

A River of Heart Flows with Tears

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Photo date and location unknown

Between Fear and Inspiration

As I grew older and more mature, I became preoccupied with the question, "What will I be when I grow up?" I enjoyed observing and studying nature, so I gave some thought to becoming a scientist. However, I changed my mind after I saw the tragedy of how people were plundered by the Japanese colonial authorities. They suffered so much that they could not even feed themselves. It didn't seem that becoming a scientist, even if it led to my winning a Nobel Prize, would be a way for me to wipe away the tears of suffering people.

I wanted to become a person who could take away the tears that flowed from people's eyes and the sorrow that was in their hearts. When I was lying in the forest listening to the songs of the birds, I would think, "The world needs to be made as warm and tender as those songs. I should become someone who makes people's lives as fragrant as flowers." I didn't know what career I should pursue to accomplish

that, but I became convinced that I should be a person who could give happiness to people.

When I was ten our family converted to Christianity by the grace of Great-Uncle Yun Guk Moon, who was a minister and led a fervent life of faith. From then on, I attended church faithfully, without ever missing a week. If I arrived at service even a little late, I would be so ashamed that I could not even raise my face. I don't know what I could have understood at such a young age to inspire me to be this way, but God was already a huge presence in my life. I was spending more and more time wrestling with questions dealing with life and death, and the suffering and sorrows of human existence.

When I was twelve, I witnessed my great-grandfather's grave being moved. Normally, only adults in the clan would be allowed to attend such an occasion, but I wanted very much to see for myself what happened to people after they died. I eventually persuaded my parents to allow me to come along. When the grave was dug up and I saw his remains, I was overcome with shock and fear. While the adults opened the grave with solemn ceremony, all I saw was a scrawny skeleton. There was no trace of the features my father and mother had described to me. There was only the hideous sight of white bones.

It took me a while to get over the shock of seeing my great-grandfather's bones. I said to myself, "Great-grandfather must have looked just like us. Does this mean my parents, too, will turn into just a bunch of white bones after they die? Is this what will happen to me when I die? Everyone dies, but after we die, do we just lie there unable to think about anything?" I couldn't get these questions out of my head.

Around that same time, a number of strange events occurred in our home. I have a vivid memory of one in particular. Each time our family wove cloth, we would take the snippets of thread from the spinning wheel and save them in an earthenware jar until we had enough to make a bolt of cloth. The cloth we made from these snippets, called yejang, was a special cloth used when a child in the family was getting married. One night, these snippets were found scattered all over the branches of an old chestnut tree in a neighboring village. They made the tree look like it had turned white. We couldn't understand who would have taken the snippets from the jar and carried them all the way to the chestnut tree, which was quite a distance from our home, and then spread them all over the

tree. It didn't seem like something that could be done by human hands, and it frightened everyone in the village.

When I was sixteen, we experienced the tragedy of having five of my younger siblings die in a single year. No words could describe the heartbreak of our parents in losing five of their thirteen children in such a short time. Death seemed to spread. Other clan members lost their livestock. One home's cow suddenly died, though it had been in perfect health. At another home, several horses died, one after another. At a third home, seven pigs died in one night.

The suffering of one family seemed connected to the suffering of the nation and of the world. I was increasingly troubled to see the wretched situation of the Korean people under Japan's increasingly tyrannical rule. People didn't have enough to eat. They were sometimes forced to take grass, tree bark, and whatever else they could find, and boil these for food. There seemed to be no end to wars around the world. Then one day I read an article in a newspaper about the suicide of a middle school student who was the same age as I.

"Why did he die?" I asked myself. "What would drive a person to kill himself at such a young age?" I was devastated by this news, as if it had happened to someone who had been close to me. With the newspaper open to that article, I wept aloud for three days and nights. The tears kept coming, and I couldn't make them stop.

I couldn't comprehend the series of strange events, or the fact that tragic events were happening to good people. Seeing the bones of my great-grandfather had inspired me to start asking questions about life . a river of heart flows with tears . and death, and the series of unusual events in and around our home caused me to hang on to religion. The Word of God I was hearing in church, however, was not sufficient by itself to give me the clear answers I was seeking. To relieve the frustrations in my heart, I naturally began to immerse myself in prayer.

"Who am I? Where did I come from? What is the purpose of life? What happens to people when they die? Is there a world of the eternal soul? Does God really exist? Is God really all-powerful? If He is, why does He just stand by and watch the sorrows of the world? If God created this world, did He also create the suffering that is in the world? What will bring an end to Korea's tragic occupation by Japan? What is the meaning of the suffering of the Korean people? Why do human beings hate each other, fight, and start wars?" My heart was filled with these serious and fundamental questions. No one could easily answer them for me, so my only option was to pray. Prayer helped me to find solace. Whenever I laid out the anguishing problems in my heart to God, all my suffering and sorrow vanished and my heart felt at ease. I began spending more and more time in prayer, to the point that, eventually, I began praying through the night all the time. As a result, I had a rare and precious experience in which God answered my prayers. That day will always remain as the most cherished memory of my life - a day I can never forget.

It was the night before Easter in the year I turned sixteen. I was on Mount Myodu praying all night and begging God in tears for answers. Why had He created a world so filled with sorrow and despair? Why was the all-knowing and all-powerful God leaving the world in such pain? What should I do for my tragic homeland? I wept in tears as I asked these questions repeatedly. 50 . as a peace-loving global citizen . Early Easter morning, after I had spent the entire night in prayer, Jesus appeared before me. He appeared in an instant, like a gust of wind, and said to me, "God is in great sorrow because of the pain of humankind. You must take on a special mission on earth having to do with Heaven's work."

