

When It Is Hard to Understand the Lord's Will

「 Introduction 」

Has Jesus ever seemed unfamiliar to you while reading through the Gospels? Anyone on the path of discipleship is likely to go through a time of confusion. Oswald Chambers described his experience, "At the beginning of our life with Jesus Christ, we were sure we knew all there was to know about following Him. It was a delight to forsake everything else and to throw ourselves before him in a fearless statement of love. But now we are not quite so sure. Jesus is far ahead of us and is beginning to seem different and unfamiliar." In this session, we will get closer to the heart of Jesus by looking at the lives of three different women.

(1) 1st story: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28)

A Canaanite woman cried out desperately. Her daughter who was oppressed by a demon needed help. Initially, Jesus is silent. He neither accepts her nor drives her away. His attitude is intentionally ambiguous, and he just listens. The disciples ask for him, but Jesus still ignores them. Then he intensifies the situation by saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (v.24) Sensing an opening, the Canaanite woman throws herself at his feet and pleads, "Lord, help me." (v.25) But Jesus's response is maddening. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (v.26) The woman does not stop here and asks again, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (v.27) Then Jesus finally says, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." (v.28)

[Reflection]

- Why did Jesus deny the woman's request three times?

- What did Jesus desire to see?

Were prayer like a magic wand, Jesus would have answered her right away. Jesus's ambiguous attitude gave her a chance to form relationship and trust. If the miracle comes too quickly, the opportunity to discover one's faith and build relationship would diminish.

(2) 2nd story: Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (John 20:11-18)

On the first morning of resurrection, Jesus hid his identity from Mary. She probably thought it was a gardener talking to her. Jesus had already risen, so Mary no longer needed to cry. And he could have clearly and surely shown himself to her, but he chose not to overwhelm her. Mary remained in her confusion and panic until Jesus called her, "Mary!" Many of us often wish that God were more visible. We think that if we could see him better or know what is going on, then faith would come more easily. When we suffer, we long for God to speak clearly, to tell us the end of the story and, most of all, to show himself. But if God showed himself fully and immediately and answered all the questions, we would never grow. We would never emerge from our chrysalis because we'd be forever dependent.

[Reflection]

- Was the moment of confusion, panic, fear, and sadness which Mary had to go through in the empty tomb necessary? Were those emotions wasted for nothing?

(3) 3rd story of another woman

Over a twenty-five-year period, Jill wrestled with God for Kim (a daughter with disability). Week after week during our family prayer time Jill would pray for strength and faith—strength to get from one end of the day to the next and faith not to throw in the towel. “Give me the faith to leave this with you. Please help her to talk.” It would be twenty years before Kim would begin to speak, at age twenty-five. God left Jill in confusion in order to grow her faith, her ability to connect with him.

Jesus’ ambiguous interaction with both Jill and the Canaanite woman is a minicourse on prayer. God permitted a difficult situation in both of their lives, and then he lingered at the edge. If he were at the center, if they had had regular visions of him, they would not have developed the faith to have a real relationship with him. When we persist in a spiritual vacuum, when we hang in there during ambiguity, we get to know God. No one works like he does. He is such a lover of souls.

[Applications]

- Take a moment to share the stories of your faith growth. When and how did your faith and character grow?

- What did God allow you to experience at that time?

[Going deeper]

Read Luke 18:1-8 and reflect on what Jesus truly meant to communicate through the parable of the unrighteous judge and the widow.

[Conclusion]

The path of discipleship often comes with training through confusion. When everything seems unfamiliar, incomprehensible, and confusing, you need to endure until the dark situation is over. Some battles are overcome by enduring. Eventually, following the Lord will become the ultimate and unspeakable joy in life.