

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

1/9/2011 **“Crisis of Faith and the Work of God” Isaiah 55: 8-11**

The people of Israel lived in the darkest years when they were taken to Babylonia and Assyria as hostages and slaves. That happened in 6th and 7th centuries B.C..

In those desperate years, people were compelled to ask themselves, “Does God really care? Does he know I exist?”” What they experienced was a crisis of faith of the most serious nature.

It was the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea who consoled their people, “Of course, God cares. Be patient. Keep the faith.”

And yet, the prophets were also convinced that when all the chips were down, no human beings deserved God's forgiveness. One prophet cried out, “Our righteousness is like a filthy rag.” Human beings need forgiveness but do not deserve it.

Now how is it possible for God to forgive those who do not deserve God's forgiveness? All the prophets could say was, “We cannot think God's thoughts. God will do it his own way.”

This was what Isaiah meant when he declared, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

The New Testament solves this theological dilemma. How can God save human beings whose righteousness is like a filthy rag? The answer is this: God took the consequences of our wretchedness upon himself. In Jesus Christ, God took the consequences of our sin upon himself for our sake. Jesus died for us.

This solution of the theological dilemma is so profound that reason and logic cannot fully comprehend it. All we can do is to accept it in gratitude and faith.

In this context, I would like to share the following testimony of a Christian gentleman I heard several years ago in Japan.

His father had been killed in the battle of Okinawa. His mother raised three boys by managing a tiny vegetable shop. She worked from early morning to late at night. On Sundays, she collapsed.

This gentleman was the youngest and most rambunctious. One day he got into a fight at school and hurt his classmate rather seriously. The family of the injured child demanded a large sum of money for compensation. Or the son would be reported to the police.

The amount of the money was so large that there was no way she could pay it. So, to save her son, the mother volunteered to be a cleaning woman for that family every Sunday for a whole year.

The gentleman concluded his testimony this way. “God's grace is too profound for me to fully comprehend. But I can accept it gratefully, because I remember my mother working as a cleaning woman so that I did not have to spend time in detention. She sacrificed herself for me.”

We often wonder, “Does God care? Does God know I exist?” Unable to answer these questions affirmatively, we may experience a crisis of faith. But rest assured. God cares, God knows, God loves more than we ever know. God sacrificed himself for us. This was done once and for all in Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God