

Think!¹

March 18th, 2014, Kichijouji Bible Study
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[1]

1 John 3

1 See what kind of love the Father has given us: We are called God's children—and that is what we are! For this reason the world does not recognize us, because it did not recognize him, either.

2 Dear friends, we are now God's children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

3 And everyone who has this hope based on him keeps himself pure, just as the Messiah is pure.

4 Everyone who keeps living in sin also practices disobedience. In fact, sin is disobedience.

5 You know that the Messiah was revealed to take away sins, and there is not any sin in him.

6 No one who remains in union with him keeps on sinning. The one who keeps on sinning hasn't seen him or known him.

7 Little children, don't let anyone deceive you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, just as the Messiah is righteous.

8 The person who practices sin belongs to the evil one, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason that the Son of God was revealed was to destroy what the devil has been doing.

9 No one who has been born from God practices sin, because God's seed abides in him. Indeed, he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born from God.

10 This is how God's children and the devil's children are distinguished. No person who fails to practice righteousness and to love his brother is from God.

[International Standard Version]

What is the difference between humans and animals? The most significant difference is that humans have awareness of God. Animals do not have an idea of divinity. They don't pray when they are in trouble. We, however, not only have the consciousness of divine presence, but are also given the ability to contemplate. That is why in the Bible, men are repeatedly commanded to remember, to think. Think!

If the Lord refuses to have the time to bless us today because we forgot to take a moment to thank Jesus

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yesterday, it will put us into trouble. If the Lord decides not to guide us tomorrow because we did not obey Him sincerely today, what will happen? What if the Lord takes away our Bible tomorrow because we did not read His words today?

If we close our ears to someone proclaiming the words (of Jesus), the Lord may stop talking to us. Then what will we do? How would you feel if (someone tells you that) the Lord is concerned about us, loves us and cares about us as much as we worry about and love our neighbours? If the Lord refuses to receive our prayers today because we turned a deaf ear to the voice of the Lord yesterday, it will be an unimaginable tragedy.

It will be nothing but a tragedy if we refuse to devote everything to the Lord and as a result, He decides to close His ears forever to us. Try to imagine; If we do not think first of the Lord, it may turn Him indifferent toward our needs. It is written about our Lord; "A crushed reed he will not break, and a fading candle he won't snuff out. He'll bring forth justice for the truth."

Lamentation 3

22 Because of the Lord's gracious love we are not consumed, since his compassions never end.

23 They are new every morning— great is your faithfulness!

24 "The Lord is all I have," says my soul, "Therefore I will trust in him."

25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the person who searches for him.

26 It is good to hope and wait patiently for the Lord's salvation.

The chapter from the First Epistle of John we read at the beginning of this sermon is his wonderful confession. John must have been very lonely in a sense after being exiled to the island of Patmos. But he still cared about his fellow believers when he wrote these letters. It can be seen from the verses in the Bible, in which he used all plural words. Please take a look from the beginning of Chapter 3 of the First Epistle of John, it is always "we", "us" and "our." How would it look like if plural forms were to be replaced with singular?

It would be like this; "See what kind of love the Father has given me: I am called God's child—and that is what I am! For this reason the world does not recognize me, because it did not recognize him, either. Dear friends, I am now God's child, but what I will be like has not been revealed yet. I know that when the Messiah is revealed, I will be like him, because I will see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope based on God keeps himself pure, just as the Messiah

is pure.”

[2]

John wrote these verses to encourage the brothers and sisters of those days. It would be a wonderful blessing if each one of us could say the same today. Let's look at what John wrote to the believers of his day; “we know.” It was neither “we suppose” nor “we expect.” They were clearly convinced. This conviction is exactly the blessing given to the believers, isn't it?

Firstly, we are now children of God. Secondly, we will be like Christ. Thirdly, we will see Christ as He is.

One fact is pointed out about the present time (we live in), which is that, we are already children of God. Two possibilities are mentioned about the future, that is to say, we will eventually be like Christ first and then, we will see Him as He is. This particular verse describes one fact about the present time and two about the future, which implies that the time to come is definitely more important than the current one. For a while, I would like to discuss these three facts I just mentioned.

