

# WORLD

*"... Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." Mark 16:15*

# MISSIONS

## UBF EUROPE & CIS

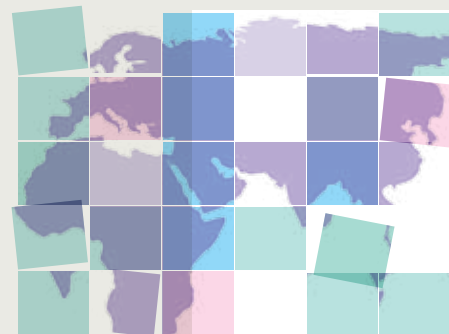
International Summer Bible  
Conferences, 2014



## C · O · N · T · E · N · T · S

## 2014 EUROPEAN &amp; CIS INTERNATIONAL SUMMER BIBLE CONFERENCES

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## message

**Closing message** by Abraham Kim, General Director

## IN HIS OWN RENTED HOUSE



We learned many beautiful lessons about faith in God. Can you memorize the key verse of this conference, Mark 11:22? “‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered.” Let’s recall Jesus’ point: If anyone says to a mountain to go and throw itself into the sea and believes that what they say will happen, God will do it for them. Jesus promised this to “anyone.” Do you believe that you can be the one who can make such a great thing like moving a mountain happen? I’d like to think with you about a mountain-moving faith through Apostle Paul’s example.

Apostle Paul had longed for preaching the gospel in Rome. Finally he came to Rome chained like a criminal. He was confined in his own rented house with a soldier to guard him, waiting for Caesar’s trial. Paul’s trial dragged on for two years. He was expecting suffering after suffering, with little hope of peaceful retirement. However, what amazes us is that he never once left a hint of complaint, sorrow or despair. Instead he said in his letter to the Philippians which he wrote during his

*“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance.” Acts 28:30-31*

confinement, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Php 4:4) Paul never viewed his confinement as a barrier to the gospel, but rather as a God-given opportunity (Php 1:12). What made Paul live above all circumstances? We can find the answers in his two other prison epistles (Ephesians and Colossians). Paul was filled with praise because of the riches of God’s grace and blessings lavished on him and God’s people (Eph 1:3-14, Col 3:1-4). God chose him when he was dead in sin. God forgave him and made him alive for a new life through the blood of Christ. By giving him the Holy Spirit, God sanctified him and sealed the promise of the resurrection of his body and inheritance of God’s eternal kingdom. What amazing grace and blessings for a wretched sinner doomed for destruction! These are what God has given to each of us. Paul’s heart overflowed with joy and thanksgiving because of God’s love and hope of glory. Shouldn’t we rejoice and praise God as Paul did? When Paul remembered the riches of God’s grace and blessings, even prison changed into a paradise.

What did Paul do in his situation? He welcomed all who came to him and studied the Word of God. He believed that the gospel is the power of God that would transform Rome (Ro 1:16). The soldiers who came to guard him were never run-away Bible students. By faith he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord worked with him. Many soldiers, officers and their families believed and through them even Caesar’s household came to Bible study



with Paul. Paul's one-to-one and small group Bible study ministry in a rented house seemed insignificant in the eyes of the world. But God did an amazing thing through faith of Paul and his coworkers. God changed the Roman Empire into a Christian nation 250 years later. Indeed God threw the mountain of Rome's godlessness into the sea.

Through this, the Holy Spirit teaches us how we can have a mountain-moving faith. Most likely you have never been confined anywhere for two years. Neither have I. But we all live in a rented house situation of our own. You may feel chained to your limitations. You may feel chained to your family or job responsibilities. Or perhaps you may feel chained to your past, unable to escape the restrictive circumstances. Maybe you have lived this way for long that negative thinking has become a habit. I've got wonderful news for you: There is hope beyond your circumstances. Let's have faith in God. You can find God's wondrous provisions, a great opportunity in your situation. If Paul could live above his unbelievably crying circumstances, so can you and me. When we remember the riches of God's grace and blessings, the Holy Spirit fills us with hope and joy and we are more than conquerors.

The book of Acts ends with the words, "with all boldness



and without hindrance." This is a triumphal note. Actually Paul was neither bold in speech nor impressive in person (2Co 10:10). But when he had faith in God, the Holy Spirit gave him power to testify to the gospel (Ac 1:8). When we have faith in God, the Holy Spirit gives us all boldness not fearing anything. No one can stop God's work. Even when we are chained, God's word is not chained (2Ti 2:9).

The work of the Holy Spirit continues today. As did Rome in the first century, Europe and CIS today needs the gospel. The gospel is the power of God that can transform Europe and CIS. The gospel is the hope of all European and CIS people. As God sent Paul and other servants to transform Rome, I believe God has called us to transform Europe and CIS. Let's believe that we are where we are in our own situations by divine appointment to preach the gospel. Many will reject the gospel, but many whom God has prepared will accept it. Let's welcome all whom God send to us and by faith proclaim the kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will give us power. Our one-to-one and small group Bible study and discipleship ministry may look insignificant in the eyes of the world. But the Lord works with us. Through our Bible study and discipleship God will throw the mountain of Europe and CIS' secular humanism and hedonism into the sea, bringing a great spiritual revival to Europe and CIS. Amen. 🌍



## FAITH IN GOD

"Have faith in God, Jesus answered." Mark 11:22



"Faith in God" (Mark 11:22) was the title of our recent conference at the beautiful winter resort Willingen (Upland). We are thankful to God for blessing this conference abundantly through his powerful, gracious and challenging word. Thursday to Sunday (August 14-17), we studied passages mostly from the New Testament, with key messages from Mark's gospel, and one from Ezekiel 37.

We are grateful for the work of the Holy Spirit in and through 12 messengers from 8 nations and 9 life testimony speakers, also from 8 nations. We were inspired by the opening address of M. Sarah Barry on Romans 1:17 to live by faith in Jesus from first to last, and by the closing address of P. Abraham Kim on Acts 28:30-31 to put our faith in God into practice through one-to-one and small group Bible study ministry. We also had a deep and clear lecture on "Growth in Faith—The Foundation for a Powerful Missionary Service" by Prof. Dr. Peter Beyerhaus. He is a renowned missiologist and defender of the gospel faith even at the age of 85.

Apart from these very experienced speakers, messengers were young and (with one exception) novice speakers at an international conference. James, Sara Neusa, Georgi, Petrus, David, Enoch, Michael, Stamatis, Bruno: they all did a great job, serving God's work with all their hearts, all their souls, all their minds, and all their strength—even with their own characteristic. They revealed the necessity and blessing of our faith in God very clearly and practical-

ly. Mainly, through Mark 5:21-43, we learned that we should make every effort to come to Jesus and that Jesus also challenges us to remain with him. And through Mark 11:1-25, we learned that Jesus is our true King and coming judge and that he challenges us to live by faith in the almighty God with whom there is nothing impossible.

The life testimonies by Marianne Blessing, Nuno, Denitsa, Lydia, Regina, Louise, Anna, Skyjo, and Sarah were deep and heart-moving witnesses to the grace and power of Jesus in this generation.

While the program was mainly in English, Bible studies on the main passages were held in various languages. We should have given more time for this fundamental element of enhancing faith in God. Reflection time was attended well and with humble and thankful hearts.

We had a gracious environment with music (orchestra, 4 worship bands, several choirs, even a musical), drama and dance. It all contributed to opening our hearts to the messages we heard.

European nations also prepared beautiful mission booths to inform about the practical and spiritual environment for our missionaries, including their prayer topics. This also served as an invitation for potential missionary candidates.

Parallel to the main event, there was a CBF conference with the identical theme. M. Hannah Shin of Czech Republic and many coworkers served more than 90 children (5—14 years old) whole-heartedly.

All in all about 830 people joined the conference, among them 235 between 15 and 25.

We are truly thankful to God for granting us a meaningful conference through the whole-hearted preparation by cowork-

ers from 23 European nations and all their chapters. Through preparatory meetings with passages from Acts 1—5, God gave us grace to pray and work together as one heart and mind, listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

We express our gratitude to Dr. Mark Yang, Dr. Henry Park, and Dr. Paul Hong who coworked well with P. Abraham Lee in supporting the young messengers. We are also thankful for the unceasing prayers from around the world, esp. from UBF Korea and USA.

Besides Prof. Beyerhaus, we welcomed friends in Christ such as Rev. Hyun Suk Lee (GIMNET General Secretary), P. Kwang Su Jang and Young Hea Whang (KOSTE), P. Okhi Denker-Park.

Through God's word and grace, we were all strengthened and renewed in our faith in God and experienced young European students come to know faith in God, too. So we pray that God will revive Europe spiritually through our faith in God.

As a conclusion, P. Abraham Kim gave us the following prayer topics:

- Believe that the power of the gospel will transform Europe.
- Rekindle prayer for spiritual revival of Europe.
- Rekindle zeal for one-to-one & small group Bible study ministry.
- Let us double the number of new gens (15—25) at the 2019 European Summer Bible Conference.
- Pray for reaching out to Muslims in Europe and to the Muslim countries, esp. in Middle East and Africa.

We also prayed sincerely for the upcoming CIS conference (Aug. 21-24 in Moscow) and M. David Byun's stewardship. 🌍

# FAITH IN GOD

*“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘the righteous shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17*



**W**elcome to the 2014 UBF European Summer Bible Conference. Our conference title is “Faith in God” We have come here from many parts of the world by faith to worship

our Creator God. We gather in his name. And as he promised, he is here with us. May he open our eyes to see his work in and among us. We come as his children. We are a part of his Body, the Church. We have come especially to pray for Germany and for Europe. When I heard the theme, FAITH IN GOD, I thought about the words in Romans 1:17, “by faith from first to last.”

First, beginning by faith

By faith, The UBF mission to Europe began in the late 1960’s and ‘70’s. It began with “the obedience that comes from faith.” Missionary nurses were obedient to Jesus’ world mission command. They came to Germany by faith to share the love of God and the gospel of our Lord Jesus with students of Germany. God sent men of faith who also answered the call to world mission. They married by faith. By that same faith they learned the languages of the mission lands, studied and taught the Bible, and entered the gates of universities. A student ministry was born.

Second, continuing by faith

When I look at our program, I see that the size and shape of the UBF ministry has changed a lot. It is the work of the Holy

Spirit and the fruit of faith “from first to last.” Our conference director and most of our speakers and testimony sharers are national leaders from the countries of our mission lands, or representatives of the new generation. They are the fruit of deep, Spirit-led Bible Study, prayer and obedient, sacrificial lives. These men and women are disciples of Jesus who are learning how to make disciples. As we listen to their testimonies and messages and talk with them and others of our friends and coworkers from around the world we want to deepen our understanding of faith in God.

When important life decisions are made by faith, faith grows. Godly families are established; disciples of Jesus are raised. When we continue to meet challenges, solve problems, endure hardship by faith in God, we learn the meaning of “by faith from first to last.” What we begin by faith, we continue by faith. We believe that God who has begun a good work in and through us will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

We are here to affirm our faith in the Almighty Creator God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to give him praise and thanks. He the God of the Bible. We don’t know what the future holds for us or for our world. As individuals and as a community of believers we step forward into the future by faith in God.

Some prayer topics:

- May God renew and strengthen our faith through this conference.
- May God use us to plant faith in God in the hearts of the college students of Europe.
- May God the Holy Spirit continue to work in and among us to enable us to live by faith from first to last. 🙏



# HAVE FAITH IN GOD

*Mark 11:1-25 (22) “Have faith in God, Jesus answered.”*



**T**he theme of our conference is “Faith in God”. And today’s passage is about extra-ordinary faith. It’s faith, which can move mountains. In verse 23 Jesus says: “Truly I tell

you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”

Commonly, this passage is very often understood in the following way: “If only you have faith in God, you can get anything you want including moving mountains. (Btw, why would you want to move mountains anyways?) But you better don’t doubt. As soon as you start doubting in your heart you will ruin everything!” That’s what many Christians think about biblical faith. This is how I used to think about faith for a long time.

There are some serious flaws with this kind of view. The major problem is this: instead of dealing with the object of faith, that is, God, we are predominantly occupied with the quality of our faith. It’s a constant struggle to increase faith, to be more convinced, to believe more strongly. Here is why this is so terrible. Faith instead of being a gift of God, becomes a virtue. Faith becomes your accomplishment and your achievement. Also, faith becomes your idol. You believe in belief. It’s faith in faith and not faith in God. Such a way of thinking about faith is deeply self-centered. So for obvious reasons, this is not what Jesus had in mind when he commanded us to have faith in God. This is not

the kind of faith that moves mountains. But then what does faith mean? The verse I just read to you is embedded in a context. And the context is absolutely crucial when it comes to the meaning of a text. Here’s the punch line of today’s message: King Jesus is the true object of faith. Having faith in God means to completely surrender our lives to Jesus’ reign.

**First, Jesus is the King**

Verse 1: “As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives...” Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem. As a faithful Jew, Jesus had been to previous religious feasts in Jerusalem. But for this entry, he chose something special.

Notice how he sends two of his disciples ahead: “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.” This is what Jesus told his disciples. But there was a small problem here. The disciples were told to untie an animal, which didn’t belong to them. You could call this “borrowing without asking the owner”. But the more common name for this is “stealing”. The disciples were committing a theft.

Next, we see how Jesus had prepared his disciples. Verse 3: “If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’” The Greek word for “Lord” is *kyrios*. It’s a word very commonly used when referring to God. In the Greek translation of the OT, *kyrios* is used more than 6,000 times in reference to God. When Jesus was saying “The Lord needs it”, he was saying this: “I am the true Lord and God. I am the creator of everything that exists. As such, I am the ultimate owner of everything that exists. I am claiming what rightfully belongs to me.”

