

Amazed and Perplexed #2: The Crucified and Enthroned Jesus, Humility, and Suffering¹

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Abstract

This article is the second in a four-part “Amazed and Perplexed” series, originally published in Korean. While focusing on Korean missions, the article explores the worldwide outworking in recent times of the exalted Jesus, forever bearing his Crucifixion wounds, especially moving among those who are humble and who suffer.

Key Words: Africans, Chinese, Immigrants, Koreans, Refugees

Introduction

“God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

Two millennia ago, Jesus poured out his Spirit at Pentecost. That landmark event demonstrated that Jesus had been newly enthroned as King over all the earth. As explored in the first article of this series, in recent generations Jesus has in new ways poured out his Spirit on his multinational people throughout the earth. King Jesus has also interacted with human beings in dramatically increased numbers of languages through Bible translation. Furthermore, Jesus has reconfigured his people organizationally, ethnically, and by nationality.

Jesus’s followers today represent myriad more languages, ethnicities, nationalities, locations, life situations, and organizational labels than our mainly Western predecessors did just a few generations ago. Related is how God is now understood beyond Western religious sensibilities and has shown himself afresh to be the dynamic and omnilingual God of all sorts of people that he always has been.

Together with these dramatic transitions, the crucified and enthroned Jesus has freshly identified with those who are humble and with those who suffer. He always has done that, really, as the Scriptures amply demonstrate. After explaining that he as Creator of everything is beyond any temple that would purport to house him, God continues: “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). Jesus not only lived a poor and humble life that culminated with the horrific suffering of his crucifixion; he also consistently taught, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:3-5). Jesus has come afresh by his Spirit to identify with people throughout the world who are humble and who suffer.

This second article explores this recent divine movement toward the humble and suffering, as well as some implications for Korean Christians and their roles in Christian mission.

Jesus’s Recent Move toward the Humble and Suffering

One hundred years ago, the so-called Christian countries of Europe and the United States politically, militarily, and economically controlled almost all of Africa and the Pacific, as well as large chunks of Eurasia and Asia. Catholic Spain and Portugal had controlled Latin America

until independence movements there in the early nineteenth century. The Western-based, “Christian” empires had developed from European peoples migrating worldwide in search of land and riches, resulting in the cultivation of such cash crops as tobacco, sugar, tea, coffee, and cotton, plus the mining of precious minerals. Militarily conquering and frequently trafficking indigenous peoples as slave labor (millions of Africans as well as large numbers of Asians) were additional consequences of these imperial spreads.

Westerners’ intertwined racial, Euro-Christian, and political sensibilities of superiority were exemplified in Rudyard Kipling’s 1899 poem, “White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands.” The Englishman Kipling composed the poem following the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War and the resulting U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippine Islands. In the face of intense debate in the U.S. regarding how to treat the Philippines as its new colonial possession, Kipling sought to persuade his fellow Anglos to “Send forth the best ye breed ... to serve your captives’ need.” This sense of duty, responsibility, and burden toward allegedly less fortunate members of the human family eventually fueled U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt’s resulting policy of lifting Filipinos - “Your new-caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child” - into civilized people, even if that meant the brutal U.S. military campaigns that ensued in the Philippines’ southernmost island of Mindanao.

During the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries, Western Protestant Christians’ hymns were a mixture of praise of Jesus as King and love for Jesus as personal Savior. “Jesus Shall Reign Wher’er the Sun” (Isaac Watts, 1719) foresaw “His kingdom stretch from shore to shore.” “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (Sabine Baring-Gould, 1865) was an exemplary missions hymn, picturing Christians “Marching as to war, with the Cross of Jesus going on before.” What was minimized was the recognition of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, the one who forever bears the marks of the Cross, even in his glorified body, and who “looks on those who are humble, who are contrite of spirit, and who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

While the influences of Social Darwinism and imperial power further buttressed Westerners’ superiority complex toward the non-White world, God was bringing the good news of Jesus to those very peoples ranked lower on Western evolutionary scales and taking up residence among them. The Spirit of God used Western missionaries, and he even more fruitfully used non-Western gospel emissaries, to bring about Christian growth - unnoticed by Western observers as it often was - throughout sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia, and the Pacific. With the mid-twentieth century breakup of Western (and the Japanese) empires, the reversal of people’s migrations from unidirectional Western-based to multidirectional multi-based (including into the West), and increased leveling of economic power centers throughout the world, the crucified and enthroned Jesus has been demonstrating his joyful willingness to live among those who are weak and who suffer.

