

In Just a Little While 3¹

October 15th, 2013, Kichijouji Bible Study
 Gotthold Beck

1 Thessalonians, 4

13 But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve like other people who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus God will bring those who have died with him.

15 For we declare to you what the Lord has told us to say: We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have died.

16 With a shout of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of God's trumpet, the Lord himself will come down from heaven, and the dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

18 So then, encourage one another with these words

[International Standard Version]

I have to make this sermon very short, as I do not have a lot of time today. I have to fly to the city of Kochi right after this meeting. In fact, I just came back from Amami Oshima and was also in Okinawa earlier this month. As I've said on multiple occasions, although I have experienced so many things in my life, there is one thing I have never yet gone through. It is boredom. I have no idea what it feels like to be bored.

This may be a blessing for me. This time, I am going to Kochi to attend the funeral ceremony of our brother, Masao Takemoto. Just the other day, I had taken a trip to Kochi for the funeral of another of our sisters. That time, I desperately wanted to see Brother Masao too, because I knew he was in the terminal stage of cancer and had been in severe pain for a long time. Actually, I have cancer too, but it is not painful at all. So I can ignore the illness but unfortunately Masao could not. I hear that he suffered from too much pain until the very last moment. Please pray for the blessing of the Lord at this funeral.

Today, I would like to entitle this sermon, "In Just a Little While". Those who come to know Jesus have a bright and wonderful future. Because Jesus is the path, truth and life for them. A future for anyone without Jesus is one of complete darkness and solitude.

1 『もうちょっと(3)』、2013年10月22日、吉祥寺学び会、ゴットホルド・ベック

Those who experience the enlightenment of Jesus will rejoice in Him. They will be convinced that Jesus will arrive in just a little while. It gives us peace and happiness to think of that day, which for all we know, can even be today. No matter how bad our situation is, no matter how serious our problems are, we can live with hope and move forward to our future with positivity and faith. So many things are written about the future in the Bible. Jesus explained what will happen in the last days to come:

Luke 23

30 Then people will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!', and to the hills, 'Cover us up!'

From this verse, we can see that apparently the future is not rosy. Those who pray to mountains and hills are weak, foolish and helpless. Let's look at some other verses;

Revelation 6

15 Then the kings of the earth, the important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and all the slaves and free people concealed themselves in caves and among the rocks in the mountains.

16 They told the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb.

17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to endure it?

Jesus promised very clearly that 'I will return to bring you back'. This time he is not coming back to die on the cross, but to carry away all those who belong to Him. In the days of Advent, when the so-called Rapture occurs, all those who have been saved by the grace of the Lord will instantly disappear. They will be given spiritual bodies of resurrection and become one with Jesus without viewing their own deaths.

Furthermore, it is the end of the era of grace. The verses we just read predict what will happen after that: all other people will finally begin to pray. They will begin to ask for help. Unlike our ordinary prayer meetings, numerous people will join the prayers at this time. There is mention of seven independent groups of people in this part of the Bible and seven is the number that represents perfection. It implies that all those who refused the salvation of the Lamb will be gathered here.

'Terror' will bring them together. Even the most powerful men will lose their strength when this time comes. Those who arrogantly refused the salvation offered by the Lord God will now try to hide underground just like moles. This time, they would not

be seeking protection from nuclear bombs coming down from above, but from the one who sits on the throne, from the 'wrath of the Lamb', who is the Lord God. These people, in other words, will not be not trying to hide from transitory dangers such as nuclear bombs or humans, but to find cover from 'the wrath of the Lamb', the Lord Jesus. I would like to talk about three things quickly.

First, 'what kind of time' is it that they start praying? Second, 'to whom' are they praying? And finally, 'what are they praying about?'

When will they pray?

It will be after the time of 'wrath and judgment' arrives that they begin praying. However, by then it will already be too late to pray. Instead, this present era in which we are living is still the age of 'grace'. Those who repent of their sins and come to Jesus today will obtain forgiveness of their sins and receive eternal life and peace.