At the same time we see that Jesus did it in the most humble way. He even promised to send the donkey back. And then we see Jesus’ entry. Jesus was riding into the city and a crowd of people welcomed him. We read that these people started to spread their cloaks on the road. This is highly unusual. Can I ask you a question? If you ever put one of your jackets or coats on the street for someone to walk on it please raise your hand. I guess hardly any of us did. It wasn’t any different in the Ancient Near East. The roads were dirty and dusty. N.T. Wright, a British NT scholar and one of the most influential theologians of our time, commented that putting your clothes on the street is something you wouldn’t do even for a friend or for family. And people cut off branches from the fields, which they also spread on the road. Again, you don’t do this for random people. This is the kind of stuff you do when you welcome a king. It’s what you do for a person you not only love but

for a person you revere. There is more. Verses 9 and 10: “Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’ ‘Hosanna’ was originally a cry for help: ‘Save us! Help us!’ They were quoting Psalm 118. It’s a Psalm overflowing with messianic overtones. I don’t even know whether the people fully understood what they were shouting; whether they were fully aware of the extent of what their words meant. When the people were welcoming Jesus into the city, they weren’t just welcoming a king. They were welcoming the one and only King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords, the Messiah. The whole narrative in this chapter is an overwhelming proclamation that Jesus is king.

### Second, Jesus is the judge

In the next verses we have one of the most peculiar stories in Mark’s gospel. It starts with a fig tree. Jesus was hungry but he couldn’t find any fruit on the tree. And then, Jesus cursed the tree in verse 14: “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” The next day, Peter pointed out that the fig tree had completely withered. Why did Jesus curse the tree? In verse 13, Mark clearly tells us the reason why the tree wasn’t bearing any fruit: “When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.” It wasn’t time yet for fruit! It seems as if Jesus’ behavior is arbitrary or even a bit capricious. What does it mean?

Sandwiched in between the story of the fig tree, there is another major event. Verses 15 and 16: “On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.”



This is one of the most dramatic scenes in all the gospel accounts. It is the only act of violence documented of Jesus. His eyes were blazing as he started to throw tables and benches around. Piles of money were spread on the floor, doves started flying around, vendors were screaming as they were trying to save their belongings, all of this happening at the busiest time of the year when thousands of people were frequenting the temple court. Our passage says that Jesus didn’t allow anybody to carry merchandise through the temple courts. There was not a single person who dared to resist.

Many people refer to this story as the one where Jesus purified the temple; the story how Jesus kicked out a bunch of vendors and cleaned the temple. However, I think we can safely assume that once Jesus had left, everything went back to normal. The salesmen and bankers returned for sure. Here’s why: if you had lived in ancient Israel somewhere in the province, like Galilee, you had a logistic problem transporting your sacrificial animal all the way to Jerusalem. It would have been tedious; you were always in danger of getting mugged. By the time you and your animal arrived in Jerusalem it likely would not have been in the perfect condition to sacrifice it; or to have it for dinner, for that matter. Regarding the tithe, God had said it was okay to buy animals for sacrifice in Jerusalem. What about the bankers? The money exchangers were required for the temple tax. Roman coins had to be exchanged into shekels. That was the currency of the temple as prescribed by the Law. Animal vendors and money exchangers were required for the temple to function.

Jesus didn’t just purify the temple. He did something far more drastic. When Jesus interfered with the business at the temple, the entire sacrificial system came to a halt. The temple stopped. It was a symbolic act. But within this symbolic act and for a short time



span, Jesus had abolished temple worship. He was pointing to a time when the temple would stop permanently. About 40 years later, the Romans destroyed the sanctuary made an end to Jewish temple worship. The temple was under God’s judgment.

The implications are equally radical. When Jesus symbolically abolished the temple, he was proclaiming that the temple was unfixable and beyond repair. He was saying that it was corrupt to the core. And now we see that the fig tree story doesn’t look that arbitrary after all. The fig tree was a picture for the temple: impressive from the outside but no fruit. The fig tree was a symbol for Israel. We might have a hard time to understand why the destruction of the temple was so radical. But suppose, terrorists would destroy the Big Ben in England or the Eiffel tower in France. It’s unthinkable. To first-century Jews, the destruction of the temple was far worse. To them the temple was almost everything. The entire identity of the nation of Israel was tied to the temple. But Jesus declared his judgment upon them. Jesus is the divine judge.

Why was the temple under God’s judgment? Verse 17: “And as he taught them, he said, ‘Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.’ You have to understand that the market and money exchanging did not happen in the temple building. It happened in the temple court, the so-called “court of Gentiles”. It was the only place of the temple freely accessible to non-Jews. The Jews had turned the only place where Gentiles could come and worship into a bazaar. They had made it impossible for non-Jews to approach God in quietness and reflection. And Jesus was acting so subversively: the Jews thought that the Messiah would drive out the Gentiles from their temple. But Jesus, the true Messiah, was outraged that Gentiles were kept away from finding God. Jesus entered Jerusalem with the authority of a King. And he pronounced judgment on the temple and the nation of Israel. This is the context of “have faith in God”. The disciples were amazed to see the cursed fig tree dried to the roots. Jesus, the true King and the judge, answered: “Have faith in God.”

What does it mean? ... These are the three things Jesus gave

his disciples to think about: the object of faith, the prayer of faith and the community of faith. Let’s have a brief look at each.

Firstly, the object of faith. Verse 22: “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.” When Jesus was telling his disciples to have faith in God, he was in essence saying this: “Trust in God. Make him the first priority of your life. Let your life be reigned by God. Let your identity and worth come from how He relates to you.” In other words, the true object of faith should be almighty, eternal, God, supremely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ word is an invitation to re-examine what we are trusting in. Who is reigning your life? What is your object of utmost importance? If you think that these questions are odd, please consider this: everybody is trusting in something. Everybody is reigned by someone or something. And everybody has an object that defines who we are. A popular belief in our days is this: “You can be anything you want to be. Just believe in who you are. Believe in yourself.” But it doesn’t work. It cannot work. We don’t find our worth and identity intrinsically. What truly defines us always comes from outside of us. It comes from how we relate to the objective reality outside of us. Jesus’ disciples believed in the temple. In a similar way, it so easily happens that we replace God with something spiritual, such as our ministry or our mission. Friends, why do you serve God? If you serve God by grace only, why is it that your joy depends on how successful you are in ministry? Why is your happiness dependent on how many bible students come? Why are you disproportionately crushed when they leave? Why are you unable to stay friends with people who leave the ministry? If this applies to you, you are not fully under Jesus’s reign. And it’s so common among Christian ministers.

There was a pastor who realized this was the case with him. He mentioned that part of his identity and righteousness were based on how well he did as a minister and preacher. This was a serious problem. One day he read Romans 1:17 in an alternative translation. It read: “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Immediately, he heard a voice in his head: “Yes, and he who through preaching is righteous shall die every Sunday.”

Next, the prayer of faith. Verses 23 and 24: “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Many commentators pointed out that when you were standing where Jesus and his disciples stood, between Bethany and Jerusalem, you could see the Mount of Olives and the Dead Sea. When Jesus said “this mountain” it is likely he was talking about a specific mountain, either the Mount of Olives or the temple mount. What does it mean when either one of those mountains is thrown into the sea? The likely meaning is that it represents the coming of the kingdom of God. True faith in God is always expressed in prayer. Absence of prayer is almost always a sign for absence of spirituality. In huge contrast, Jesus taught his disciples about the prayer of faith. It is a prayer for the coming of the kingdom of God.

In verses 23 and 24, Jesus says that we must believe and not doubt. What is doubt in that context? Doubt is not just a lack of conviction. Doubts are all those areas in our hearts where we are not yet surrendered to God. Doubts are all the areas in our lives where we want to stay in control and where God does not fully reign yet. But what happens if we are fully surrendered? Verse 24 says something remarkable: “whatever you ask for in prayer...”

When we pray God wants to give us whatever we want. Maybe you think: “Wait a second. This doesn’t sound right. I had prayed to pass the exam without studying and to have a trouble-free life. And none of it happened!” I prayed to have a little daughter. God answered my prayers by granting me three boys. Isn’t it like this:



God gives us whatever He wants? And the answer is: yes. But here’s the crucial point: God wants us to want it, too. To be ruled by King Jesus means that our deepest, innermost desires and wishes are transformed into God’s will. He wants us to desire the coming of his kingdom and the glorification of his name.

Martin Luther, the great reformer had a friend named Friedrich Myconius. Myconius was a theologian who supported Martin Luther. One day, he became severely sick. He was convinced he would die soon. So he wrote a farewell letter to Luther. Luther received the letter and gave him instant reply. This is what Luther wrote: “I command you in the name of God to live because I still need you in the work of reforming the church. ... The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead but will permit you to survive because I seek only to glorify the name of God.” Myconius completely recovered. He survived Luther by 2 months. Luther was a man completely submitted to God’s will. He only sought the glory of God. Because of this, he was able to pray in such a way.

**Thirdly, the community of faith.**

Verse 25: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Jesus had called the temple a “den of robbers”. This was a very strong rebuke. Jesus was accusing the temple for being a place of self-righteousness and religious violence. Again, we see a great contrast. The new people of God are supposed to relate to others in a completely different way.

What is one of the main characteristics of the new people



of God? According to verse 25, it is the ability to forgive. Hardly anything else makes us look so much like God than forgiving others. At the same time, forgiving others is one of the most difficult things we are called to do. It requires us to die to self, to bury our pride. It requires us to pay the cost for all the damage and all the wounds that have been done to us. Maybe, when you thought of faith, you were mostly thinking individual faith.

Maybe you were mostly thinking of personal faith. And that’s okay because faith has a personal component. But faith is not an individualistic thing. True faith is always lived in a community, within the church, the body of Christ. It’s not possible to truly live by faith and at the same time harbor bitterness against others; or to engage in gossiping and slander; or to be filled with self-righteous pride. The faith Jesus is talking about is a communal faith. This raises some painful questions. How is your relationship with your brothers and sisters? How important is their spiritual growth and wellbeing to you? What do you do to improve the quality of your relationships with others? The true measure of faith is not how strongly we are convinced of something. The true measure is how readily we can forgive others.

In the introduction I said that the main point of the message is this: King Jesus is the true object of faith. And to have faith in God means to surrender our lives to his reign. I want to have such faith! I want to move mountains into the sea. I want to see the coming of the Kingdom of God in my days. I want to pray the prayer of faith. I want to stop wasting my life and see amazing things happening everywhere. I want to live in a Christian community, in which

Jesus’ love and forgiveness are evident to the fullest measure possible, this side of heaven. But how? There is so much resistance in me when it comes to submitting myself to God. How can I die to myself? How can I fully surrender to King Jesus without counting the cost? How can I know that I can trust him? There has never been nor will there be a king like Jesus. Spurgeon said in his last sermon: “He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him.” When Jesus hung on the cross, the note attached read: “The king of the Jews”. Jesus’ kingship was most visibly proclaimed on the cross.

We are called to submit to a king who died for his servants. Jesus’ power is not wielded and imposed on us from above. His power as King is one that comes from under to serve us. On the cross, Jesus the judge was judged so that we can go unjudged. He was removed from the presence of God so that we never ever have to. Jesus became the fig tree withered from the roots so that we can grow and blossom and bear fruit, fruit that lasts eternally. When we see Jesus the King hanging on the cross, bleeding for us, when this truth hits us and enters our hearts, do you know what happens in us? Doubts flee. We can finally surrender. We have faith in God.



# GOD REVIVES DRY BONES



**Ezekiel 37:1-14 (10)** *“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.”*

On April 19, 2014, four French hostages who were being held in Niger by Jihadists were released. They stayed 10 months locked up in a cellar, without seeing daylight. They confessed that they were able to support their very difficult conditions of detention because they kept hope in their heart. A French proverb says: “Hope is what makes us live.” That is true. Even in the worst situations, hope helps us to continue to live and act instead of drowning in fatalism. Do you have hope in your life? At the time of Ezekiel, the Israelites had no hope. They were like dry bones, without life, without future. But God gave them hope. God is the God of hope. God gives hope to those whose hope is broken or lost. God can revive dry bones. Nothing is impossible with God.

Verse 1 says, “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.” The Lord took hold of Ezekiel and brought him by his Spirit to a valley which was full of bones. These bones belonged to men who had been killed, surely in a battle. It was a vision of terror, a post-apocalyptic vision. It was a place of despair, an accursed place, left to the wild animals. Bones were very dry, which supposes that they had been there for a long time. The Lord led Ezekiel back and forth among bones. Why did the Lord take Ezekiel to a valley full of many dry bones? It was to help him to realize how desperate and hopeless the situation of the Israel was. Verse 11a says ““Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.” The nation of Israel was destroyed by the invasion of Babylonian Empire in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, invaded the land of Judah and destroyed

the wall of Jerusalem. He killed many young men of Judah and burned the temple with many officials and royal family. Jeremiah 52:10-11 reads, “There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; he also killed all the officials of Judah. Then he put out Zedekiah’s eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put him in prison till the day of his death.” Most of the people in Judah including nobles became captives of war. Only the old and sick were left on the land of Judah. Most of all, the glory of God left them. Why did it seem that God had abandoned his people? It was because of their sins. Because of their godless and sinful lives, they had lost God’s glory and blessing, and his protection. And now, they were without strength and hope, physically, morally and spiritually. They said: “Our hope is gone; we are cut off.” (11b) When they abandoned God, they became hopeless.

When Ezekiel saw the condition of the Israelites, his heart must have filled with great pain and agony. He must have groaned inwardly and cried out to the Lord because of his people who became like dry bones. Then the Lord asked him: “Son of man, can these bones live?” (3) The question was, if they could be restored to become his own people again although they were completely hopeless due to their sin of rebellion against God. It is simply impossible for dry bones to live. In the same way, it was impossible for Israelites to restore their own nation and become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation by themselves. Despite all of this, the Lord asked Ezekiel, “Can these bones live?” This question was a challenge of faith for Ezekiel. It shows also the desire and vision of God to restore his people in his glory.