Africans, Chinese, Koreans

Specifically, Jesus has shouldered his way into living among many peoples of Africa, long considered by Westerners as the least civilized and most primitive of all of humanity. Indeed, since the early sixteenth century, “Christian” Europeans had ripped over 12 million Africans away from their homes for transport across the Atlantic to the Americas as slave laborers; and, European powers had carved up and scrambled for African lands for imperial plundering of rubber, gold, diamonds, and other minerals. Even so, Jesus was using Western missionaries and especially African converts to live by his Spirit among Africans suffering brutal conditions in the

Americas, as well as among those plagued by internal warfare and tyrannical political leaders in the Sudan, Uganda, Congo DR, Apartheid South Africa, and elsewhere throughout the continent. The famous 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, with over 1200 total participants but only 18 non-Westerners, had zero African participants and held low expectations for Christian growth there. The crucified and enthroned Jesus, however, was already identifying himself with Africans on the continent and in diaspora, such that today Christians in sub-Saharan Africa alone comprise over 25% of the world's Christians, with projections that by 2060 that figure will have risen to over 40% (McClendon 2019).

Similarly, Christians in China have known great suffering under Communist rule, enduring not only the expulsion of expatriate missionaries, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, but periods of persecution involving destruction of church buildings, harassment, arrests, imprisonments, and martyrdoms. Even so, the forever-scarred Jesus has granted stupendous growth of rural house churches in the 1970s and urban churches in 1990s, such that today the number of native Chinese-speaking followers of the crucified and enthroned Jesus (in China and in diaspora around the globe) rivals the numbers of Christians worldwide who use other major languages, including Spanish and English - with the Chinese number projected to increase.

As another example of how the crucified and enthroned Jesus leaves observers amazed and perplexed, at the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference, great anticipation was held for the prospects of Christianity in modernizing Japan - but not for Korea. Nevertheless, Jesus moved significantly among the poor and suffering in Korea, granting what are now well-known revivals in the early 1900s, particularly in and around what became the "Jerusalem of the East," Pyongyang, in 1907. Jesus also drew close to Korean Christians during their oppression under Japanese rule, and he continued to work during the post-liberation war years and aftermath of poverty and military dictatorships. The growth of Korean Christianity, both in South Korea and in the worldwide Korean Diaspora, has been almost unmatched, particularly as it has spawned a missionary zeal that has been a major catalyst in the ongoing worldwide missionary movement. Korean missionaries' willingness to serve among the poorest and most suffering peoples elsewhere is a testimony both to their own experience of suffering and, even more poignantly, to the humble Jesus who suffered.

Immigrants and Refugees

A major sector of the human family among whom Jesus has specially worked - including those groups already mentioned - has been those displaced around the world as immigrants and refugees. On the one hand, throughout history until today not all emigrants (those who have left their countries) have suffered or been poor, particularly military conquerors, economic opportunists, human traffickers, and exploiters of natural resources. Often, however, immigrants and refugees suffer great loss and pain associated with leaving their homes - sometimes forcibly or for survival, be it economic or fleeing from violence. Furthermore, making new lives in foreign settings is rarely easy or comfortable. Different foods, health care, language, and customs; precarious political and economic status; loneliness and emotional adjustments: all of these elements and more make life as immigrants and refugees challenging. While the mainstreams of hosting societies might have ignored or even despised their new arrivals, the crucified and enthroned Jesus has been delighted to work and take up residence among them in their suffering and poverty.