To begin with, the happiness of believers is based on the fact that they are already children of God. Becoming children of God is the most important purpose. The only true living God is the one who created all things between heaven and earth. And this Lord God opened the way to salvation through the Lord Jesus. When we believers look back over our past, we can't help but mourn; we did not know the Lord God, of course we did not fear the Lord God, and we did not worship the Lord God.

We used to refuse to accept the truth; in fact, we resisted the truth. However, as a result of the work of the Lord God, we came to realize these important facts; “We are standing in front of the Lord God with our sins. We are under the wrath of God. We are separated far from the Lord God and thus, we have no hope at all.” This way, we came to recognize how meaningless and empty our life is without God and that no human efforts, no human exertion can solve the problem of our sins.

Then, as the ones who were illuminated by the light from above, we declared personal bankruptcy and were privileged to confess our debts and arrogance to the Lord. Consequently, we came to be convinced that we were redeemed by the blood Jesus shed for us and were allowed to become children of God. How did our life of faith begin? (It began when) we saw Jesus nailed on the cross through the eyes of our hearts.

The Bible tells us; “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” To believe is to recognize this crucified Jesus as the one who sacrificed Himself for you. When Jesus was crucified, He took on his own body the ire of the Holy God, which was supposed to be directed at our sins, as if he were a lightning rod. He paid the precious ransom to redeem us and thus cancelled our debts. Those who see crucified Jesus with the eyes of their hearts and appreciate the work He has accomplished for our salvation will be given eternal life.

Isaiah

45:22 Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other.

It is exactly the Gospel. It is good news.

Jesus on the cross is the one we have to look up to. To look up to Him is to receive Him. John, Chapter 1, Verse 12 says, “to all who received him”, not who understood him, “those believing in his name, he gave authority to become God's children.”

All believers can exclaim with joy that they are already children of God. To be a child of the only true living God would be our greatest pleasure. The Almighty One made us children of God. The Lord God became our father by the virtue of Jesus.

We are never alone anymore because this great Lord is always with us. How could believers become the children of God? It was simply because the Lord had mercy on us. We could become the children of God by being reborn.

And just like we can be born into this life only once, your rebirth is a one-time only event. Conversion is accomplished through the words of God in the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Just like the birth into this world was the beginning of our life, conversion is the beginning of a new life.

New-born babies are a source of joy for their parents. However, if the baby does not grow at all in later years, he or she will turn into a source of sorrow. Once we are converted, we have to begin to grow. Conversion is just the beginning of the new transformation. This change and growth must continue throughout our life.

Saved people in the early churches could confess with joy and conviction that they were already children of God. We can rejoice so much now because our filthy past has been redeemed, and all our mistakes and arrogance have been washed away by the blood (Jesus) shed.

[3]

The Bible explains our future and our growth in the second point; "we will be like Christ."

As I just said, in order to be saved, that is to say, in order to become a child of God, we are supposed to look up to Jesus as our savior. "*Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.*" "*Look, your sins are taken away as the Lord Jesus promised.*" Jesus promised this way;

John

6:40 This is my Father's will: That everyone who sees the Son (i.e. who sees me) and believes in him should have eternal life.

When the saved people are mentioned, it is written that "we will be like Christ." How will we be like Christ? The answer can be found in the Second Epistle to Corinthians, Chapter 3;

2 Corinthians

3:18 As all of us reflect the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, we are becoming more like him with ever-increasing glory by the Lord's Spirit.

The secret to being transformed into the image of Jesus is to look up to Him who was taken up high into heaven. When we look up to the Lord, we will unknowingly begin to be transformed, we will be given victory and be greatly blessed. Humans are transformed into the image of what they look at. David, author of Psalms said;

Psalms

34:5 Look to him and be radiant.

Your life will be a reflection of what your eyes are seeking. You will follow whatever your eyes are watching, and eventually you will be changed to its likeness. If we don't look up to Jesus and instead look at something else our eyes can see, we will never be fulfilled.

Unless we look up to Jesus, we have nothing in our life to guide and support us. The purpose of the devil's temptation is to lure us into looking unknowingly into ourselves alone instead of looking up to Jesus.

Those who refuse to look up to Jesus, but only look at themselves lead others to arrogance or oppression. If people don't look up to Jesus, they will have to fall into miserable self-indulgence. Contrarily, as we reflect the glory of Jesus, we are becoming more like him with ever-increasing glory.