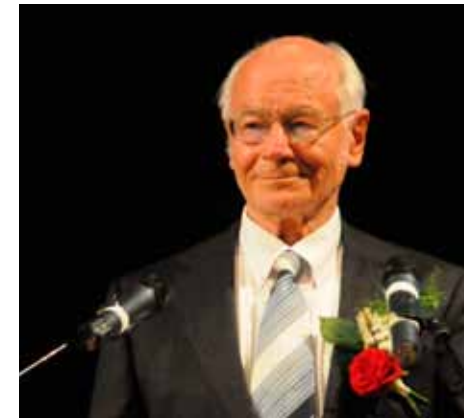
God is the God of hope! He is the God of hope who carries out his almighty work even when there is no hope. God is also the God of mighty power who can restore dry bones to life. God plants faith and hope first in the hearts of his servant whenever he wants to restore his people. God cannot work if there is no faith and hope of restoration in the hearts of his servants. God cannot work through his servants who are filled with unbelief and despair. By asking “Can these bones live?” God was planting faith and hope in the heart of Ezekiel. God wanted Ezekiel to have hope in his heart. God want us to have his hope in our hearts. The hope and vision does not depend of the situation or our ability to overcome the situation, but it depends of our faith in God. The prophet Habakkuk expressed well what hope in God is. He says: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” (Ha 3.17-18) Our hope is God himself. Our living hope is in the kingdom of heaven!

How did Ezekiel respond God? Ezekiel said in verse 3b, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” Ezekiel saw God’s hope. He was God’s intention to restore his people who were like dry bones. Ezekiel believed that what is impossible with men is possible with God if God wanted. Yet, he did not know how the Lord

would accomplish the work. So he answered, “O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” It is easy for us to see the work of God from our point of view. It is easy for us to say, “No, it is impossible”. Then we sit down easily in despair and unbelief. But we need to believe that God carries out his work in his own hands. He carries out his work according to his own plan.

What did God command to Ezekiel to do? Verse 4 says, “Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’” God asked Ezekiel to prophesy and say his word to the dry bones. Prophecy to human beings, we can understand. But prophecy to human bones, who cannot hear, it’s more difficult to understand. Precisely, it is not a question of understanding, but it is more a question of faith and obedience to God. The great work of restoration of dry bones comes from prophesying and saying the word of God. When God wanted to restore the Israelites who were like dry bones, he asked Ezekiel to prophesy and say his words to them. What did God ask Ezekiel prophesy and say? It is “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” God allowed the Israelites to become captives of war to the Babylonian Empire. However it was not for the purpose of abandoning them. Jeremiah 51.5 says: “For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the LORD Almighty.” God allowed the Israelites to become captives to help them to come back to their senses and repent of their idol worship and listen to





the word of God. However, they did not repent even when their nation was wiped out and they were carried away as captives of war. They would not listen to the word of the Lord. They only fell into despair and unbelief after complaining a lot. God helped the Israelites to listen to his word. God wanted to plant faith and hope through his word and restore them. Trials and hardship themselves cannot renew men. Only the word of God can revive men and renew them. When one hears the word of God his dead soul revives. That is the reason why the Lord asked Ezekiel to say "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!"

The Lord asked Ezekiel to prophecy continually. Consider verse 5. "This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life." The Lord said that he would make breath enter them when they listened to his word. Then they would come to life. God said in verse 6, "I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord." The Lord told once more that he would let them come back to life by restoring tendons and flesh and skin. Then Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded. Then what an amazing thing had happened? Verse 7 says, "So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone." There began a noise among the dry bones which had remained silent for many years. There was a noise, rattling sound. There was a sound of rising of bones together. Bones began to move to their own places. They began to move up and down and side to side. Then they began to form skeletons. It was an amazing thing. It was so amazing that Ezekiel looked at them closely. Verse 8 says, "I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them." Now dry bones had appearance of men. When Ezekiel just simply prophesied according to God's command dry bones gathered together and tendons and flesh and skin appeared and they became appearance of men.

Here we learn the power of the word of God and the importance of a man who prophesy the word of God. In the world there is nothing more challenging than the work of changing men. Parents want to change their children. So they teach them and warn them. But they are not changed easily at all. Even prisons do not change criminals. Many people make new resolutions in each year but they carry them out only in a few days. Only the word of God can change men. Hebrews 4:12 says: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." When we hear the word of God wholeheartedly our souls are revived. When we listen to the word of God we become free from our sins, and we can get out of emptiness and powerlessness. People become like dry bones not because of a famine of food or a thirst for water but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11). One day, one brother was very despaired because he didn't feel appreciated enough. It was just the day before he had had a very important interview to enter the best business college in France. His shepherdess asked me to call him to encourage him. After hearing his complaints, I gave him with conviction the word of John 8:44: "The devil was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." I encouraged him not to listen the lies of Satan and I confessed again our love for him. Finally, the word of God helped him to overcome his feelings and he went to the interview with a strong spirit, and he was accepted into this famous school.

According to verse 8, the dry bones had human appearance but they did not have breath in them. Because there was no breath in them they were still lifeless. Then the Lord said to Ezekiel. "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" (9) At first the Lord asked Ezekiel to prophecy and talk to the dry bones. Now he asked Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. Here the

word "breath" means 'wind, breath, spirit' and it refers to God's creative life. In Genesis 2:7 the Creator God formed man from the dust of the ground. The man from the dust of the ground did not have any life in him like dust of the ground. But when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life he began to breathe. Blood began to circulate, the heart began to beat and he became a living being. He became a living being and spiritual being. He became a living being breathing and moving, when the breath of God entered into him. God asked Ezekiel to prophesy toward the breath which was the source of life. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live."

When Ezekiel prophesied as God commanded him, what happened? Verse 10 says: "Breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army." Wow! When Ezekiel began to prophesy according to God's command, all of sudden breath came from four winds and began to enter into them. When breath entered into them, blood began to circulate and they began to have life. The dead heart began to beat and their dead eyes began to twinkle. Their spirits began to breathe. And they became a vast army. People who do not have God's Spirit cannot see spiritual world. They cannot have fellowship with God and communicate with him. Their inner person cannot be changed nor can they grow. Therefore in order to become a truly living person the Spirit of God should come. When the Spirit of God comes upon a man he is born again and he becomes a new person. When the Holy Spirit comes upon a man he receives power although he was powerless. When the Holy Spirit comes upon men young men see visions and old men dream dreams (Ac 2:17). When the Holy Spirit comes upon men unclean person like Samaritan woman is changed and live a pure life. When the Spirit comes upon a man he becomes a saint although he was a selfish man.

What should we do then in order to receive the Spirit of God? In the first place, we need to listen to the word of God and repent. If one hears the word of God and does not repent, the Holy Spirit cannot work. That is the reason why Jesus said, "The

kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15) Wherever people listen to the word of God and repent there is always amazing work of the Holy Spirit. In the second place, we must pray for the Holy Spirit to work. We need to open our hearts and be guide by the Holy Spirit.

Where is your hope? In the world? In visible things? In men? Or in God? We must put our hope in God. Because in God alone is the true hope. God puts his hope in each of us. God turns our despair in hope. In the Bible, Abraham was a very old man when God called him and promised to give him many descendants, even he had no children and even his wife was infertile. In his situation, many people would have said: "It is impossible." But Abraham put his hope in God. And God blessed him. Romans 4:18 says: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations."

Abraham could put his hope in God because he had faith in God. We need to have faith in God. Faith in God means to put our hope in God who can even revive bones. Amen! 🙏







## JESUS, MY TRUE HOPE

*“Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” John 8:11-12*

### 1. Life in darkness without hope

My name is Denitsa Krasteva and I was born in 1986 in Pernik, Bulgaria as the first child of the family. I have one younger brother, we were so loved. Our parents took good care of us. My father gave us a chance to be good tennis players. We lived in comfort by their protection. My mother is a medical doctor and my father was a police officer, and later he had his own business. My brother was often sick and my parents looked after his health night and day, so I secretly got jealous.

I was a quiet child in the eyes of others, but I was full of anger and discontent

against my brother and my parents. Once I heard my father saying that I was not smart because I was not interested on what he taught. Also I had dissatisfaction and negative thoughts caused by hints of people about my larger size and I had a striving to get approval from the world.

In primary school God gave me success, but because of that I tended to become proud comparing myself to other children. But in high school, I did not manage well with some of the disciplines, so negative thinking and fear were growing in me. Also, I started having difficulties in communicating with my classmates and I gained a lot of weight. I always doubted

my abilities because of my bad results in school. My striving for approval, however, always made me dissatisfied.

I often got angry with my mother and I blamed her for having expectations of me to help her but no expectations of my brother. I blamed her for tolerating him and also for his behavior that I didn't like. I quarreled with her and then I regretted it. I did not want to hurt her, but I was impatient. Once she cried because I wanted to go to USA for a Work and Travel Program and she thought I wanted to get away from her.

I also quarreled with my brother. In my anger and helplessness to change him the way that I thought it was right, I often

wept. I accused him and blamed him for the problems between my parents. In my anger I couldn't talk with him calmly and I was impatient. Once I told him I didn't want him to be my brother.

I had also sinful lusts and I wanted attention from guys. Temptations of the world, that I saw everywhere, went inside me and I had secret thoughts of sin, which made me ashamed to share with someone. At university God gave me victories, but because of the problems I had with sin and negative thoughts I had no satisfaction and success seemed to me insignificant. In the third year I met a guy and started dating him. Initially I had a passion and desire for approval. Gradually I felt that he loved me and I loved him. I felt that he was my mainstay in life and the closest person. However, he started a relationship with another woman. My life turned upside down and I thought I lost everything I had. I was a woman in darkness without any hope because of anger, blame, dissatisfaction, negative thoughts and sinful lust.

### 2. New life with true hope in Jesus

At that time my brother studied the Bible in UBF church. I had already seen a big change in his life. He repented that he was a bad brother and we cried together. I saw a different world without anger and it was a miracle for me. He had testified about Jesus in front of me and our parents.

When I heard the Word of God I realized that I did not lose everything I had, but I lost the illusion that I have something in the world. I could see the light and hope in the Word of God.

But because of sinful passions in me and my indecisiveness I compromised with sin that I allowed another colleague of mine from the university to have intimate relationship. I became attached to him. But God was merciful upon me. The Word of Genesis 3:10 “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” came to me and my sin before God was so terrifying that I felt stifled. I felt so dirty and in me there was growing anger against my boyfriend. When I suffered, Romans 12:2 helped me to repent for my sins to have a direction how to solve the problem with my boyfriend; “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” I insisted him to come to our church. He began to study God's Word, but he studied the Bible because of me, so when I refused his proposal for marriage, he hated me and quit Bible study.

I prayed God for His mercy to give me a new life with a new heart. John 8:11 “Then neither do I condemn you, Jesus declared. Go now and leave your life of sin...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will

never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” and Hymn 183 brought my confidence that God hears my prayer. I heard the hymn, “Happy day, Happy day when I was forgiven. Jesus had washed my heart and gave me new life, happy day, happy day, when I was forgiven”. When I accepted Jesus' forgiveness of sins, the light of life shined deeply into my heart. I found true happiness and true hope in Jesus.

The Word of God had more influence over me. He restored my relationship with my family, so that I could love them from my heart. Thank God that He is working in my parents' hearts. He gives me a desire to serve them completely, so they may know God's love and have an eternal life through faith in Jesus. He revealed to me that I have to have a firm decision in Him, to follow His path in which He leads me and the importance of having obedience to His Word. God gave me a Word: “I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38). I prayed God for a living faith and I desired God's will to be fulfilled in me in His way.

God blessed my life to live in the light of life with true hope. I participated in several Balkan Bible conferences in 2010, 2011, 2012. I saw how God is working in the hearts of people and their joy in God of the forgiveness of sins. In 2012 when I shared my life testimony in the BBC in Romania, I realized more deeply God's grace upon my



life that Jesus died for my sins. And also God gave me the word of Mark 6:36 "You give them something to eat."

God gave me a heart to serve one sister and testify the light of life with true hope that Jesus gives, not the deceptive human hope. She accepted the Word and I was glad. In 2013 during the Easter conference in Sofia, God gave me a living hope for the kingdom of God by the word of Corinthians 15, which I recited together with the sister with whom I studied Bible. However, she began to drop out due to commitments with the world and desires which pulled her back in the world.

Since then God gave me a new life in Jesus. He trained me to be God's good servant. For about 3 years I've been working at a Korean company in Sofia, at the same time I am a PhD student. My lack of self-confidence kept me from being a good employee and my work was a burden to me. I wanted to run away and I found myriad reasons for that. But God helped me to make the decision to work hard in front of God through Genesis 45:7,8 "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. ....". I understood that all trainings of God that Joseph passed were used for good. After that God gave me many victories at my workplace and showed me that He is faithful. Now my boss is satisfied with my work and I know that all this time God taught me obedience, humility and faith. He continues to train me in order to build in me a character of a soldier, not a fearful person.

I became a PhD student with the counseling of my Bible teacher, but I fell into despair, because I could not combine work with studying for the PhD and I could not see any meaning. But the faith of Joseph helped me that God put me there for good, to use me as He planned, I have decided to struggle. I repent for my faithless heart and that I admitted doubt and despair to

come into me. I thank God that despite of my unfaithfulness He remains faithful and helped me to pass all the exams. I pray God to give me unconditional, unwavering faith and wisdom to be able to apply what I have learned into practice.

Through my job in the office and at university God showed me that victory comes from Him, not from my own limited forces. My struggle is not with or against the world but against myself, against the sin in me. God gave me understanding that my uncertainty is a lack of faith, but faith can only come from Him.

Since the word of God came into my heart my life has changed so much. I lived in the darkness of sins without any hope, but during the last 4 years God led me step by step into the light of life with true hope for the Heavenly Kingdom of God. My soul is delighting in Jesus. During this period God trained my inner person through Sunday worship messages, one to one Bible study, Bible reading and morning prayers to have an understanding heart, thankful heart, faith, hope, love and a decision to follow Him. And God blessed me to be a faithful bible student and prayer servant. God planted in me a holy desire to serve Him like Mary the mother of Jesus through this year's key verse: "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).



