August 30th (Sunday Main Service Sermon)

Senior Pastor. Sung-Jick Kim

**The Kingdom of God is...**

[Passage]

**Romans 14:13-21 (NIV)**

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

[Introduction]

Hallelujah!

Past few weeks we have looked at how Old Testament Joshua and Israelites entered the Promised Land Canaan and seen how they overtook the land making it Kingdom of God. We as the Israelites of this time, have looked at how we as church, can also firmly build Kingdom of God with everything that is entrusted to us.

Today as we move on to New Testament, Romans, we are going to meditate what Apostle Paul saw as Kingdom of God and how we can build this Kingdom well. First, we need to look at the context of the Book of Romans. As we continued to look in Quiet Time, the book of Romans was the letter that Paul sent to church of Rome. But this church of Rome is not the church that Apostle Paul preached and planted let alone visited. So it’s the church of Rome that he never actually saw the face of the congregation.

Usually, other letter forms that Apostle Paul used were to the churches that he preached and planted meaning that they had certain relationship with himself. So it contained Apostle Paul’s answer, recommendation, reproof to various problems and difficulties of the church having the heart of spiritual father. 2 Corinthians is one of the classic example.

However, at least this church didn’t have this kind of relationship built up so we can’t really see Apostle Paul’s practical recommendation or reproof of the church but rather we find Paul’s really considerate care to the church that he doesn’t really know yet. Instead, in Romans, Apostle Paul is focusing on the essential gospel itself, centered in gospel.

Especially, this region of “Rome,” at that time it is not far-fetched to say that it was the center of the world since it had world’s fortune and power. So, Roman Christians who had to survive in the den of tigers relatively had to stay alert compared to other regions and hold fast the center of the gospel living the intense life.
Like this, to the Roman Christians who he has not yet met, to those who are intensely trying to hold fast their faith in the center of the world, the Romans is the word that centers in the essential gospel itself by Apostle Paul. As we live in this world as Christians, Romans is the book that focuses on essential concepts itself that we need to hold on as we live this life: what is the “gospel” and what is “faith.”

So in this Romans contains the most important thing is the “gospel” to those who are called Christian surpassing time and what this gospel is and what kind of meaning it brings to us these days. That’s why this book is so precious. Because Romans focuses on the gospel itself, there are many testimonies saying they were transformed reading this book.

There are many Christians who were formerly atheist started reading Romans to disdain and break down gospel but was completely repented and became Christian. Also, Luther the religious reformer realized the concept of “justification by faith” (we are justified only by “faith”) when he was lecturing “Romans” while working as professor of middle age catholic and had a breakthrough of dark Medieval church, led the Reformation and started building genuine church.

So I would like to share this grace while looking at what this Kingdom of God that Romans is talking about which focuses on essentials of gospel to every Christians.

[Main Sermon]

We will see two big points,

1. The Kingdom of God is where each other’s differences are accepted.

First, the kingdom of God is where each other accepts one’s differences. When we look at today’s verse 17 first part, it says like this.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking...

About the Kingdom of God, it says “this kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking.” When we just take this part out and see, we might misunderstand thinking “does this mean that we would not eat or drink when we are trying to build the Kingdom of God?” We are currently in “40 days relay fast”, does this mean that we need to “reduce eating and drinking?”

But rest assure. This doesn’t mean that “we should not eat or drink.” What this word really mean is don’t continuously condemn and have conflict and oppose each other regarding the issue with eating and drinking. You can never build kingdom of God like that.

Actually, the early churches in Paul’s time had huge conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians because of the issue of eating and drinking. Gentile Christians who were gentiles didn’t really know about Old Testament law, believed that they were completely free through Jesus Christ and ate and drank freely. However, Jewish Christians who believed in Jesus, but wasn’t really free from the boxes of Judaism that they grew up with, never ate pork and other things that the law states as defile. And they went further out putting considerable restraints saying that they are following Daniel and his three friends, not drinking wine and eating only vegetables.

So to Jewish and Gentile Christians who starkly conflicted with the issue of eating and drinking, Romans is saying like this.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking...

So it’s saying we can never build kingdom of God when we have conflict with one another with the issue
of eating and drinking. I view and translate this verse like this: “we should lay down conflict and opposition whatever it may be and accept differences. That’s when we can stand in the start point of building the Kingdom of God!”

In our home, in our church, in our jobs, and wherever we are, if we are to build the Kingdom of God and not our own, first step is to accept differences. If we can’t do this, we can not even make another step. Parents need to accept children’s differences, believers need to accept other believer’s differences and employer need to accept employee’s differences. Like this, accepting each other’s differences is the most obvious first step of Kingdom of God.