So many things are written about the wrath of Father God in Scripture. However, there are only a few descriptions of 'the wrath of the Lamb'. The wrath of the Lamb, leads to total destruction. The one who loved us and gave us his own life is about to show his wrath now.

When we have to face the wrath of the one who sacrificed himself to save us from the wrath of the Lord God, how can we endure it? There will be no hope left for us but it will lead to complete annihilation. When the Lamb shows his ire, there will be no salvation at all.

In Romans, chapter 8, verses 31 and 32, we find something totally opposite:

Romans 8

31 What, then, can we say about all of this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 The one who did not spare his own Son, but offered him as a sacrifice for all of us, surely will give us all things, along with his Son, won't he?

If Jesus is for us, no one can be against us. However, if Jesus is against us, who can give us salvation and who can heal our pain? When the Lamb shows his wrath, all our hope will be lost.

My second question is, 'to whom' are people praying? They are praying to 'mountains and rocks'. Such prayers are absolutely empty and meaningless. True faith dictates that only those who call on the name of

Jesus will be saved. Salvation is given only by the savior of God.

Jesus is called the 'rock' in Scripture. Even today, those who abdicate control into the hands of Jesus will be protected forever under the cover of this immovable rock. On the other hand, some people pray passionately to mountains and rocks, which is a futile and purposeless path to take. It is just worthless.

These people are captured by fear and anxiety, just as the first people, Adam and Eve, were when they tried to run away from the Lord. Awareness of sins and conscience urges people to run away from the Lord God. Sins make people cowards and fugitives from God. Some of you who are gathered in this room today might be fleeing from the Lord God and trying to find a refuge even now. If so, please stop fleeing, repent and return to Jesus today. Jesus himself is the true refuge. Jesus is waiting for each one of us to come close to him. He wants to accept us and forgive us.

Third, 'what' will these people be praying about in the years to come? As we have just read, they will come to pray, 'fall on us and hide us from his face'. These kinds of people would actually rather die than step in front of the Lord. The reason is that they have refused to admit their sins. Furthermore, they have turned away from acceptance of the salvation offered by the Lamb. And now, they are fleeing to evade 'the wrath of the Lamb'. However, no one can avoid the judgment and 'the wrath of the Lamb'.

Hebrews 9

27 Indeed, just as people are destined to die once and after that to be judged,

The judgment of God and 'the wrath of the Lamb' is not a fantasy or fable but rather a dreadful reality. 'Who shall be able to stand it?', so the people will cry out in the coming day. However, they are not crying out sincerely for help, rather, they are just screaming from fear. People don't seriously think of the judgment rendered to them until the very day they face the trial of the Lord God.

Eventually, we all have to admit that the judgment of the Lamb is righteous. To conclude, I would like to briefly ask three questions.

First, 'when' will we begin to pray? Do we want to pray now at this very time, while blessings are still available to us? Or do we wait until the time of blessings is past and all the foundations of the earth are shaken?

Isaiah 55

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.

Secondly, 'to whom' do we pray? Do we pray to the true living God, to the Lord who offers us eternal salvation through Jesus? Or, will we pray to the rocks and mountains in the years to come?

Third, 'what' do we pray for? Should we pray for our temporal protection in this life? Or, should we pray to have an immortal soul? Should we pray for ephemeral or eternal life? Nothing is more important for us than to pray at this present time, 'be merciful to me, the sinner that I am'. Only those whose sins are covered by the shed blood of the Lord will be protected on that very day.

Psalms 32

1 How blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 How blessed is the person against whom the Lord does not charge iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Jesus still remains the savior in this present time. However, on the Day of Judgment, he will no longer be the 'savior', but will turn into the 'judge'. What is the foundation of our lives? Those who have laid their foundation in Christ are truly blessed. Today, we can still hear the voice of the one who shows eternal love.

Psalms 2

12 Kiss the son before he becomes angry, and you die where you stand. Indeed, his wrath can flare up quickly. How blessed are those who take refuge in him.

For all brothers and sisters who believe in Jesus, two things are true regarding the upcoming darkest Day of Judgment. We are requested first to pray unremittingly for all unsaved people in our lives, and then further to bring them to Jesus through our unceasing labors of love.

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