The Bulgarian mission began with msn. Cathy Kang when she obeyed the world mission command of Jesus during 1990. She came alone to Bulgaria, an unknown country in South Korea, as a secretary in the Korean embassy in Sofia. Now there are two chapters of UBF in Sofia. God established a house church of shep. Georgi Kumanichliev with an American missionary Heather Kumanichlieva during 2011 and now his house church is coworking with missionary John Jung's family and shep. Georgi's sister Veska Kumanichlieva to preach the word of God among the students of NWEU in Sofia. In the other chapter is working James Kang's family with me and my brother Lachezar Krastev. God is sending young people whom they serve. We are praying for the evangelism of Bulgarian students, so that God may establish house churches in each of the 10 main Bulgarian universities.

Thank you Lord for calling me from the darkness of sins and for leading me into your world of wonderful light, by showing me your never ending mercy on me. Thank you for your faithfulness that You are my true hope. I pray God to use my life for His glory. I pray God to give me wisdom and love to serve with 1:1 Bible study young people who live in darkness of sins and whose hope is still in the world.

One word: Jesus is my true hope 🙏

## THE WORD OF GOD SET ME FREE



### Part 1: My Life

Hello, my name is Lydia Lee and I'm a second gen of Greece UBF. My parents decided to sacrifice their lives to God and they pioneered in Greece since 1991. I was born by the Lord's grace and as the first child I had the big opportunity to embrace great caring and special love from my parents. So when my brother was born my jealousy towards him was the main reason of making his life a living hell. But the Lord granted me 2 siblings and all the 2nd generations of Greece UBF in order to teach me how to serve others and grow as a shepherd from my young age.

My mother reached the limits of losing her life thrice while serving God's work when the Lord revealed her the three of us as her co-workers in His work in Greece. So, at the age of 4 my siblings and I used to prepare and clean the worship service room and serve God's work with great zeal and joy. But my appearance, my mother language and my foreign parents were things to be made fun of by the Greeks because of us being too different and them being too curious. Especially during my first grade of primary school I was surrounded by the kids and was made fun of for being the only foreigner in the school. Despite those difficulties, the Lord helped me through my mom to serve one soul for his glory. Every day after school I used to bring my friend at my house, solve all her questionnaires in

her studies and help her see things through God's view and invite her to the Sunday worship service.

But during that period of time I was confused with my identity and my different life style because it was totally different with the ones my friends had. In ..... (when?), my mother's health got severe and we ended up going to Korea for her treatment. Even though I was still a kid and didn't know what sort of country my parent's motherland called Korea was, I felt like I had finally found my country and my people. Sad fact was that staying there for 13 months I was once again the kid to be made fun of since I was a stranger to them. My conclusion was made. I didn't belong anywhere. However, I had the chance to meet my relatives and the Lord helped me also invite my friends there giving them the chance to listen to God's word.

When I was back, things were not easy for me since I had to learn the Greek and become a foreigner once again. Sadly our missionary life started with a big financial drop. Day by day, we grew along with our needs, but my father's payment was never enough. The five of us lived in a house with 2 rooms full of cockroaches having no money even to fulfill our basic needs. But God protected us from having feelings of inferiority. We gathered every morning and night to pray and finally we felt His presence in our lives.

Despite our financial problems, God

helped us continue to serve the university students and invite them for fellowship. God's training seemed endless but with patience we kept praying by faith and finally ending up with us moving out to a better house able to meet all our everyday needs. God had blessed us and with that he helped us continue serving the students and his work and not fulfilling all the things we missed all those years.

During my lifetime the one who was always nearby, my spiritual teacher, my best friend, and my supporter was my mother. She would always dedicate her time and show interest in us but especially stand by our side both teaching and protecting us from the pressures of our external environment and from our church. But she taught us to give our time and our skills to God so that he may be glorified. So the Lord helped us to prepare the worship service room with joy, to play music instruments during the worship service, to serve the students and the members of our church, to serve God's servants who visited and to do everything for his glory by faith.

On the other hand my dad was different from the worldly ones. He never cheated my mother and he worked very hard with patience and prudence so that we may cover all our needs. He never cursed us neither had he ever broken an object due to his anger. I respected him as a servant of God since as a preacher he touched my

soul and quenched my thirst. Despite that, his indifference, his harsh and silent way character hurt my feelings. I was jealous and at the same time hurt when I saw a boned father and daughter relationship, the feeling I'd never felt. But once, the Lord gave me the opportunity to meet the God of my father. So from that day I started respecting him and started seeing the good sides of him.

Personally the Lord was working through the chats I used to make with my mother. The Holy Spirit would help me understand deeply the words of God and on the other hand he would give me the spirit of prayer. Countless times did he fulfill our prayers, from the smallest to the biggest ones, as he wanted me to relay and to tell him all my problems. The problem was that even though I learnt the word of God and knew his great work I hadn't found my personal God.

### Part 2: My first wrong-trapped in sin

When I graduated the 6th grade of junior school my parents decided to send me to Germany near to the missionaries there so that I would grow spiritually and use my free time in a good way. I thought that my visit in Germany was going to open a new adventure. But the reality was different.

All the missionaries were so busy to show interest in me. It was a very silent city and there were no television, neither books that I was interested. I was bored. I was lonely in my room, having nothing to do. It was then when I started having temptations. One day while I was searching something funny to watch on the internet I ended up being in a very dirty website due to my curiosity. This first experience was so shocking that I shut it down immediately. But when I came back to Greece, my temptation would grow. While I started entering my puberty my curiosity about the other gender and my sinful desires started filling my mind and my heart that I sinned again and again behind my parents back. The more I sinned the more I realized what a weak human being I was. From that time I started to cover my real self and to live a duplicitous life. I was Satan's victim. I couldn't get away from him even though I tried endlessly when I realized that I was already caught in his nets and was being led to the way of disaster. It was then when I started hating myself, cursing me and losing my confidence. Even though I was listening and reading the word of God, the power of sin was not disappearing since I wanted to fulfill my sinful desires and not repent with sincerely because of my fears. At that period of time I was desperate and tired. My sins were destroying me

and I couldn't find a place to confess with a humble heart.

### Part 3: Repentance and restoration

In 2010 I had the chance to attend the Balkan Conference in Romania. Even though there were not a lot of God's servants the spirit worked in me. When I heard the word of God from missionary James Point the word of God "Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." He worked in my desperate soul and I was set free from the bondage of sins. My heart was not filled with sinful thoughts and desires any more. I was grateful to the Lord and I started kneeling before Him because I was greatly moved from his great love. Jesus Christ died on the cross because of my sins. I then accepted God's love and knew that Jesus Christ was flogged and crucified because of me. But the title of the second Generation missionary and the praises from the other missionaries about our educated manners couldn't let me go towards God with a humble heart so that I may be born again. I couldn't bring my titles down and my good image because I didn't want to be ridiculed or judged by others. My sins, my wrong choices in my

life seemed to destroy me. Because of my qualms I would ask God to take my life away from this world, because I had lost my purity and my holiness. But then God worked in me to write a sincere life testimony at the Easter Bible Conference ... (when?) based on the message: It is finished. I confessed to the Lord: Can a sinner like me be set free and receive mercy from God and from others? Then I heard Jesus Christ say upon the cross: "It is finished". The lord was scourged and crucified because of me to give me a new life. I don't deserve it but his grace and love are so great that it kneels down and leads me to go forward. I again asked myself: Can I? A great sinner like me? Can I do it with faith? Do I deserve this great atonement? He said again: "It is finished". Then by faith I made the decision to receive this grace. The Lord says: "So do not fear for I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand". Not only did the Lord set me free from the shackles of sins but he also strengthened me to come near to him and accept his redemptive grace. I had been afraid to come out to the light of truth for all those years. I had avoided it, because I had preferred to be in the dark because my thoughts were evil and I was a victim of evil. But the word of God set me free when I sincerely repented with a humble heart and my life changed. Because of Jesus Christ I was free from the sins. Since then my spirit felt lighter and I gained courage and strength for my life. I pray to God to show mercy and make me a new person. I pray that he may richly give me his Spirit so that he may be glorified for his grace and love that he showed to His useless servant. Thank you, Lord, for not letting your servant down. Lord, thank you that you didn't let me go away from your side but you saved me from the eternal loss by being crucified. Please be my Lord, be my God and be glorified through my life! Please use my life in the salvation work.

After that Easter conference the Lord

helped me to start appreciating myself and the Lord started to open new wonderful ways so that I could go to the outer world. My fear of people had continued since my childhood when I was a victim of mockery but the Lord helped me to overcome it by sending me to the hospitals with the heart of a shepherd. But yet I didn't have the courage to hold their hands and pray for their depleted bodies and their wounded souls because of my fears. In my prayers the Lord gave me the gift of cure. But my fears hindered me to preach the joyful news to them. In my 6th semester the Lord spoke to me through a message and my heart started to fill with qualms and fear of God because I was avoiding all those chances the Lord gave me to witness the living God. So I asked God to forgive me, because I wasn't responsible for their lives and avoided to give them the living word. Please make me a courageous servant of God and from now on to preach your word by faith.

After that conference the Lord also opened me a way to start teaching Korean in a tutorial school and he helped me to offer my first salary, my first fruit to the Lord. In this way the Lord helped me to learn Korean better and also to do other works by faith ending up by covering all the necessary money for the conference. He also blessed me to pass all the exams and to be a good example for them. I still have a lot of imperfections and fears in my life. But the Lord blessed me when I repented from the bottom of my heart and he still works through me. If it is God's will, I pray that He may open new ways during my life so that I may be used as a mother of prayer for the students in Greece and all over the world. If it's God's will, I pray that I may establish a spiritual family so that we may continue His salvation work and keep the light of prayer and blessing so that it may have no end in the land that we will live. 🙏





## BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB, I KNEW YOU FOR MY OWN

*“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:5*

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for speaking to me personally with this word. May you help me to reflect on my life through your word and reveal your truth and glory.

God spoke to me with his words from Jeremiah about 25 years ago yet it was not until I wrote this life testimony that I deeply reflected on their meaning for me. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you for my own,” means that God personally authored, designed and intended me. I belong to him. To be God’s own is to be his beloved child; I am of his spirit, his family. “...before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” When still

in my mother’s womb, God consecrated me, he set me apart and prepared me for a holy purpose, which is to be a prophet to the nations, to share his redemption plan with people of all nationalities. You’d have to be me to know how perfectly and profoundly these words speak to my sinful reality, but I hope to reveal God’s special grace to me through this testimony.

I was raised, the eldest of two daughters, born to parents who loved us and worked hard to provide a secure home for us. When I was young, my Dad was a Sunday School teacher, and through God’s word planted the seeds of faith in my heart. Only now am I starting to realise how blessed I was to have such parents.

However, my character was very sensitive, and I judged the world according to my feelings. I often received criticism with either self-pity or aggression. I constantly felt as though something fundamental inside me went unanswered. I often prayed but I was not aware of God answering me.

When I left school at 16 I didn’t have any clear idea of what I wanted to do. I chose to go to college but really I wanted to avoid responsibility, and was just hoping that something exciting would happen to me along the way. Around this time I was attending a Baptist church and once answered an altar call to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet when God did not work as I expected I cried with disappointment and felt rejected by him. I sought emotional consolation in a boyfriend’s love, but when I was rejected by him too, I felt overwhelmed and unable to cope. I refused to listen to my parents and ran away from home to escape everything.

Even though I hurt my parents very much, they brought me home and in desperation my Mum suggested I might like to work on a kibbutz in Israel. I was instantly seduced by the exotic and romantic lifestyle, working the land with a pioneering spirit, it was so exciting, yet I with it I also sought to indulge every sinful physical appetite as though today was the last. After a year I felt disillusioned and jaded. I

hadn’t built any meaningful relationships or learned from my experience. I returned to the UK and got an office job but it was a poor imitation of my experience in Israel, so 2 years later I decided to go back and try again. I was always searching for love, and I fell in love in the most romantic circumstances with a soldier. The whole experience from start to finish was incredibly thrilling, but set an unrealistic and deceptive ideal which became a stumbling block in my future walk with God.

When I returned to England on the outside everything seemed to be going well, but inside I felt empty and my life meaningless. In desperation I cried out to God to help me. I opened my Bible straight onto Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” These words pierced my heart, I knew God was speaking directly to me. For the first time in my life I felt acknowledged. I started to seek out Christian fellowship, and a friend took me to a prayer meeting. I prayed sincerely for God to help me. I heard him tell me audibly, “Trust me” and I felt the Holy Spirit come on me in power. God had met me in a way I had been waiting and hoping for. I attended prayer meetings and went to church regularly but despite being in a faith environment there was no shepherd to help me or teach me what it meant to surrender to God’s authority. I was still trying to work things out for myself and hadn’t clearly or specifically repented of my sins and had no power to resist my old temptations and sinful desires.

While all this was going on, my landlord encouraged me to go to university. I enrolled at UCL for “Hebrew and Jewish studies”. At this point I began to think that this might be God’s leading for me. While preparing to go God spoke to me through Jeremiah 30 and 31, and I began to have a vision that he would use me to lead Jewish people to faith. I spent my third year at the

Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Even though I was in Israel this time only by God’s grace and appointment, I immediately slipped back into the immoral lifestyle I had lived in Israel before. I had another sinful relationship that would one day produce more bitter and angry fruit. God had graciously spoken to me personally through Jeremiah 1:5 to reveal the meaning of my yearning could only be answered by him alone, but I persisted in seeking physical satisfaction in the world. The inner spiritual turmoil took its toll. I lost a lot of weight and got seriously ill.