Insofar as Christian mission leaders have begun in recent years to reflect on the particular importance of God's work in and through immigrants and refugees, "Diaspora Missiology" has developed as a vibrant field that has received increased attention. Christians have discovered that the theme of diaspora is important throughout the Bible and all of history, including Adam and Eve's exile from Eden, Abraham's migrations, the family of the infant Jesus fleeing to Egypt, the early Christians' persecutions, Africans trafficked across the Sahara and the Atlantic, and many other instances. Increased and multidirectional migrations of peoples since the mid-twentieth century have been noted as well. Some of these more recent migrants have been Christians, e.g., from the Caribbean and Africa, and God has been with these humble travelers to help revitalize Christianity in Europe and North America, as well as to spread the gospel wherever they have settled, e.g., Filipina nurses and house servants in the Middle East. Other migrants have been non-Christians of various religious affiliations, and God has used Christians in hosting countries to serve these often humble and poor migrants in Jesus's name. In many cases, immigrants and refugees have become Christian in their new settings and have established new churches in diaspora or back in their home areas, e.g., Syrians who have fled to Lebanon, northern Ghanaians who have sold their yams in southern Ghana.

In the case of Korea, Korean Christians starting churches and witnessing while living abroad in diaspora are well known. Not as well known have been Korean Christians who were forcibly taken to Japan during the 1910-1945 Occupation. With the abiding presence and encouragement of the crucified and enthroned Jesus by his Spirit, these humble, suffering believers and their offspring - having become culturally Japanese but still aliens by nationality - have given steady witness among Japanese churches, neighbors, and acquaintances. The rise of immigrants in the Republic of Korea (ROK) - especially laborers from China and from throughout Asia but also students as well as brides from Southeast Asia for rural Korean men - has been widely publicized and, correspondingly, raised awareness among Korean Christians and churches. As a result, more ministries are being directed toward these various immigrants in South Korea, producing conversions to Christ and "reverse migration" ministries back to homelands, e.g., Mongolia and Sri Lanka.

Insofar as similar dynamics have been occurring in other parts of the world as well, the compassion of the forever crucified Jesus to live among immigrants and refugees in their suffering and poverty is evident to those with eyes to see him at work.

Some Implications

Along with other Christians worldwide, Korean Christians should recognize how the crucified and enthroned Jesus forever bears his scars and humble heart. While he is enthroned as the King of all creation and "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3), Jesus is also the "founder of [our] salvation [who was made] perfect through suffering." He is the one who was "made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:10, 17-18). Jesus has known suffering to an extent far greater than any of us will ever experience personally, and we are to relate to him as our merciful Savior and faithful High Priest who deeply empathizes with those who are humble and suffer.

In particular, Korean Christians can thank God for his mercy in bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to their predecessors, many of whom lived in the midst of widespread suffering and

poverty. Moreover, Jesus by his Spirit sustained previous generations through the struggles of the Japanese Occupation, Korean War, division of Korea into North and South, and poverty and military dictatorships that followed. South Korean Christians can be assured that Jesus empathizes with Christians and others who suffer in North Korea, so prayers and other initiatives for North Korea can continue with expectation of God's merciful blessing.

How should South Korean Christians feel about their country's newfound affluence? According to the *U.S. News & World Report*, "The nation has seen steady growth and poverty reduction since the 1960s and is now the world's seventh-largest exporter and 11th-largest economy overall" (U.S. News & World Report 2019). Even with the recessions of 1998 and 2008, along with the more recent leveling off of economic vitality, the ROK economy is a major world force that has grown miraculously since only a half century ago (Trading Economics 2019). A simple eye test of daily life in South Korea shows a level of affluence in terms of transportation, construction, food supply, clothing, luxuries, and other indicators well above those of the vast majority of other countries throughout the world.

One appropriate feeling is gratitude. Indeed, representing all South Koreans the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has expressed its central mission as, "KOICA repaying Korea's gratitude to the world" (KOICA 2012). For Korean Christians, thanksgiving to God underlies gratitude for aid that came from other parts of the world. The sense of gratitude is no doubt most poignant with older Korean Christians who experienced Korea's earlier poverty, deprivation, and suffering in ways that younger Koreans have not. An accompanying sense of amazement at today's affluence must strike many older Koreans.