How different were gentile Christians and Jewish Christians in early churches? We may have difference in degree, character and the color of our faith and have conflict but theirs were in different level. Their differences were real “difference.” Jewish and Gentiles, especially with Samaritans, they did not even consider them as humans and they were seeing them as dogs. But now they are praising together in one place, with one heart building Kingdom of God, church shows that they were surrounded by “difference” that we can’t really imagine today.

We don’t really have to go that far. Just look at the early Christianity in our country. There were times aristocrat and plebeian gathered together and worshipped. We commonly see how different this aristocrat and plebeian difference is in historical drama. In the midst of this unimaginable “differences”, aristocrat and plebeian sat together in one place became church, and even plebeian becomes elder first. Also it is our real church history that aristocrat called elder our elder accepting each other’s differences, starting to build up the kingdom of God. Later on, there were aristocrat Duk Sam Cho who became elder and helped plebeian Ja Ik Lee become pastor not withholding love and support, accepting one another’s differences and building the Kingdom of God together.

So us saying with one another “our personality doesn’t go together, don’t like their appearances, color of faith is different!” and not accepting one’s differences, cannot be an excuse in the Kingdom of God. I want all of us to confess together to the believers next to you.

“I accept that you and I are different!”

Even the children who were born in the same womb is so different, it is so natural that we each are different. If we have some problem, conflict and opposition, I hope we should first lay it down, accept one’s different and start building up the kingdom of God. This is the first step to building up the kingdom of God.

2. Three things in Kingdom of God : “Righteousness,” “peace” and “Joy”

Secondly, Kingdom of God has to have three things, “righteousness,” “peace” and “joy.” When we look at verse 17 of today’s passage again,

17. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

Kingdom of God has three things. “Righteousness,” “peace” and “joy” only in Holy Spirit.

(1) Very first thing is “righteousness.”

In Chinese character it uses the word that represent “right” the Bible states “righteousness” as “what God views as right” only. In New Testament, it is “dikaousunê” and in the same root, “dikaioma” means “Word of God.” Thus, “righteousness,” “what God views as right” is surely the right things reflecting “God’s Word” “Bible.” I believe this is the genuinely right, “righteousness.”

when we build Kingdom of God in our home, job and church, the very first thing that is required is
“righteousness” which in the Spirit of truth through the word of God, and word becoming our standard letting us to reflect on us. It is no other standard. Not a standard of human being, not the standard of other sayings, not I but with the standard of “Word of God” we need to properly discern what is right and what is genuine “righteousness” in God’s eyes.

Mentioned above in the first step, accepting each other’s differences. When this is somewhat carried out, not just accepting differences and living the life of Judges each living as they saw fit but we need to discern and begin processing together “what is right in God’s eye?” “revelation in the Bible, what is genuinely right?” “what is right life according to the scripture?”

Today’s passage in whole, Apostle Paul repeatedly and accurately points which is “right, righteousness” according to the scripture to the “conflict of eating and drinking” between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. When looking at verse 14 of today’s passage,

14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

Apostle Paul clearly points out the biblical fact that whatever it is, even if it’s unclean animal, nothing is unclean in itself. Verse 20, he also says like this.

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

Likewise, Apostle Paul clearly points out the biblical fact that “all food is clean.” The basis of this word is Leviticus 20 verse 25 in Old Testament. Just as we saw last time, it talks about reasons why God separated some animals as unclean to Israelites. Leviticus 20:25.

25 “‘You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those that I have set apart as unclean for you (Leviticus 20:25)”

God Himself set apart as unclean “for you.” This means that everything was clean and in the beginning everything was good in God’s eye “Tov.” But because of your sins, our sins, everything that was clean was distorted and “for you who are unclean” “for us who are in sin” had set apart unclean animal instead, so that obeying this we distance ourselves from unclean animal allowing us to get away from our own uncleanness.

Then our Jesus Christ embraced all of our uncleanness, impurities and died on the cross and resurrected fulfilling all the laws including this Leviticus word. I believe that there are no unclean animals and everything in Jesus is clean just as today’s passage states.

So Apostle Paul is clearly pointing out what is “right” according to the Word of God, and what is “righteousness” with the matte of “eating and drinking” which was a conflict during that time.

(1) “Righteousness” is the first thing that we need when building up the Kingdom of God, discerning what is right according to the Word of God.

(2) Followed by is the second thing of Kingdom of God is “Peace.”

“peace” “shalom”

First, we cannot build Kingdom of God by just having only the “righteousness” and arguing one by one what is right and wrong. In “Kingdom of God” there must be “peace” “shalom” also. I think this “peace” and “shalom” must be accompanied by “consideration” or “care” and eventually “heart of love.” Even if we are so different, even when someone is wrong according to the scripture, not just pushing them out, but we have to have
“consideration” and “care” near them and have “heart of love” that seeks to achieve “shalom” and “peace” when we try to build Kingdom of God.