When I returned to the UK for my final year I felt so sick in my spirit that I prayed God would send me a Christian friend to be a good influence on me. The next day Msn Beth Kim stopped me at UCL and invited me to study the Bible. Naturally I didn’t for one second recognise her as the answer to my prayer, and told her to stop trespassing on campus! I was aware that there was an inner strength to her, but she was so foreign to anything I knew or aspired to I couldn’t relate to her at all. I just dismissed her from my mind. About two weeks later she saw me again at UCL and finally agreed to meet up for Bible study. As a British woman I thought I was being sincere with my passionate opinions, but

from Beth’s point of view I was obstructive and argumentative. In my pride as a student of Biblical Hebrew and Jewish History I felt my knowledge was superior to Beth’s, which made unteachable, but we did start to build a relationship.

As graduation approached, I began to feel anxious about my future. I could only see things humanly—I was 32, no clear direction, no money, and above everything I wanted to live in Israel. Without seeking God’s will I decided to take charge and find myself an Israeli husband. I met someone through the internet and we wrote to each other for several months. Beth, my best friend and my parents urged me not to but I did not listen to them. I went ahead and married but within 3 months we had separated. It took this traumatic experience to realise that I could not trust my own judgment. I had no choice but to put all my trust God. Beth visited me every week, bringing me flowers and giving me God’s word and promises to hold onto. I began to grow spiritually and after a couple of years I was offered the opportunity to spend a few months in Chicago in the World Mission Headquarters.

There I found a friend and shepherd in Msn Birgit Pierce, a fellow European. She and her three daughters accepted me like



part of their family, and I She encouraged me with her wisdom, humour and love and always brought me to God in prayer and through the Bible. I sought God's direction concerning marriage and mission, and after a year he sent me back to the UK. Amazingly by God's grace I got a job at UCL. God also helped me encourage someone who wanted to study the same degree that I had, and we studied the Bible together for four years, throughout the duration of her studies. During this time I found God trained me at work and living in common life. The Korean missionaries were wary of me due to my outspokenness and critical spirit. According to God's wisdom I was the only committed English woman and had to go to God with my struggles.

There were many occasions when I wanted to leave UBF. Looking back though, I see I had not made any commitment to the UK student ministry. In my heart I still hoped to be sent to Israel as a missionary. In 2007 I tried to force God's hand by visiting the missionaries in Israel. I sensed from the start of the trip that my spirit was not in step with God's. On the flight home God rebuked me through Jonah: "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." It was a painful struggle to let go of my dream of Israel and repent. I began to pray to God who showed me that the most valuable thing in my life was his call. I was reassured

that God still wanted to use me, but deep down I was reluctant to accept UCL as my mission field.

Towards the end of 2008 God helped me to meditate on marriage through several scriptures—Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel, and the creation of woman in Genesis 2. I felt God was asking me if I could marry a man of his choosing, I was introduced to Jonathan Sung, who had come to England to study English before taking up a place at university. He liked me but I hadn't paid any attention to him since he had arrived in the UK. I was therefore rather shocked and went home to pray about it. I earnestly begged God to give me some direction, but I couldn't discern anything. God left the choice up to me. I wanted to marry rather than remain single. In my heart I had laid down some conditions about a husband, and God had fulfilled the main two, which were, that the man should want to marry me, not just any woman in UBF, and that I would have to rely completely on God's choice of husband. We have been married now for over five years, and God has given us a beautiful son, Judah. His name is my prayer for Jewish people for whom God has given me a special love and hope to meet Jesus. I found one of the blessings of marriage is all my shortcomings, sins and wrong attitudes become clear! But God has given me his promise in Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the

womb, I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Looking back I see how gracious God has been to give me his word. Though I did not know him, he appointed me a prophet to the nations; despite my seeking satisfaction in the world he led me to Jesus and a personal call to serve students at UCL in a marvellous and extraordinary way. He has such hope for me and my house church. I pray God grants me one sincere English woman Bible student from UCL with whom to share the love of the Gospel.

Let me tell you about UCL and the London ministry. For just over 20 years the London ministry has aimed to serve students. Our focus throughout this time has been UCL. God has provided me with a job at UCL and I work there today. I pray monthly with a few other staff members and am at the heart of the campus. Both Ian and Paul graduated from UCL and we focus on serving today's students with the gospel. UCL has traditionally been referred to as "the godless institution in Gower Street" because of its non conformist roots and because it provided a secular alternative to the Anglican dominated Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In some ways this reflects the climate of the nation. Students increasingly have no church background or even a basic understanding of the Bible. Atheism is the choice of many

and like much of Europe it's fashionable to say we are a 'post Christian country'. It means student ministries struggle to grow and take hold and traditional ministries and methods don't work as they once did.

Yet in London we thank God that we are stable and almost all are serving someone in Bible study. As a ministry we have seen an explosion of children and now have 21 children between 9 families. With no full time workers it means time is short but our focus remains 121 study and outreach. The London ministry's main prayer topic is for each person to study faithfully with one student. This year has been encouraging with Bible students starting to study the Bible with others. Toby, James student, has started studying with Joseph. Joanna has begun studying with 3 different PhD students from UCL: Anna Monica, Ellie and Alisha. Paul continues to study regularly with Jonathan who is now training to be a pastor at Spurgeon College and Matthew. Ian continues to study with Dave, Ronnie and Stephen who is a lecturer at the University of the Arts. God increasingly works through the ministry beyond UCL. Dave and Philippa have a heart for outreach at Goldsmiths College, University of London and have bought a house nearby with a vision to serve students there. Daniel and Maria serve Cambridge University as he completes his PhD.

Perhaps most unexpected and un-

planned of all, Sarah, who lectures at Oxford University has seen the growth of a regular bible study group with Oxford students. Last year Sarah noticed 2 students with a Bible. Following a discussion Sarah began studies with Jenny and Ashley and held a Christmas party for 10 students in her dormitory. From this simple start grew weekly Saturday Bible studies of between 6 and 10 Oxford students. These are some of the UK's brightest and best students and yet all have commented on the value and help a clear focus on the Bible has. Students in Britain's universities desperately need to hear the gospel. Thankfully many share this vision and we meet regularly with other student ministries and churches with a focus on student ministry to pray together and encourage one another. Student ministry can feel under pressure in such a secular age. Yet we find the Bible is timeless. We find that through Bible study and personal care of one person at a time, God's life changing work continues. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. We pray the gospel of Jesus may go out to Britain's universities. We pray in London to be a loving spiritual community, to outreach and serve 100 universities in the UK.

One word: I appointed you a prophet to the nations 🙏





# CIS – GOD'S KINGDOM

In August 21 through August 24, The CIS ISBC 2014 was held at Pokrobckoe Retreat Center near Moscow with the theme, "CIS-God's Kingdom." A total of 344 people (193 from CIS, 45 from USA, Canada and Germany, 40 from Korea and China and 66 of CBF, MBF and HBF) attended to this conference.

### 1. Conference preparation by 5 native shepherds of the working group

At the Regional Directors' conference in January we formed a working group of 5 native shepherds who would serve the con-

ference as hosts. They had a meeting every Tuesday for six months via SKYPE. They prayed earnestly and prepared the coming conference wholeheartedly. Through this working group meetings the conference preparation were preceded, like conference theme, Bible passages, and all programs including serving servants. It would be a biggest event in the last 9 years, but native shepherds had no experience of serving such a big conference at all. However, God abundantly blessed the conference when they co-worked very closely.

### 2. Work of sincere prayers

During the conference preparation

a conflict and a war between Russia and Ukraine broke out. The situation had been getting worse. In the end, due to this risk Ukraine leaders and sheep were unable to attend the Conference, and that is why we worried that the Conference would be postponed. God, at this point, gave us specific prayer topics: Hold firmly to the Conference theme, "CIS-God's Kingdom," and pray that God's kingdom may come to all attendees, and also pray for CIS to be used as a priestly nation for 7 unreached nations among CIS, Islamic countries, China and North Korea. And we prayed for Russia and Ukraine to end the war. God heard all our prayers from all over the world and greatly blessed the

conference in the grace of God. Eventually, 9 Ukraine leaders attended the conference and greatly encouraged all of us.

### 3. Amazing work of the words of God

In this conference there were no bells and whistles, but pure words of God centered messages. Whenever the words of God centered messages were proclaimed, the words of God penetrated into each attendant's heart as if they are alive. For this, Dr. John Jun and M. John Lee came early to Moscow and helped each messenger.

The opening message (Jn 1: 29, "Look, the Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World") was served by Sh. Alexei Belykh from Moscow. The evening message of the 1st day was "The Love of the Father" based on Luke chapter 15 and was delivered by Sh. Rustam from Astana. The 2nd day morning message was delivered by Shs. Rebecca, entitled "Jesus Who Never Condemns" based on Jn 8. The Main Lecture 1 was served by M. Point based on Lk 23, entitled "Jesus' love of forgiveness." The 2nd evening message was served by Sh. Daniel Zhivaeva from MGIMO chapter, entitled "Duty of Reconciliation" based on 2Cor. 5. In the third morning, Sh. Sergey served a message, entitled "Your Kingdom Come"

based on Matt. 6. After that the main lecture 2 (A Royal priesthood, 1 Peter 2) was served by Sh. Konstantin from Moscow. The third evening message was "Christian View of History" based on Mk 13 delivered by Sh. Abraham Stas from Almaty. The third main lecture was served by P. Kevin Albright from Chicago, entitled "Remain in Me" based on Jn 15. And P. Abraham Kim, UBF General Director, served the closing message, entitled "In a Rented House" based on Acts 28. In addition, M. Mother Barry encouraged all of us in the very beginning of the conference, saying "Let's possess God's kingdom by faith in Jesus through deep repentance before the words of God."

### 4. Precious jewel-like life testimonies

M. Sunji Jun, M. Anna Yang and M. Maria Ahn's shepherdology – All participants were able to learn their full devotion to early pioneering UBF ministry and their beautiful life of mission before God. It was a heart moving and beautiful time that we desired to follow their good examples.

The first UBF silver missionary, M. Isaac Lim's life testimony – He showed us that old age does not matter in serving God's world mission and everything is possible when we challenge by faith and enthu-



# FORGIVING LOVE OF JESUS

siasm. There were 14 more testimony speakers. Among them specifically M. Rebecca who went to Turkey as a missionary from Ukraine testified how she has been molded as a mother of faith who loves Turkey, bearing the cross of a pioneering a ministry in Islamic Turkey.

## 5. Missionary Calling

On the third night, we had a time of God's calling for those who want to devote themselves to live as "missionaries" and "shepherds". Amazingly 55 volunteers came up to the stage and made a decision to commit the rest of their lives to live as "missionary" and "shepherd" and prayed to God with tears.

## 6. RUDN UBF Pioneering

During this conference God ordained M. Andrej & Joshepina Choi from MISIS center and sent them out to pioneer RUDN



campus in Moscow. The Sister Irina has been raised as a shepherdess for this campus and they asked us to pray for them to raise one Abraham from the RUDN campus ministry.

## 7. The 1st CIS 2nd gens SBC 2014

For the first time, all 2nd gens of CIS missionaries who have been scattered all over the lonely places and 2nd gens of native shepherds gathered together in

one place. A total of 66 children attended their own conference with the theme, "I'm Seeking God's Kingdom." Especially M. Catherine Han and Sh. Artom and some Korean shepherds from Kwangju UBF, Korea prayed hard and devoted themselves to serving this 2nd gens conference. I pray that all CIS 2nd gens who will be the next generation leaders of CIS ministry may have a clear spiritual identity as children of God and grow spiritually.

I am really thankful to all our co-workers world wide who prayed hard while we were in many difficulties and hardships for the CIS ISBC 2014. Especially I am very grateful to those who came far from N. Amreica, Korea, China and Germany for their love and fellowship. Above all, I want to give much thanks to all our missionaries in Moscow, native shepherds and even all 2nd gen missionaries for their devotion to this conference.

May God preciousy use CIS as a priestly nation for Islamic world, China and North Korea! 🙏



**Luke 23:1-59 (34a)** "Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'"

I thank God for our conference "CIS – God's Kingdom". God is restoring his Kingdom in our hearts through his word. The

great love of the Father to the Prodigal Son and the love that Jesus showed to the woman caught in adultery, give new life to all women and men. This message is called the Forgiving Love of Jesus. God's forgiveness fully poured out on sinners through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. The love of Christ can change any corrupted sinner into a child of God.

In this passage we can see total and absolute corruption of the man. But it's not all. The main topic of this passage is the all-forgiving love of God.

## 1. Jesus was condemned in our place (1-25)

The religious leaders of that time arrested Jesus. The Lord fearlessly testified to high priests and scribes that he was the Christ, Son of God. However, they did not want to accept his testimony and decided to kill him. But they had no right to sentence someone to death, so they brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate asked him: are you the King of the Jews? Jesus answered: you say this (23:3). "King of the Jews" at that time meant "Messiah". Jesus bravely testified to this even in front of the Roman judge Pilate. Pilate did not find any guilt in Jesus and wanted to let him go. But the Pharisees went on accusing Jesus. Pilate did not know what to do. So, when he heard that Jesus was from Galilee he sent him to Herod who was luckily in Jerusalem just then.

When Jesus was brought to Herod in that morning, most probably Herod was not in clear mind at about 7 AM. He asked Jesus to perform a miracle but in vain. Then he started questioning Jesus on many things but Jesus was not answering (9). Jesus was standing before Herod like a silent lamb, he would not speak. Prophet Isaiah had prophesied about this: "... he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a

sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isa.53:7). Herod failed to extract anything from Jesus so he made fun of him, along with his soldiers. Then they dressed him in bright clothes and sent him back to Pilate.

This time, Pilate summoned all High Priests, leaders and people. He announced again that neither he nor Herod found Jesus guilty. He had to let him go, but instead, he suggested that he have Jesus flogged in order to satisfy the demands of the people. It was to his profit, as a politician. In Pilate we can see ourselves, people who easily compromise their faith and conscience for profit. So, it was not only Pilate who gave Jesus over to death, but it was us as well.

