

## **“The Brilliance of Two-Sword Style”**

Romans 10:13-15

March 30, 2025

by Ptr. Yuzuru Yamaguchi

I am very happy and sincerely grateful to be allowed to worship with you all this morning. My name is Yuzuru Yamaguchi. I have been serving at Shimokitazawa Bible Church in Setagaya-ku, Tokyo until this March, and from April I have been led to serve at a church in Bangkok, Thailand. I mentioned that I would be serving in Bangkok, Thailand, but this will actually be my third time serving there.

I have been asked, “How much do you like Thailand?” But when I came to Tsuchiura church, I must mention this. At the time, our church was planning to send missionaries to Indonesia and Thailand. So it was assumed that I would go to Indonesia. In fact, I visited Indonesia for about 10 days to learn about the situation. At that time, I stayed up all night with the missionary who took care of me discussing the overseas mission. I think it was very annoying for him. However, he was patient with me because of the expectation that I would come to Indonesia.

And yet, in spite of all that, I, Yamaguchi went to Thailand instead of Indonesia. What was that patience and forbearance of that missionary to me at that time? I became a Thai missionary who was pointed at with the back of my head, saying, “That traitor”. Such things do happen in the Lord’s leading.

Forty years have passed since then. It has been exactly 40 years this year. The traitor, in his own way, is trying his best to follow the Lord’s leading to serve in Thailand for the third time. I believe that this is my sincerity to the former missionary to Indonesia (Pastor. Seino), who truly supports me with a warm gaze while calling me a “traitor”.

Thus, my first service was for 14 years from 1985, mainly in Thai churches, with a sub-service in Japanese language church. During

that time, the members of Tsuchiura Megumi Church have given me unspeakable support, not only in prayer, but also in concrete, human, and financial ways. Some of you may say, “I served, too”.

As a result, a church called Mahaporn Sangsoon Church has been built. In Japanese, it is called the Great Blessing and Praise Church. It is a small church with only a handful of members. But the name “Great Blessing and Praise Church” is very bold. What kind of church is this? This church is located in a small slum in a corner of Bangkok. Most streets in Bangkok have names, and the authorities put up signs with the names on them. One day, a new sign was put up on the street that serves as the entrance to the slum. It read “Soi Loso.” “Soi” means ‘alley,’ but I did not understand “loso”. I took out my Thai dictionary, but could not find “loso” anywhere. So I asked a young man at the church, “I saw ‘loso’ on the new signboard, what does it mean?” He looked a little uncomfortable and said, “That’s not Thai, it’s English. I realized what he said. I realized that “Lo-So” on the signboard is the opposite of “Hi-So”. The opposite of high society, upper class and wealthy. I don’t know if there is such an English word as “low society,” but it means “low-society” in the sense of so-called “lower class” or “poor people. So, the government has named a road “Soy Loso” or “Loso Lane” and even erected a signboard for it. It is a small slum, but it is such a discriminated area. When their church was established, they named it Mahaporn Sangsoon Church / Great Blessing Praise Church by themselves. It is a bold name for a church in such a discriminated area, and it shows their spirit.

Of course, this is not a big talk, like the howl of a loser. It has been about 35 years since the start of the church, and there is a young man who, through the prayers of the church and a scholarship, graduated from university and became a Japanese teacher at Thammasat National University, a well-known university. There is a young man who became a kindergarten teacher and is now involved in early childhood education, another who works as an accountant in a company. There is even a woman who is a pastor’s wife of a small church in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. They have been named by

the government as a “low-ranked person,” yet they are active members of the society.

I believe that this is the result of the Lord’s answer to the service of those who visited us with their backpacks on their backs and your prayers. It was not a face-to-face encounter, but rather, they became friends and blended into each other. It was not a service or support that made them stand out and increase their presence, but rather service and support that makes them less needed.

Therefore, they do not feel that they were helped by the Japanese or that they were able to do it with the help of foreigners. They are proud of their faith that Jesus has done so much for them. It is a small church in a small slum, but as the name implies, it is a flock that truly praises God for His great blessings. I think you also can be thankful to the Lord that you were able to be a part of it, even if only a little. I believe that you can be proud that you were able to serve and show Christ by putting yourselves out of the way.

On the other hand, there are many Japanese in Bangkok. According to a survey by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, there are currently over 50,000 Japanese living in Bangkok. This may be due to the economic situation in Japan. The number has decreased by about 10,000 in the last two years. Nevertheless, the number of Japanese living abroad is still the second largest after Los Angeles, the United States, which is in first place. There are many people living in Thailand, including those sent by companies and other organizations, those who came here on their own to seek local employment, foreign students, those who came to Thailand by marriage, and many other circumstances. The population is almost the same as that of Tsukuba Mirai City. I found that there are three or four churches in Tsukubamirai. It would not be surprising if there were churches in Japanese in Bangkok, where more than 50,000 people live. Of course, many of them are fluent in English, and many of them are fluent in Thai. But it is the Japanese language that reaches their hearts.

It is interesting to visit their houses. In Japan, there are four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. However, Bangkok has only three seasons. Hot, Hotter, and Hottest. Recently, Japanese summers have become hotter, but Bangkok is hot all year round. Yet, they drink hot green tea with relish. They like natto and tofu, some are even putting tatami mats in their rooms, and they hang pictures of Mt. Fuji on the entrance. In Japan, no one hang picture of Mr. Fuji, unless he/she is a big fan of Mt. Fuji. Yet, in Bangkok, they hang a picture of Mt. Fuji. I think that is what it means to live in a different culture.