Related should be the sense of opportunity for ministry among migrant laborers who have come to the ROK for work. It was the growth of the South Korean economy that led to an influx of laborers, particularly after normalization with China in 1992. Since then workers have flooded in from other parts of Asia as well. Some of these new arrivals are Christian, but most are not. In either case, almost all are in need of friendship and assistance with coping with daily life. Korean Christians have a wonderful opportunity to serve, an opportunity given by our Lord Jesus who has demonstrated his special heart for those who suffer and are in need. Serving those nearby who are different from us is also an opportunity to grow in our appreciation for how worldwide God's concern is for all kinds of people, not just people like ourselves.

Some Korean Christians fear that focusing ministries on international people who now reside in South Korea - ministries that could be labeled as "home missions" - could take away from Korean Christianity's God-given responsibility for "foreign missions." After all (the thinking goes), one reason that God has blessed the ROK with the economic strength it enjoys today is to support missionaries sent "to the ends of the earth." If Korean churches and ministries give resources of people and money to serve foreigners inside South Korea, might not that divert those resources, as well as passion and focus, away from Koreans' hallmark foreign missions efforts?

Such fears are understandable, but they need not lead to an "either/or" dilemma. Instead, Christians can see the growth of South Korea's economy as a supporting reason for both sending missionaries and the influx of foreign laborers, i.e., "both/and" opportunities. Also, especially within this article's overall thrust of "The Crucified and Enthroned Jesus, Humility, and Suffering," should not Christians be compelled to follow Jesus's example in serving among those laborers who come from poorer settings in search of a better life, including to help support

family and friends back in their home settings? In light of the humble and suffering Jesus moving in recent times to serve and take up residence among those who are humble and who suffer, Christians in South Korea can do none other than serve among those who, within God's providential guidance, have arrived from elsewhere over recent years. How Korean Christians should react to refugees arriving in South Korea seeking help, for example those who came from Yemen in 2018, is an additional matter needing prayerful consideration.

In addition, Korean missionaries who serve abroad should continue fearlessly to go to difficult contexts, to be about "frontier missions" among the unreached and among those who suffer. Future Korean missionaries will have been raised and shaped in an affluent ROK society, so the tendency will be to shy away from struggle and gravitate toward safe and comfortable situations.

Not only do the arrivals of immigrants and refugees in South Korea signal opportunities for ministry, but their presence also issues a warning. Affluence is a blessing, including by providing resources for ministry and for sharing with others. At the same time, affluence can turn into a curse. One curse is a resulting pride that those who are rich can develop, both toward those who are less rich as well as toward God, if one assumes that wealth comes only from one's own efforts or, worse, because one deserves such wealth. In South Korea's case, Koreans can begin to think that their country's economy has grown due to their own special ingenuity or unique character, amounting to racial arrogance. (Such racist pride is exhibited in a recent book entitled *Finding the DNA of Korean People*, by Kim Seok-dong. Kim sees South Korea's recent economic growth as unique, and he asserts that Koreans' unique DNA is why. Both assertions of uniqueness are questionable at best and, instead, smack of narrow-minded racist pride couched in scientific objectivity (Hong 2019).) Korean Christians must humbly plead with our elder Brother and humble High Priest Jesus that, in their sense of calling to missions, they not fall prey to a Kipling-esque racism and corresponding xenophobia. The presence in the ROK of suffering and poor immigrants and refugees serves as a reminder to Korean Christians of their own humility and dependence on God for all things.

The Scriptures are full of warnings to those who are rich. Simply put, wealth can puff up the pride and dull the spiritual sensibilities of God's people, reducing their awareness of their utter dependence on God. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, knocks on the door of God's people's hearts when they become lukewarm (Revelation 3:14-22). One of the dangers that Korean churches face is a dullness and self-sufficiency caused by their newfound affluence. Jesus's evident move in recent times to work and reside among poor and suffering immigrants and refugees is a clear knock on Korean Christians' hearts to respond to him in humility and service.

Conclusion

In a way that left his hearers amazed and perplexed, Peter proclaimed at Pentecost that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Those of us today, also, are to be amazed at how Jesus, who will forever bear the marks of his suffering, draws close to those who are humble and who suffer. May our amazement compel us to humble service and deeper fellowship with the crucified and enthroned Lord Jesus Christ.

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