Great luck for Pilate, he had to free one criminal in agreement with tradition. But people began to yell: away with him! Release Barabbas to us. Barabbas was a murderer. Here we can see what the nature of a crowd. When Jesus was feeding them, they glorified him, saying: truly, this is King the Savior! (John 6:14) But when he began to teach them the kingdom of God they became evil and yelled: crucify him. When it was sweet in their mouth, they swallowed but when it was bitter, they spit it out. They did not live according to the truth but for a momentarily profit. Who are these people in the crowd? It is us, not someone else. It is me and us. When we did not live according to the truth of God's word, but rather according to our feelings, we gave Jesus over to death. Thus, the yelling of people and High Priests prevailed and Pilate decided to let Barabbas go free and have Jesus crucified.

Let us think about why the Holy Son of God had to be judged. Who is supposed to be judged? All people, all sinners. Each of us will have to stay before God and receive God's judgment. Who is free from God's judgment? Nobody! But Jesus, the Son of God, took the sinner's place.

## 2. Jesus was crucified for our sins (26-56)

Finally Jesus was taken from the judgment hall and led to be crucified. They laid upon his shoulders a heavy cross and led



him to the place of crucifixion by the longest possible route, while before him a soldier marched bearing a placard with his crime inscribed on it: “The king of the Jews.” Jesus was exhausted and fell down. Then the Roman soldiers whipped him. Blood dripped from his forehead and his back. When Jesus collapsed, they seized Simon from Cyrene and put the cross on him.

There were many women in Jerusalem, crying for Jesus who was being led to the execution place. It was impossible to look at tormented Jesus without tears. But what did Jesus do to the women? He said to them (18), “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.” Jesus did not care about himself. Instead, he was worried about those being under God’s judgment. Jesus said (29-30): «the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”» They should not have cried about Jesus, but rather about themselves and their children. Do you weep for your children? Do you cry because of your sins? This word tells us that God’s judgment is absolutely terrible. Many people do not know this and they do not cry about their sins and their children. They say: peace and tranquility. But if we do not cry about our sins now then one day great tragedy will overtake us: it will be too late to cry on God’s judgment.

Jesus went on saying: (31) “For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” In these words “the green tree” stands for Jesus who was being judged by God for our sins. “The dry tree” stands for a sinner, who has already died and dried up in his sins. If sinless Jesus had to suffer so much then how much more will suffer real sinners, condemned by God for their own sins? So Jesus warns them about this by telling them not to weep for him but rather to weep for themselves and their children.

Two criminals were led with Jesus (32). And when all people came to the execution place called Golgotha, Jesus was cruci-

fied between them two. Prophet Isaiah prophesied about this: “he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa.53:12). Roman soldiers crucified Jesus between two criminals on purpose, in order to put more shame on him.

Crucifixion is a punishment which is designed to give to the criminal as much suffering as possible, long pain in bones, broken sinews, hard breathing and thirst, while slowly dying on the cross for 2-3 days from the loss of blood and water, with hands and feet pierced by long and thick nails. I would like to ask you: anyone ever suffered a broken bone or a cut? How painful it is, even if the injury is very small! Anyone was sentenced to death? We are afraid to even imagine such a thing. Even for a sinner who does deserve death, it could be the scariest moment in life. But Jesus, our good shepherd, received a death sentence and now was being crucified. Imagine how scared and lonely he was, suffering excruciating pain. Human words fail to describe his pain. Psalm 22 says: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death (14-15). Why did Jesus have to be crucified? He did not deserve this. On the contrary, we deserved this. Each one of us had to be crucified on the cross. But God had mercy on us and put our punishment of sin upon his own son. Jesus was tried instead of us and crucified instead of us too. What a marvelous event! Why did God do this? We will never understand this, it’s his unfathomable love! Human mind fails to understand it.

Jesus was endlessly suffering on the cross, but what was he really doing in that moment? Let’s read verse 34a. He was praying: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was teaching the people: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them

which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Jesus showed an example while hanging on the cross: he forgave those who were killing him. He prayed for them: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”. Greatest people, world-wide famous philosophers, generals and artists could not overcome the desire of revenge and hatred. But Jesus prayed that God forgive his tormentors. They say that the thing of men is to take revenge and the thing of God is to forgive. This emphasizes that Jesus is the all-forgiving God.

Jesus was not merely praying by his mouth. He really desired that God the Father forgive the executioners. He named a reason for his request: for they do not know what they are doing. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” These words contain the all-victorious love of Christ. We all are standing there, in the same crowd. And Jesus is praying for us as well: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Do you suffer because of guilt feelings for the sins you have committed? Do you suffer because of the power of sin? Or maybe even right now you are tormented by the sin of lust, deceit and hatred. Do you have hidden sins that you cannot reveal? Do you live in self-condemnation? You want to break free but you cannot. Why do all these things happen to people? It’s because they do not know the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus Christ is the all-forgiving love of God. There is no sin that God cannot forgive. There is no condemnation in Jesus Christ. He has already been tried for us, crucified for us; died for us, taken our shame and condemnation. He has prayed for us before God: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” All our sins and condemnation has forever been removed from us. By his Blood, we have been cleansed and freed! Let us read verse 34 again and put each one of us his/her own name instead of “them”: Father, forgive Point for he does not know what he is doing. I pray that the forgiveness of Jesus may enter every heart today.

Jesus words: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” also show us how exactly God’s kingdom

enters our hearts. Everyone needs forgiveness because everyone has committed sins and done mistakes. But the problem is nobody forgives in this world, most people just criticize and condemn each other. So many tragedies happen in the world because of the lack of forgiveness. Family turns into hell because husband and wife do not want to forgive each other. Church turns into a bunch of enemies because its members do not forgive. Do you know how many people suffer from hatred and wounds in their hearts? How many wounds Ukrainians received in the recent events? And how many Russians suffer from wounds and misunderstanding? When people do not forgive, Satan easily controls them and leads many to hell.

Evil cannot overcome evil, and hatred cannot overcome hatred. Only good overcomes evil, and love overcomes hatred. Only Jesus’ love that he showed on the cross can solve the problem of hatred. That is why Jesus prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” On the cross, God from heaven poured out a waterfall of his love upon us! This love washes away all condemnation and hatred. Before such love who can demand anything from others or judge others? I pray that the waterfall of God’s love may wash away the leftovers of our hatred and condemnation; and fill our hearts to the brim. Let us say to each other: I love you.

Look at verse 34b. Roman soldiers divided up Jesus’ clothes by casting lots. Verses 35-37 show how people, leaders and soldiers were mocking Jesus, saying: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” Now, could Jesus have saved himself? Of course, he could have. But he had not come to this world to save himself. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mar.10:45).

Look at verses 39-43. One of the criminals, being condemned, was mocking Jesus. But the other one rebuked him and then addressed Jesus: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus said to him: “Truly I tell you, today you





## CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY

*Mark 13:11-37 (10) "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."*

will be with me in paradise." Even on the cross Jesus forgave one repentant sinner and saved his soul.

Let us read verses 44-45. It was 12 PM, noon. Darkness settled until 3 PM. The Sun went dark and the temple curtain was torn in two. This temple curtain served as a barrier between sinners and Holy God. But Jesus' death gives forgiveness to the sinner so the way to God is opened. At that moment, when the curtain was torn from top to bottom, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. Jesus' death on the cross is the central event of human history. His death was witnessed by many people, one of whom was a Roman centurion (47). He saw everything, praised God and said: "Surely this was a righteous man."

People coming back from the execution place were beating their breasts. Then a righteous man, named Joseph, appeared. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was expecting the kingdom of God. He asked for Jesus' body, took it down, wrapped it in cloth and put it into a tomb which most probably was prepared for him and his family. When Jesus' body was laid in the tomb, some women from Galilee were there again. They are reliable witnesses. What is the meaning of Jesus' burial? Jesus died instead of us and was buried in our place too. His burial shows that our old man, my ego, is buried too and I am no more. I am a new man. I no longer live but Christ lives in me.

I was raised in a catholic family but I was at the same time soaked in the sins of lust, hatred, and envy. When I was invited to a UBF church in 1995 I did not repent but started sinning even more. My body and soul were sick because of the slavery to sin. And when I almost lost all hope for salvation, Jesus entered my life. Through his word of John 14:1-3 and Ps.91 he gave me faith,

so I believed that he died for my sins and will come back to take me the Heavenly Kingdom. God revived me for a new life. In 2005 God called me as a servant for Muslim gentiles and I have lived in Turkey since then. Before I moved to Turkey I thought that I was a good man. But in the land of mission and loneliness, all my hidden lusts and sins surfaced, even flesh depravity and drunkenness as well as pride, judging others and criticism. All dark and evil deeds were there. I did not know what to do. I was asking myself: how can a missionary who is responsible for a nation be so sinful? I realized that I was sick and needed a doctor, my Savior and good shepherd Jesus. Looking at Jesus hanging on the cross and praying for sinners, I accept God's all-forgiving love which washes away all my sins, all my shame and condemnation. Looking at Jesus, I forgive wrong-doers from my heart, and God is purging my heart from hatred. I pray that God strengthen me to serve Turkey and Muslim nations.

Nowadays, religions of good works are fast spreading in the world, such as Islam, Catholicism etc. All such religions deceive people that a person can save him/herself from sin by his own good works, merits, rituals or sacraments. This is a big lie. Just as a human heart is completely depraved (Jer.17:9), so are all works done by man. They are dirty like filthy rags and all thoughts and intentions of a man are evil from his youth (Gen. 8:21). I must not be delusional regarding my condition before God. The only word that I can approach God with is: Lord, forgive me. Only Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, can save a sinner.

Jesus prayed on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." I pray that the all-forgiving love of God may pour out upon each one of us and make CIS the Kingdom of God. Amen. 🌍

In our days the interest of people to the end of the world is great. There are different views on this event but only the Bible can with all authority tell us about the last days because God himself is the author of the Bible. I pray that through today's passage we accept God's point of view on the history of the world and the purpose of Jesus' disciples.

### Part 1. Signs of the end of the world (1-13)

Look at verse 1 "As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

This conversation took place not long before the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Even though Jesus was warning his disciples about this, their attention was fully attracted by the beauty of the temple of Jerusalem. The temple was situated at the pinnacle of the mountain and was surrounded by huge walls. The building was made of marble and its ceiling, roof and gates were covered with pure gold. All this was showing the might of the official religion and its priests.

But Jesus saw the spiritual emptiness of the temple in which there was no more place for the presence of God. That is why Jesus was predicting its destruction. For the Jews, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the world. Disciples asked Jesus about the signs of this event.

Look at verses 3-4 "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

The first sign is: seduction by the false messiahs and false prophets (verses 5-6) "Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many."

In the last days some people will arise who will pretend to be Jesus' messengers and even Jesus himself. In verse 22 they are called false messiahs and false prophets, and such people will be many in the last days. They will act both in religious domain and outside of it. All these liars look great in the eyes of people. They will perform miracles and great signs. But their influence will be aimed at leading all people astray, away from the Gospel.

Why is this seduction so dangerous? It is because it is trying to steal salvation from us. Sister Nazgul repented in Almaty but later went back to her native town. There she met Korean followers of Park Ok Su who outwardly looked more pleasant and kind than our UBF missionaries. Nazgul did not even notice that their teaching was not in accordance with the Bible. Only with Mark and Ruth's family help from Bishkek, Nazgul could see the deception and leave them. Now she is serving God in Bishkek.

Second sign: wars and rumors of wars. Look at verse 7 "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."

There used to be an opinion that all wars would stop if the humanity developed well enough. But history proved this theory to be wrong, the world was shaken by two world wars. Local wars rage every decade. Until now we have heard about wars which were fought somewhere far away, for example in the Middle East and Afghanistan. But today the war is raging in Ukraine, right within us. When we think about this we become really fearful. But Jesus tells us "do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."

Third sign: Global catastrophes. Verse 8 “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.”

All catastrophes show how unstable our world is and weak before the forces of nature. Literally, before my departure from Almaty there was an earthquake in Almaty with magnitude of 5.2. All people woke up in fear in the middle of the night. But I saw that God’s word was coming true: the fast spreading of Ebola virus, race fights in the USA, bloody enmity between the Palestinians and Israelites in Gaza. They say that there are about 300 acting volcanoes in Earth which are ready to erupt. How many more catastrophes are still waiting for us?!

Forth sign: persecutions against Christians. Look at verse 9 and 11. “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”

Persecutions of Jesus’ disciple will come not from the atheists but in the synagogues and courts which represent the official religion. In those days faithful disciples of Jesus will receive the labels of fanatics. But on the other hand, exactly at that time every Christian will become mighty witness of the Gospel due to the work of the Holy Spirit. Relatives will also persecute Christians. Look at verse 12-13a. “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents

and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me” At such times Jesus’ disciples will be required to have a holy patience because verse 13b tells us “but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

So, we can see that in the last days we will hear a lot of bad news but we should not be afraid of anything. We have to look at what God is doing at this time. Where is God then? What is he doing in this time?

## Part 2. First the Gospel will be preached to all nations

Let us read together verse 10 “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” In this verse, two important truths are revealed:

First, the history of the world is ruled by God. God is the Creator of heaven and earth and is the ruler of history. God began history and he will end it. God has a certain purpose in this – the Gospel must first be preached to all nations.

If we look at the events around us we cannot understand their meaning. Every day military coups happen, power changes, wars, economic crises, various actions of political and military organizations like NATO and the UN, European Union, -- they are created and shut down --, catastrophes, epidemics and so on. When people do not know why all these things happen, they become the victims of the circumstances. Yes, powerful people in the world, such as Obama, Putin, Merkel, Ban Ki-moon act out of their ambitions or the positions they occupy. But God is using all these events to reach his own goal. His main goal is to spread the Gospel to all nations.

That is why all history is developing for the sake of reaching this goal. And when the Gospel is preached to all nations, human history will end. Believers should see not only the events themselves but the great plan of God behind them all. Then we will never be in despair or anger. On the contrary, we’ll be able to serve God’s work in all circumstances without hesitation. This is the Christian view on history. We have to have such point of view.