That day, I saw clearly the sorrowful face of Jesus. I heard his voice clearly. The experience of witnessing the manifestation of Jesus caused my body to shake violently, like a quaking aspen's leaves trembling in a strong breeze. I was simultaneously overcome with fear so great I felt I might die and gratitude so profound I felt I might explode. Jesus spoke clearly about the work I would have to do. His words were extraordinary, having to do with saving humanity from its suffering and bringing joy to God.

My initial response was, "I can't do this. How can I do this? Why would you even give me a mission of such paramount importance?" I was truly afraid. I wanted somehow to avoid this mission, and I clung to the hem of his clothing and wept inconsolably.

The More It Hurts, the More You Should Love

I was thrown into extreme confusion. I couldn't open my heart to my parents and share my huge secret with them. But neither could I just keep it to myself. I was at a loss over what to do. What was clear was that I had received a special mission from Heaven.

It was such a huge and tremendous responsibility. I shuddered in fear to think that I might not be able to handle it on my own. I clung to prayer even more than before, in an attempt to quiet my confused heart. But even this had no effect. No matter how much I tried, I could not free myself for even a moment from the memory of having met Jesus. My encounter with Jesus changed my life completely. His sorrowful

expression was etched into my heart as if it had been branded there, and I could not think of anything else. From the day on, I immersed myself completely in the Word of God. At times, I was surrounded by endless darkness and filled with such pain that it was difficult to breathe. At other times, my heart was filled with joy, as though I were watching the morning sun rise above the horizon. In an effort to quiet my heart and my tears, I composed the following poem:

Crown of Glory

When I doubt people, I feel pain.
When I judge people, it is unbearable.
When I hate people, there is no value to my existence.
Yet if I believe, I am deceived.
If I love, I am betrayed.
Suffering and grieving tonight, my head in my hands,
Am I wrong?
Yet I am wrong.
Even though we are deceived, still believe.
Though we are betrayed, still forgive.
Love completely, even those who hate you.
Wipe your tears away and welcome with a smile
Those who know nothing but deceit,
And those who betray without regret.
O, master, the pain of loving.
Look at my hands.
Place your hand on my chest.
My heart is bursting such agony.
But when I love those who acted against me,
I brought victory.
If you have done the same thing,
I will give you the Crown of Glory.

I experienced a series of days like those that led me into a deeper and deeper world of prayer. I embraced new words of truth that Jesus was giving me directly and let myself be completely captivated by God. I began to live an entirely different life. I had many things to think about, and I gradually became a boy of few words.

Anyone who follows the path of God must pursue his goal with his whole heart and total dedication. It requires a steadfastness of purpose. I am stubborn by birth, so I have always had tenacity. I used this God-given tenacity to overcome difficulties and follow the way that was given to me. Anytime I began to waver, I steadied myself by remembering: "I received God's word directly." It was not easy to choose this course, because it would require me to sacrifice the rest of my youth. At times, I felt I would rather avoid the path.

A wise person will place hope in the future and continue to move forward, no matter how difficult it may be. A foolish person, on the other hand, will throw away his future for the sake of immediate happiness. I, too, at times held foolish thoughts when I was still very young, but in the end I chose the path of the wise person. I gladly offered up my life in order to pursue the way God desired. I could not have run away if I tried; this was the only way I could have chosen. So why did God call me? Even now, at ninety years of age, I wonder every day why God called me. Of all people in the world, why did He choose me? It wasn't because I had a particularly good appearance, or outstanding character, or deep conviction. I was just an unremarkable, stubborn, and foolish young boy. If God saw something in me, it must have been a sincere heart that sought Him with tears of love. Whatever the time or place, love is most important. God was searching for a person who would live with a heart of love and who, when faced with suffering could cut off its effects with love. I was a boy in a rural village with nothing to show for myself. Even now, I insist uncompromisingly on sacrificing my life for God's love and nothing else.

There was nothing I could know on my own, so I took all my questions to God. I asked, "God, do you really exist?" and that was how I came to know that He did, in fact, exist. I asked, "God, do you have any cherished desires?" and this was how I came to know that He, too, had cherished desires. I asked Him, "God, do you need me?" and this was how I discovered that He had use for me.

On those days when my prayers and dedication connected to Heaven, Jesus appeared to me without fail and conveyed special messages. If I was earnest in my desire to know something, Jesus would appear with a gentle expression and give me answers of truth. His words were always on the mark, and they struck deep into my bosom like sharp arrows. These were not mere words; they were revelations about the creation of the universe that opened the door to a new world. When Jesus spoke, it seemed like a soft breeze, but I took his words to heart and prayed with an earnestness strong enough to uproot a tree. Gradually, I came into a new realization about God's purpose in creating the universe and his principles of

creation.

During the summer of that year, I went on a pilgrimage around the country. I had no money. I would go to homes and ask to be fed. If I was lucky, I caught a ride on a truck. This was how I visited every corner of the country. Everywhere I went, I saw that my homeland was a crucible of tears. There was no end to sorrowful sights of suffering from hungry people. Their woeful lamentations turned to tears that flowed like a river.

"This wretched history must end quickly as possible," I told myself. "Our people must not be left to suffer in sorrow and despair. Somehow, I need to find a way to go to Japan and to America so that I can let the world know the greatness of the Korean people."

Through this pilgrimage, I was able to redouble my determination toward my future work.

As I clenched my two fists, my mind became totally focused, and I could see clearly the path I had to follow in my life: "I absolutely will save our people and bring God's peace on this earth."