Verse 21 in today’s passage, Apostle Paul again talks about matter of “eating and drinking” that was a problem in that time.

21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

Even when we are free in Jesus with the matter of eating and drinking according to the scripture and even if it is “righteousness,” not eating meat or drinking wine or do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall, is your “beauty.” That is the beautiful loving heart in you. The heart of peace.

When I was in Chicago Trinity Seminary studying, there was my advising professor called VanGemeren. He was worldly renown professor in reformed Old Testament scholar and he was frequently invited Old testament scholar in Korean religious and academic academia. But because he was raised up in Netherland traditional reformism, he was a heavy smoker smoking several packs of cigarette a day. Reformed church in the Netherlands, cigarettes are considered favorite food and are irrelevant with belief. So, there are scholars who are heavy smokers and some reformed seminaries have smoking room. But I don’t want you all to misunderstand. I am not saying that we too are reformism, that we can smoke now. Actually, I am going to tell you how he quit smoking. Netherland reformist quit smoking because of Korean people, we cannot cause each other to fall.

Long time ago, when he was beginning to be invited to Korea, after he finished lecture in Korea he had the cigarette in his lips in front of church at ease. Then, when he light the cigarette and had a sip, he heard buzz and even women’s cries. So he looked sideways and there were believers who heard his lecture saying something angrily and people crying. Later on he heard from the authorities how Korean Christians thought about smoking and drinking. Right after he found about this, he quit his smoking that he smoked for several years and he never smoked again.

Even though it did not bother his own belief and he was free from it, giving it up because of my own action someone is hurt, falls and is bothered by it is “beautiful.” I believe this is beautiful loving heart and peaceful heart.

The first thing needed to build a Kingdom of God “righteousness” and second thing “peace, shalom” are not the things that one or the other is important but both need to go together. We cannot just have “shalom” and we cannot also just accept everything thinking it’s good and having “relationship” only shalom without discerning “righteousness” according to the Bible.

In contrast, we cannot just have “righteousness.” As if we are saying to just do it according to the law, as it is, like cutting paper with razor knife cutting precious relationship that God Himself knotted, cutting “shalom” and only protecting “righteousness.”

The Kingdom of God that we need to make, we need both first thing “righteousness” and “peace, shalom” to firmly build it.

(3) The last thing in the Kingdom of God is “Joy” “Happiness”

“Joy” is as equally important with former two things mentioned. First, while discerning what is “righteous” in God’s eye according to the Word of God with “peace,” consideration and care striving to love one another if we lack “joy” in the process of making Kingdom of God, it’s a sign that something went wrong.

Then if we are the ones who are making the Kingdom of God properly, let’s see what kind of joy there is. Our Jesus Himself speaks of this parable. When looking at Matthew 13:44,
Matthew 13:44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

If a person really knows the value of the Kingdom of heaven, if a person really knows how precious the Kingdom of God is, he/she doesn’t withhold worldly values and return with sad heart but because of the heavenly hope, he/she returns in gladness.

Just as we saw last week in Joshua, cutting my hamstrings of worldly horses, relying on God’s grace, anticipating and hoping how God will work in our lives with “joy”, I believe is the one who are properly building up the Kingdom of God. So the source of this “joy” is the natural flow in us that flows out when we rightly hold on to the grace God pours.

This joy cannot come out when I still hold on to my horse and my chariot and when we try to do it with my own strength. There is no joy but only tiredness. But because the battle is the Lord’s, releasing my horse and chariot, relying on and desiring God’s sovereign grace, walking out the calling to build the Kingdom of God faithfully, I believe our Father god will lead me in His goodness and faithfulness and God’s “joy welling up“ in me will flow out abundantly.

[Conclusion]

Dear beloved Korean Hope Church members,

(1) Kingdom of God is where each other’s differences are accepted.

How are we building up Kingdom of God in our home, job, church and every other places that are entrusted to us? I hope if there is problem, conflict and opposition, firstly, just lay it down, accept each other’s differences and start to build up the Kingdom of God.

(2) Three things in Kingdom of God: “Righteousness,” “Peace” and “Joy”

And when we actually start building up the Kingdom of God, please remember these three things: “righteousness,” “peace,” and “Joy”

(1) Discerning and recognizing what is right “righteousness” according to the Word of God,

(2) Also, even if it no problematic for me, having the beautiful loving heart, having the heart of “peace” daringly giving up, if because of me someone is hurt and fall.

(3) Cutting the hamstrings of worldly horse, relying on and desiring God’s grace, hoping of things God will do in the future with “joy” and walking out the calling faithfully.

I earnestly hope we will be the true Christians building the Kingdom of God like this so that it’s pleasing to God and receives human approval just like the verse 18 in today's passage.