Second, let us read verse 10 again “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” Through this verse we learn the true status of Jesus’ disciples. We are standing in the main stream of human history. God is doing his work through us. Nobody values preachers and shepherds in this world. People think that the main characters in history are powerful political leaders and businessmen, presidents, top people of the Forbes List, even terrorists. But this is a very much mistaken point of view. From God’s perspective all these people are just a bunch of humans – and the main characters are the preachers of the Gospel. This is a wonderful truth.

Look, an unknown shepherd is studying the Bible in a basement with one student. Who can see a history-maker in him? Or a shepherd is delivering a message in a small congregation? Who pays attention to this?! But the history is driven by them! Amen.

If God has such view on us then how should we view ourselves? For example, can we regard ourselves merely a pitiful resident of Moscow, Odessa or Almaty? No! In God’s eyes, we are the main characters of human history, history-makers! Let us greet each other with the words: you are a history maker.

Normally, our first goal in life and our major mission is the world evangelization! Nothing in this world can be higher than this. If we lose this mission, we start wandering. Then Jesus’ disciple can become just as victim of circumstances just like the people of this world. I pray that each one of us may have the Christian view on history and faithfully participate in the world mission!

## Part 3. The Glorious coming of Jesus (14-37)

Look at verse 14-17 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!”

Last days the spiritual order which was established by God in the beginning of creation will be distorted. Great apostasy will appear on Earth. Then everybody must remember Jesus’ words “Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.” This means that we must not be tied to the earthly life. Whoever lives thinking that all they have is life on earth, will perish like Lot’s wife.

Jesus gives his advice “Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has



chosen, he has shortened them.”

In those days not only physical but also spiritual trouble will happen. It is the great seduction by the false messiahs. Jesus is warning us: “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”

“But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ In this darkest time, when the distress will reach its culmination, all of a sudden the Lord Jesus will appear! Let us read verse 26 altogether. “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” Amen.

What will the Lord Jesus do during his second coming? “And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.” Jesus will gather his faithful disciples who underwent suffering starting from Irkutsk, Tashkent, Odessa, Osh, Moscow, Almaty, Astana, Bishkek, Yekaterinburg, Perm, Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, Riga, Minsk, Dushanbe, N. Novgorod, St. Petersburg, Istanbul and from all continents. And he will say to us: Well done, my good and faithful servant! And he will wipe out all tears from our eyes and give us the crown of glory! Our real hope is in this!

In the day of the second coming the grand finale of human history will take place! What does Jesus say to us, those who live on earth in the last days? He warns us to always be ready for

his glorious second coming. “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Through today’s passage I learned about two pillars of Christian faith:

1. The faith in the second coming of Jesus. This means that I have to live expecting Jesus’ return at any moment.
2. The faith which is obedient to God’s mission. God’s servants have the power and command to preach the Gospel to all nations.

While preparing this message God reminded me that I was saved by the message of the Gospel. If there was no messenger I would be left without salvation and lived in the stream of the worldly life. But my meaningless life was changed when I began to study the Bible in my second year in college. After Jesus came into my heart I began to invite my friends and people around me to Bible studies and messages. Even though I did not understand anything in the spiritual world but my life gained was filled with the purpose to preach the Gospel. But after I graduated, I began to work and was gradually soaked by my job. In this way I lost my calling to preach the Gospel to all nations. Then my heart became full of emptiness which I was trying to fill with many sins, starting from sexual lust and ending with self-righteousness and pride. Finally, I was very close to losing everything that was dear to me: Kingdom of God, mission, my family and my dear community. Only by God’s grace, he helped me to humble myself and repent. I thank God for renewing my calling to preach the Gospel. But in order not to go back to my past sins I have to be on guard. Also, through this passage I repent that I only preached during SWS and do not preach outside our Bible center to unbelievers. I pray that through Mark 13:10 God would restore the expectation of the second coming of Jesus in my heart and the greatest priority to preach the Gospel for me and our community, as well as all servants in CIS, Ukraine and Baltic states!

I pray that we have God’s view on history and actively participate in it by preaching the Gospel to all nations until the glorious day of Jesus’ second coming !!! 🙏



## A BRUISED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.” Matthew 12:20

### Part 1. My life was a bruised reed and a smoldering wick

My name is Botagoz. I was born in 1983 in Korgalzhin area in Kazakhstan. My mother had forsaken me immediately after my birth, since she was not married. I did not like to stay in the orphanage because the tutors always punished us with no reasons. I hated them for it. I wanted to grow up faster, not to be hurt again. Once, when I was playing with a ball, a boy came up to me and began to take away the ball. He pushed me and I hit on the door jamb so badly that I injured my head and started to bleed. After that I began to be afraid of older children, and at the same time all my aggression I began to pour out at the younger and the defenseless. So, I unjustly struck the girl in the group while she was playing. I took her toy plate, threw it and hit right in the head. She cried. I went to her and said that she was to blame. In this orphanage I liked only one thing: when we were taken out for a walk in the woods.

I dreamed that my mom would find

and rescue me. But this did not happen. I felt lonely. Growing up, I became to hate my mom. I began to think that I no longer needed her, that I can handle myself in this life. But really, deep down, I wanted her to be near me to love and support in difficult situations. To get rid of the feeling of loneliness, I started going to the gym, signed up for the drawing. I thought that if I could suppress my peers, I would be more respected and people would listen to my opinions. So I tried to draw attention to myself and to find fellowship with others. But at the same time I felt fatalistic about the fact that I was destined to live as a loser whom nobody likes and no one needs. My heart was hardened, I was easily annoyed, misbehaved and hurt many children and adults. Sometimes I wanted to get far away from myself somewhere, because I felt very ashamed. But I could not apologize because of my pride. Because of my quick temper and loneliness I suffered from much self-condemnation and thought that it would last forever. I started drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and going to a disco with my friends. One day I drank

so much alcohol that I was not allowed to enter my hostel. I saw that in this way of life I could not fill the inner emptiness, loneliness and fear. No one had control over me. I was ashamed and disgusted by my life. I hated myself, thinking, if this was all I would have in life. I even did not want to live sometimes. I was disappointed in myself, not having meaning and purpose in life.

### Part 2. One-sided love of God brought me to life

In 2007, a friend invited me to UBF. It was winter time before Christmas. Everyone in the church was laughing, having fun. I also wanted to be happy, but I did not know how. Through God’s word I learned that Jesus Christ was born to save all men including me from sin and death. I started studying the Bible with a shepherd. I was particularly touched by the word of Genesis 1:31 “And God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.” This word deeply touched my heart, because living without God I did not know what I was living for. There was no meaning and purpose in my life, but the word of God re-



vealed to me that I was created “very good” for God. After the Bible study I received the hope for change and joy. Word from Matthew 6:33, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well” helped me to attend Sunday Worship faithfully. Before meeting with Jesus, I worked every Sunday. But in Jesus I have decided to devote Sunday to God. My co-workers started strongly condemning me because of that. Although I was afraid of condemnation but still I tried to participate in worship services faithfully. God filled my heart His joy. In addition, living in a common life helped me spiritually. I got up early for the daily bread and morning prayer to reflect on the word, and I went with my sisters to the campus to invite students. I am very grateful to God for His mercy and love for me, because people of the world do not have such love.

In 2007, I participated in the Summer Bible Conference for the first time. God blessed me at this conference. I was particularly touched by the word about the cross, where Jesus forgave His enemies, who put him to death, and crucified. He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing”. Also, the word convicted me in my unwillingness to forgive my mother. But when I found her, she drank a lot of vodka and smoked. I was ashamed to come home. I did not want to believe that it was my mom. I condemned her and hated her and did not want to see her. But thanks to the word about the cross, I forgave her and prayed for her salvation, for the salvation of my family. She stopped drinking alcohol at home and

helps her children. Now I pray that she may accept Jesus Christ, because she considers herself a Muslim.

At the spring conference, God helped me to open the sin of lust through the word of Isaiah 1:18, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Before the conference, I wrote a life testimony where I confessed all my sins in detail. It was difficult and embarrassing, but God helped me realize my sin deeply, and see how I was dying because of my sins. I accepted Jesus, who did not condemn me, but wanted me to be free from sin and condemnation. I received forgiveness from Jesus Christ, and none of the people could judge me. During fall of 2009 till spring of 2010, I became seriously ill. After the hospital I was not allowed to work. I had little faith in the future and did not know how to live on, but I decided to rely more on the word of God and prayer. At this time, I saw how God did not leave me and my life was important for him. God gave me a suitable job which involved interpersonal skills. Through this God has expanded my narrow selfish heart. He wanted to use my precious life, and taught me humility, submission and obedience. I began to serve Him in the church actively. When the sisters went fishing, I too went with them and helped them. I served God in the church, using my talent to decorate the church building.

On May 4, 2013 God created a house church through me and brother Bolat. I thank God for the help of our shepherds,

for the word of God, which has helped us to obey and prepare for the wedding properly. Thank you for your prayers and for the support of all brothers and sisters. I thank God for b. Bolat, that he is a loyal and honest and sacrificial servant of God. God can use his talents, his golden hands to serve at conferences and in the church. Now, God wants to use b. Bolat as a preacher. God showed me that He can use our family in His salvation history. At this conference we invited our niece Gulminur to hear about Jesus Christ and received salvation, but her family did not allow her to go. Then our family went and served her grandmother and helped her at her home farming. Brother Bolat fixed all electricity problems there. Thank God that God has accepted our humble ministry and helped to obtain the permission of her family. God uses our family in his history. I pray that God may raise brother Bolat as a preacher for many students, and I may be the mother of prayer. Now our family is praying to go and serve to Azerbaijan. I thank God for His mercy to me. If I did not know him, what would become of my life? But through His love I live a new life. His love for me moves my heart deeply. I pray that I may serve other perishing people with His love.

One word: God’s love made a bruised bone strong! 🙏

## CHOSEN FROM THE DARKNESS INTO JESUS’ WONDERFUL LIGHT



*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness, into His wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9*

### I. Life in the darkness

I am Ruthie, the daughter of Michael Thompson, who came from Chicago to Russia as a missionary in 2009. I am 19 years old and I am studying to teach Russian as a foreign language in Saint Petersburg.

In my childhood I was a carefree girl who often sang and danced, but rarely brushed her hair. My mother tenderly cared for my two brothers and I, and my father always took time to take us fishing, read to us and take us to the park. For the most part life was sweet, but from time to time my mother would become sick mentally and would have to go to the hospital. One time my mother became sick again, but this time was not getting better. In 2005 she

passed away. That time was very difficult and scary for us. However, amidst the fear and sorrow or death, Our Heavenly Father’s love shined brighter. His love and protection literally covered us. Our brothers and sisters prayed for us and served us in any and every way possible. Although I didn’t know why this happened, I knew one thing, that God is good. I knew that He loved me and our family and would never leave us.

After my mother’s death, I often contemplated on why my life was so cruel. I asked God, “Why did my mom have to be sick in such a way? Why did she have to die? Why can’t we live normal lives like everyone else in America? Why does my father have to chase this dream of going to Russia?” In my heart I often compared my-

self to my friends thinking I wasn’t pretty or wasn’t rich enough. When I told this to my bible teacher, she gave me 1 Peter 2:9 as a key verse “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness, into His wonderful light.” At first I didn’t understand this verse, thinking that it only meant that I was better than everyone else. I began to think that since I suffered a lot, I was better than my peers and friends. My outward holiness and wisdom was deceiving. Already in junior high school I became addicted to masturbation and pornography. I felt disgusting and worthless. Many times I tried to change and even could keep myself from this sin for months, but sooner or later I feel into





it again and started to hate myself for it. At the same time I started to fear that I would become sick like my mother. I was in darkness and didn't know how to get out.

## II. Jesus called me into His Wonderful light!

In the summer of 2009 my father told my brother and I that we were finally going to Russia. I didn't really oppose him, thinking that it would be good experience. When we arrived in St. Petersburg though, things were very difficult. We experienced culture shock, a language barrier and loneliness. My father and our brothers and sisters prayed for God's wisdom and help. Despite my brother's and my rebellion, God helped us stay in Russia, providing everything we needed. Charles and I soon entered a Christian International School, where we studied with many missionary kids. God granted us many new Christian friends helped us adapt to Russia. They loved us dearly with the hearts of Jesus, which amazed me and brought me closer to God. The Lord also helped me come closer to our coworkers at church. My shepherdess, Natasha, sacrificially studied the bible with me in English at first, caring for me as a sister.

Soon God gave us a new direction to study in Russian public school. At our new school God blessed us with kind, patient friends and teachers. At first I cried a lot, thinking it was impossible to finish the first

year. My father, however, encouraged me to do my best and let God do the rest. I learned to depend only on God every day to say alive at school and the Lord poured showers of mercy on Charles and me. At the end of the year we passed our exams, getting A's on three of them. Praise the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness. From that year I learned that I can truly put my trust in God to help me in every hardship!

At beginning of junior year I thought a lot about the meaning of life and if I would go to heaven. Every day I would wake up thinking, "what's the meaning to all of this?" I wanted to run away from that question, but I came to a point when I needed to know the answer to it. At that time I didn't know Jesus personally, but He knew me and pushed in towards my heart. In my sorrow I remembered how many people in their life testimonies talked about how they received meaning in Jesus Christ. So I started to read the bible a lot. Little by little God opened to me His Son. Jesus Christ, a man who I had read about all my life but never really knew, suddenly revealed himself to me. His word had power and authority. He healed my heart and filled me with the truth. Still, at that time I battled greatly with my past, my sexual sin. I felt somewhat tormented by the lustful, dark and hateful thoughts which constantly were in my head. Finding who Jesus Christ was, the Holy Son of God,

I finally realized who I was, a real sinner, one dying in my sins. I felt so ashamed before God and in my soul I cried out "How can Jesus forgive me?" I searched for this forgiveness and though I saw it on every page of God's word, I somehow could not accept it. Deep in my heart I couldn't grasp that fact that Jesus Christ forgives me personally. I still wanted to hold on to my self-righteousness, but finding more and more how sinful and dark my heart really was, I despaired.