That is why it is Japanese. Even if you understand English or Thai, it is still Japanese. It does not mean that other languages are not good. English or Thai is fine. Some one puts Thai landscape painting, not Mr. Fuji. It just means that the gospel heard in that language must be translated into the language of that person. The words we use in our daily life, the words we use when we think about something. If it is not translated into their language, it will not become their gospel. Therefore, we can say that our faith is a faith of translation. In this sense, the Japanese church in Bangkok has an identity of using Japanese as a common language and forming the church in Japanese.

Therefore, the gospel in Japanese is desired. It should be the gospel for those who live in such a society.

It is not a transplant of the Japanese church to Bangkok. They need a church for those who live in a different culture, both joyfully and anxiously.

The existing Japanese language churches do not have a Japanese background. They are not churches that were evangelized by Japanese churches. It was started by Japanese Christians who wanted to worship in Japanese, even though there are Thai and English churches. Two or three Christians gathered at their homes, sang hymns in Japanese, read the Bible in Japanese, and prayed together in Japanese. This developed into a Japanese language church. Therefore, there is no background of a Japanese church there. There is no denominational affiliation. It is a church that

gathers with the single important point of believing in the Lord Jesus. Last year marked the 60th anniversary of its foundation.

Therefore, we need people who have a correct understanding of the para-denominational church.

Even if a church is in Japanese, it must belong to a Thai denomination under Thai law. Therefore, we need someone who understands at least some Thai language. Of course, English is also acceptable, but Thai is preferable.

So, following the second service in Thailand, I was invited to become a pastor and accepted the invitation. In my first ministry, the first priority was Thai church and the Japanese church was the second. However, the second and the third time (this time), the opposite was true. The Japanese language church is the main church and the Thai church is the sub church. In any case, this two-faced approach has been in vogue for more than 40 years.

But it does not depend on a person's ability. It is about the gospel that the person has, or rather, the gospel that is woven around that person. If we need the faith as written word of the Bible, or knowledge or education, there is no need for a human being to communicate with great effort. It would be more certain if an angel or whatever could come out and do it.

What is needed, however, is not a written doctrinal teaching, but the gospel as understood by the one who delivers it. We need a gospel that weaves the speaker into the person he or she is today.

Verse 15 says, "And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

This is a quote from Isaiah 52. It refers to those who announce deliverance from bondage. Interestingly, it says that their feet are beautiful.

When I was 19 years old, I received a letter from my pastor. It said, "Yamaguchi-kun, why don't you go to seminary and become a pastor?"

I had a problem. At that time, people called seminary students would come back to the countryside during summer vacation and Christmas time and play an active role. I wanted to be like them, but I could not go to seminary because of my family situation. I thought about serving on PBA (Pacific Broadcasting Association), but when I talked to my pastor, he said that even for broadcast evangelism, it would be better to be someone who had studied at a seminary. So I thought that there was no way for me to do that kind of evangelism. The pastor ended his letter by saying, "Don't worry about the money." I think that is why the pastor wrote at the end of the letter, "Don't worry about the money. You have supporters, so all you have to worry about is your decision." Since he said that I did not need to worry about money, I immediately made the decision. However, since the seminary is in Tokyo, it is a different world for a country person. I felt uneasy and wondered if there was anyone else who was interested in going to seminary. I asked him about one of the young men who was active in the youth group, "Sensei, you say I should go to seminary and become a pastor, but what about him in the youth group?" The pastor thought for a moment and said, "He? He's not good." He's so active, but the pastor says he's not good. Then I asked, "Why is he not good?" and the pastor replied, "Him. He's too good-looking." He is what we now call handsome and good-looking. But I had never thought that sharing the gospel had anything to do with facial appearance. But he with good appearance is not good, but I am OK. What does that mean? The pastor said, "It is not a person's appearance but the person's attractiveness of Christ that captures a person. "I see, that's what you mean." I felt like I had been cajoled, but the Bible teaches us that it is not the face but the feet, not the length of the feet, but the beauty of the feet.

The beauty of the feet, that is important. Beautiful feet. Very beautiful legs? But it is the mouth that speaks the gospel. So why not say that the mouth of one who preaches the good news is beautiful? It is the mouth that speaks the gospel, not the feet. Yes, it is. The feet that the Bible speaks of are the feet that have walked through a person's life. They have been through many peaks and valleys. Therefore, feet are the person himself/herself. We need a

person who is woven into the fabric of the gospel. We need a person who has been made by the gospel.

I said, the third time for Thailand, but I will be 74 years old this year. I never thought I would be 74, but it is real. Am I OK? How long do you think I will last? Some even say, “Are you out of your mind?”

But it’s nice to have beautiful feet that shine for years and years. But it would be nice to have the feet of the elderly shining, even if it is only for a moment.

Yes, I am not alone. I am not alone. This is a proof that everyone, from young to old, has beautiful shining feet.

I am a two-faced person: a Japanese church and a Thai church. The Japanese church is involved in both domestic evangelism in Japan and world missions. I believe that each one of us living there, and each one of the churches living in this two-fold way, will have shining feet by God.

Our Lord will use each one of us more and more as beautiful and shining feet. Let us live up to the Lord’s expectations. Verse 15.

It is written as, “And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!””