. Paul's faith was that one day God would work in them and let them stand firm in faith. We are also saints not because of our good deeds, but because of Jesus who has saved us from our sins. So, with the joy from the inside and the love from the Holy Spirit, let's also serve each other and love one another. Respectively we could grow joyfully in the church as God rejoices in the church.