One night in my last hopes I opened my bible searching for God's forgiveness. I read Romans 3: 22- 24, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." God opened to me His marvelous love in Christ. I understood that I receive forgiveness and eternal life not by my own righteousness, but by God's grace in Jesus Christ. Jesus freed me from the chains of pride, complexes, condemnation, freed me the chains of lust and masturbation never to be enslaved again. Jesus forgave all my awful sins, removed all my shame and gave me new life through His holy blood. That hour I prayed for forgiveness and became a child of God, filled with joy and meaning in life. Praise God for His grace and mercy for saving sinners freely when they put their faith in Him! I

was dead, but I now alive in Christ. I am new!

After this, God has been working in me, making me His new creation. He has been teaching me to put His word to practice every day. Before I considered myself holier than my classmates and friends, but by receiving God's grace I realized just how much of an undeserving sinner I really was. The Lord has been teaching me to trust my Savior Jesus for my righteousness, and serve my friends and classmates in His love. God taught me that I have direction, joy and meaning in living for His glory. God is good so good!

In God's rich mercy, my brother and I were able to pass all our exams, finish Russian school and enroll in Saint Petersburg State University with full scholarships. While waiting for our visas in America I was able to spend a lot of time with the Lord and make my own personal decision to move to Russia as a missionary. My key verse is 1 Peter 2: 9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness, into His wonderful light." Before, I lived in the darkness of pride, sin and fear. I thought that I was chosen and royal because I was great. However, this was a lie. I am chosen, royal, and holy because of Jesus Christ. I do not belong to this world, to darkness, death, fear, but

to God my Creator, the One who so loved me that He would rather die, than be separated from me. I was born, I was redeemed not to live a life for myself or keep my faith a secret. I was created to declare the praise of Him who called me out of darkness, into His wonderful life. Now I walk in the light! Hallelujah!

My freshman year I struggled a lot with academics and with keeping my First Love. I moved to the dorm and wanted to talk to many people, however, studied very poorly. My spiritual fire died down partly because of the lack of God's word. I became very lazy, stayed up late and woke up even later. I thought everything was ok, since this is how students usually live. However, the Lord later pointed out my sin to me after I had failed some exams. Through our brothers and sisters, God taught me that my academics are also part of my duty before God. As children of God, we are born to succeed not only spiritually, but also academically. I often thought that I couldn't keep up with everything that I have to do at school, church and home. However, through our Genesis study this year I learned how God is an Almighty God who works through the most ordinary people like Abraham and Sarah, when they follow and obey Him. Sh. Larisa from Kiev came this summer to visit and she has trained me to be disciplined, to get up on time, do daily bread every morning and study seriously. Her prayer for Russia

has inspired me to pray for my country and for the entire world. This summer God has wrestled with my heart, like He wrestled with Abraham's heart to make him see His vision for Abraham. When I compared our ministry to other large ministries I despaired, but when I stopped looking at myself, my brothers and sisters and even our meeting place, God opened my eyes to see His glory, to see His plan to make Russia and the CIS a kingdom where Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen! I am weak and can do nothing by myself. However, our God is Almighty, ready to save everyone who comes to Him. Amen! I pray to declare Jesus' praises in my university and in my dormitory, in my city and in all of Russia, for He has called me out of darkness into His wonderful light! Amen!

One Word: Declare the praises of Jesus Christ! 🙏

# ROYAL PRIESTHOOD



*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9*

## Part 1. Life in darkness

My name is Paula Yumshanova, I was born in Perm, Russia as the only child in the family. Love and care of my parents about their only daughter made me happy on one hand and selfish on the other. Thanks to good training from my parents I easily entered Perm’s most prestigious school with profound learning of English. I was really proud of this though not for long, because my classmates were the children of politicians and well-to-do businessmen but my parents couldn’t even afford buying me new clothes. Though I studied well, with my classmates showing me contempt for my used clothes and plain appearance, I severely suffered from an inferiority complex and envy. When I was 8, my loving grandfather died and since that I never ceased to suffer from fear of death. The idea that I am to die and everything I’ve done will be forgotten made everything seem meaningless. Even in my most joyful moments I remembered I was going to die, I imagined the darkness of death and this darkness overcame me and quenched all my joy. I dreamed to make my mark that would not vanish even with death and live a great life, but I actually lived not as I wanted to. Coming back from school, I

would turn on the TV and watch sitcoms, even the dumbest ones, for hours. I lived like an animal: ate and slept much. I didn’t care how I looked and couldn’t even comb my hair properly. Once at home I found a book with very lustful episodes in it, and read it. Through it the sin of lust overtook me and controlled me. I felt like a filthy animal and wanted to stop thousands of times, but I couldn’t give up this addiction. Once even my Mom found me doing this. I cursed and hated myself for what I was. I thirsted for true romance, but dating couldn’t give me that. Adulterous relationship made me feel even dirtier and abhor myself even more.

I also was rebellious and denied all my parents’ training, and so our family environment was stressful. Endless scandals made me dream of going away. It seemed that moving to the other city would give me new life. And so in 2004 I entered the Moscow State University. But it didn’t give me new life as long as all my sins and bad habits moved to Moscow with me. I cried with despair not realizing why I having it all feel myself so lonely and unhappy.

## Part 2. God called me into His wonderful light

In the very beginning of my first year,

I was invited to a Bible study. I thought I wasn’t at all a church person, but still I came. In the first Bible study the word of John 15:5 touched my heart. The words of Jesus “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” – were the answer to my question what I was lacking to receive full life and happiness – I realized I was lacking God. So I started studying the Bible with spiritual desire. But though I studied the Bible faithfully, I denied Jesus as my Savior and the Son of God thinking that if I tried hard, I would become like Him. But in the 2005 Summer Bible Conference God let me meet Jesus personally through Luke 23:34b “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” I was so astounded with the love of Jesus to the people who were killing Him and mocking Him. His love and forgiveness shone for me like a great light. And in this light I saw my mean and evil heart; how I couldn’t forgive even my dearest people for years. I confessed my anger and unforgiveness before the cross of Jesus. At this very moment God poured out His love and forgiveness into my heart and the Holy Spirit gave me new birth. All darkness vanished and the wonderful light of Jesus and His love shone in my heart.



## Part 3. Declare the praises of God

I was so overwhelmed with joy that I couldn’t hold it back. Quite soon everybody knew that Jesus had forgiven me and cleansed me, and several friends of mine started studying the Bible. I also joyfully accepted God’s calling to serve students and God gave me several sheep to Bible study. Over time, God gave us direction to pioneer the universities MGIMO and RGUNG. It seemed that successful and promising students of these universities would never listen Gospel, but at this moment God supported me with His amazing promise through Genesis 12,1b-2 “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” I was so terrified to invite students to our center situated in a flat but still God gave me faith to challenge this mountain. All of a sudden, several students started studying the Bible faithfully and invited some more, and so our feast was filled with guests. I was very busy praying and studying the Bible and caring about several sisters with whom we lived common life. While giving back to God what was God’s, I never cared about giving back to caesar what was caesar’s thinking that, if I serve God so faithfully, He will anyway help me pass my exams. Still, when they came, I was so terrified feeling not prepared.

Eventually, I allowed my fear rule over me, skipped several exams and was expelled from the MSU. All the students whom all of us served so diligently, left. Pain, condemnation and humiliation I was going through seemed endless and meaningless. In my heart, I went away from God so far and I wanted to leave church and mission behind. But when I went away from God, He went after me. He found me in the darkness of my despair and pierced my heart by Ruth 1,16-17 “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” Through Ruth’s decision of faith God renewed my decision to follow Jesus to the end. He helped me make a fresh start and reenter the MSU in my fifth and final year, and He gave me other sheep with deeper spiritual desire. Though while finishing my studies I also had to work to fully support myself, God helped me get all excellent marks in my exams and defend my graduation thesis excellently by faith and for His glory.

In general, declaring praises of the One who called me out of darkness and into His wonderful light wasn’t always piece of cake for me, but it has always been the

most blessed life for me. In the mission field I had to face hardship and painful training through my studies, job, coworkers and sheep. Once even the brother of a student who studied the Bible with me, threatened to put me in prison for false cause and to kill me. But in Jesus, in His love and light God worked for my good in all things and made me more than conqueror. I had to repent in my weak and warm love to Jesus and learn to follow Him and not the sheep. Jesus became all my life, joy and hope. Through mission life in a pioneering center God deepened my love to Him and my hope for His glorious Kingdom. In the light of Jesus my life at any moment was truly and abundantly blessed. I pray to grow in love to God and others and to raise 1 Abraham and 1 Sarah in MGIMO and RGUNG.

One word: Declare the praises of him who called me out of darkness into His wonderful light 🙏

# FIRST CIS 2ND GEN. Summer Bible Conference

Over 20 years in the history of the CIS mission has elapsed. So far, God himself has been taking care of all CIS 2nd gens and this was a good chance for them to gather in one place. Thankfully, even the 2nd gens of native shepherds also participated in the conference. A total of 66 2nd gens (24 elementary students and 42 Middle & High school students) gathered for the first time. The theme of the conference was "I'm Seeking

the Kingdom of God." The historical conference was held on August 21 until August 24 at Moscow Pokrobckoe Retreat Center.

The elementary group and M & H school groups were divided for Bible study and messages, but for play, outdoor activities, and singing-along they gathered together.

On August 21 at 4:00 pm they gathered together on the beautiful lake shore and heard the opening message delivered

by Sh. Ivan, entitled, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near!" (Matt. 3:2) and thereafter had a delicious sausage barbecue party.

The first day of the evening, we studied Matthew 5: 1-12 (The Beatitudes). In the morning on the second day there was a message on "2nd Gens' Identity" by M. Jose Ahn. That night, there was M. Isaac Choi's message based on Matt. 7: 13-28, entitled, "The House Built on the Rock," with a slides



presentation for their easy understanding. On the third day, M. Joshua Park delivered a message based on Matt. 8: 1-17, entitled, "Jesus Who Bore our Weaknesses". In the fourth day morning, M. Pabel Choi served the Sunday message entitled "Seek First his Kingdom and his Righteousness" based on Matt. 6:19-34.

On the other hand, elementary group studied many parables of the kingdom of God from Matt. 13: 45, 46 & 31, 32 (parables of the Pearl and Mustard Seed), Matt. 7: 24-27 (The house built on the rock), Matt. 8: 5-13 (The faith of the centurion) and Matt. 6: 25-34 (Our Heavenly Father who knows all our needs). Through these messages our 2nd gens could have a concept of the heavenly kingdom. After each message, we tried to help them to have better understanding through doing some activities such as handcrafts and drawing that are related to the message.

During the day, we mainly enjoyed playing games and many outdoor activities. All elementary and M & H school kids got along well together playing with great shouting. We had a time of praise for 30 minutes to one hour every single day for three days, which greatly contributed to making all kids to be one in heart and mind in Jesus.

### Specific features of this conference:

1. All the 2nd gens including 2nd gens of native shepherds scattered in each remote lonely place assembled in one place

for the first time.

They all formed unity treating very precious one another. A kid in grade 10 confessed that he was so happy even when he felt empty after sharing with his brothers all gifts that he had gained through games. Another 10th grader gave hugs and jumped around when he met a fellow of the same age. Some native 2nd gens were hesitating to attend this conference, but after the conference they confessed that they want to attend the conference again next year. Some kids shared their reflections with crying and repentance. At the third night of the CIS conference all 60 attendees sang the chorus, "When You Believe" (Moses, OST of the prince of Egypt) with one heart and mind. God abundantly blessed this chorus and we all were greatly comforted and could see a vision for CIS to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

2. All 2nd gens volunteered and served this conference with a sense of stewardship.

Including translating and interpreting Russian into Korean, all programs like writing testimonies and messages, presentation, praise and singing-along, dance and duet drama went well by M & H school students themselves. They looked so cute and we were so happy to see them all doing their best to serve God.

3. Seeds of prayers were planted in all 2nd gens' hearts through this conference.

Many missionaries and shepherds from all over the world not only prayed for this

conference, but also participated in this conference. M. Catherine Han and Sh. Artom & Ruth's family from Moscow prayed a lot to serve this conference; M. David Byun, CIS Coordinator, and M. Isaac Choi from USA prayed and supported it. Sh. Gurdia, Jonathan Kim, Geon Ju Song, Minju Kim also participated with much prayer from Kwangju UBF, Korea and led group Bible study with much fun. Singspiration was served by M. Peter Lim from New Jersey, USA. M. Jose P. Ahn, M. Isaac Choi, Joshua Park, M. Pabel Park, M. Mark Bang, and Sh. Artom Datsenko, Sh. Ivan Fominykh served all 2nd gens messages with sincere prayers.

It was the first time for all 2nd gens in CIS to get together, so we need to keep praying for them to grow steadily. It is a very important period for them to grow over the next three to four years.

Thank God who loves all our 2nd gens in CIS! May God abundantly bless them all to grow spiritually to be the hosts of the kingdom of God with a clear spiritual identity as children of God! 🙏



NEW HOUSE CHURCHES



Active & Geeta, India



Andrew & Anna, Sydney, Australia



Charles & Haime Koh, New York, US



Ryan & Jing Liebert, LA, US



David & Anna Shin, Czech Republic



Ben & Rebekah West, Minneapolis, US



Jeremiah & Yaejin Park, UIUC, US



Andrei & Galrya, Kiev, Ukraine



Wonly & Yvonne Lee, Korea



Francis & Theresa Choi, Chicago, US



Inhyun & April Cho, Korea



Edward & Irma, Chicago, US



Joseph & Grace Im, Chicago, US



Andrew & Natalka Cuevas, LA, US



John & Sarah Little Dang, Milwaukee, US