Which way are we looking at? On what are our eyes fixed? When you look at yourself or other people, it will lead you to a feeling of inferiority. When you are in such a state of mind, Jesus can neither use you nor bless you. You would rather be made a tool of the devil.

Instead of looking at yourself, other people or the society you belong to, fixing your attention on Jesus alone, who is high in heaven, is the secret to being transformed into the image of the Lord.

What is the foundation of the happiness of believers?

The foundation for all believers lies in the following convictions; firstly, as I mentioned, that we are already children of God now; secondly, we will be like Christ; and thirdly, we will see Christ as He is.

Decades ago, I went to see brother Chiaki Yamakawa, who was a famous newscaster on TV, in the hospital. His condition was extremely serious and he looked unconscious. However, I saw him shed a tear after we prayed, so he definitely heard it.

When I was there, his wife, sister Kiyoko spoke into the ear of her husband again and again, "you will soon be with Jesus. You will get together with Jesus in a short while." We too will soon see Jesus as He is. It is an unimaginable truth which is beyond expression.

It is written that we will see Christ as He is. Though we can't imagine or explain it now, we will be like the Lord by then. Of course, when we are actually transformed into the image of the Lord, we will realize that it was not on our own, but it occurred by the grace of the Lord. This will make us compelled to worship the Lord.

What can we do to be transformed? The answer is just to deliberately set our eyes away from ourselves and other people, and instead look up to the Lord alone. We also should not prevent the words and spirit of the Lord from working on our hearts.

Shouldn't we all confess this way? When I look at myself, I am reminded every day with a painful clarity that I am so miserable and hopeless. I am filled with too much poverty naivety, incompleteness and many other flaws. It seems absolutely impossible for someone like me to be like the Lord. There can be no such possibility inside us.

However, the Bible clearly states as the covenant and promise of the Lord that, while we are looking at Him, we will be like the Lord. Let's look at again Chapter 3, Verse 2; "*We know that we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.*" It is not that we hope or we

expect it, but we are convinced of it.

What we think about it is not important. It is also not important whether or not we can imagine how it will happen. The words of the Lord clearly tell us (that it will happen). So, we can feel secure and full of trust; We will be like the Lord Jesus.

[4]

Romans

8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers.

In our life, sometimes we are burdened with various problems or something deprives us of our strength. As a result, we may feel very powerless and desire to give up everything.

However, if we stand in front of the Lord with the sincere desire to form the fresh image of Jesus within us, we will continue to be led. We will overcome all difficulties and be reformed. We will see the Christ as He is.

When we think of the future and the Second Coming of the Lord, I guess these verses from the First Epistle to Thessalonians come to mind;

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.

We will stay with the Lord forever. I forgot when it was, but it was decades ago. I came to see Setsuko Terakado, who was the mother of sister, Nobuyo Maruyama. She could not even move her limbs. From

a human's perspective, she looked so miserable and pitiful.

One day, she could express what was on her mind using a computer connected to her finger. She typed, "I am all pain. So, I keep praying. I can't hear. I can't eat. I am just waiting to hear the sound of the trumpet. Please come to pick me up at a run. I know the Advent is near and I am waiting eagerly for that day." After all, this sister could rejoice in her suffering. She was convinced that the Lord knew all and she would soon get together with Him. These verses from Chapter 15, the First Epistle to Corinthians, explain exactly the same thing;

1 Corinthians 15

51 Let me tell you a secret. Not all of us will die, but all of us will be changed—

52 in a moment, faster than an eye can blink, at the sound of the last trumpet. Indeed, that trumpet will sound, and then the dead will be raised never to decay, and we will be changed.

John encouraged the believers of his day by telling them; "*Dear friends, we are now God's children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.*" We will get together with the Lord. It is very encouraging to think of living together with the Lord forever. Those who long for the Advent have the common purpose of devoting their lives to Jesus. That was why Paul wrote to people in Colossus;

Colossians 3

1 Therefore, if you have been raised with the Messiah, keep focusing on the things that are above, where the Messiah is seated at the right hand of God.

2 Keep your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

3 For you have died, and your life has been safely guarded by the Messiah in God.

4 When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you, too, will be revealed with him in glory.

Hebrews 12

12:2 fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

End