

Jesus as the Victor (Ichikawa, 2016)

February 29th, 2016, The Interment Ceremony for
Mr. Hideo Okane, Ichikawa
Gotthold Beck

勝利者なるイエス様(市川 2016)
2016年2月29日、岡根秀夫さん納骨式(市川)
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John

11:25 “Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live.”

[International Standard Version]

Psalms

23:1 The Lord is the one who is shepherding me; I lack nothing.

23:2 He causes me to lie down in pastures of green grass; he guides me beside quiet waters.

23:3 He revives my life; he leads me in pathways that are righteous for the sake of his name.

23:4 Even when I walk through a valley of deep darkness, I will not be afraid because you are with me. Your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

23:5 You prepare a table before me, even in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

23:6 Truly, goodness and gracious love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will remain in the Lord’s Temple forever.

The Bible is called the “Word of God.” It is also one of the names by which Jesus is called “the Word of God.” Those who respect the Bible also respect Jesus. It is the greatest treasure that is given to human beings. Without the Bible, we cannot live a constructive life. The reason that it has been given to human beings is ultimately for them to have a sliver of life.

I guess you all have heard of Blaise Pascal, a man who lived hundreds of years ago. He was born in 1623 and died in 1662. He had been ill throughout his life. He died very young when he was 39 years old. But you will be impressed if you read his prayer. Let us look at how he prayed: “Jesus, I would never pray to make me stronger or to make me weaker. I do not care whether I will be healthy or sickly. However, regardless of whether I live or die, may only you be glorified. For only you know what is truly good for me. Please do everything the way you wish. You can give me whatever you want and take away whatever you want from me. Lord, I am convinced of one thing; it is best for me to obey you, and it will hurt me to cause you grief. I do not know what it is that I need, whether it is health or sickness. I also do not know whether I shall be rich or poor. I will not

strive to find answers to these question by myself or any other things. Neither humans nor angels from the sky would be able to give me an answer to these questions after all. I totally do not know what is truly good or bad for me. It is the secret only you would know. I would never seek to find it by myself. My heart is filled only with a desire to worship you.”

Although he died very young, he was convinced that death was not the end, but that real life begins after death. Most of the people living today do not seem to have this conviction, which is tragic.

Life in this present world is not secure. We have no idea what is going to happen. Something unimaginable is written in the Bible. In the war of the future, one-third of the entire human race will be slaughtered. It is beyond our imagination. This will make all wars in the past look like child's play. It was hard for our ancestors to imagine how one-third of the entire human race will be slaughtered. However, if all the countries with nuclear weapons use them simultaneously, it could be finished within 15 minutes or so. I do not know when this will happen; the only thing we need to know is that we are destined to go to heaven. If you are not sure about it, this present life is just full of pain; it is just unpleasant.

Decades ago, when people got cancer, they were so dismayed and lost their hope. People living today do not care about getting cancer or catching a cold as much as they did in the past. Because they are facing something far more horrible. The most horrible disease today is called loneliness. I am lonely; I want to be understood; I want to be loved; all humans are filled with such unsatisfied feelings. It is only Jesus who can fulfill the human heart.

Therefore, this gathering today, which is nominally a funeral ceremony or interment ceremony for our dearest Hideo Okane San is actually held for the purpose of introducing Jesus to the people. Hideo San was indeed young. He was only 83 years old. So young! Brother Shigeta of the assembly often tells us that people are not regarded as senior until they become 90 years old. We are all in youth until we reach 90. Therefore, this gathering today should be called the gathering of youth.

Anyways, it is a great relief to know that we are all destined to go to heaven eventually. Jesus is the victor. It is written here, “I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live” (John 11:25). Most people believe that death is the end of all things. Period. But, the Bible, which is the Word of God says otherwise. We will be with Jesus forever; without this personal conviction, our present life is simply painful. Jesus is willing to give this conviction to all people. We do not need to belong to any Christian organization to have this conviction.

Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross has absolutely nothing to do with the man-made religion called Christianity. When people hear the name of Christ, their most common reaction is, "Ah, Christianity, no thank you. I have my own belief." They are wrong! Jesus who sacrificed Himself on the cross has absolutely nothing to do with man-made religion. Because of this, He was misunderstood and was finally slaughtered. If Jesus had joined the mainstream religion of those times, which was called Judaism, He would have been such a popular teacher and esteemed as a great mentor. But, Jesus knew that religions were dangerous. We should avoid religions more than we should avoid nuclear weapons. They are both made by humans.

Why are there so many religions? It is because humans are so easily deceived. Religions, including Christianity, are businesses that make good money. They always demand something from believers. Do not believe anyone who demands something from you. The true God will never demand anything from humans. The call of the true God is simple: "I love You." We will never be able to understand why we are loved by Him. We are so worthless and deserve to be abandoned. The Bible says that He loves us with an everlasting love. Each one of you who came to this gathering today is loved. It did not happen recently. Even before human beings were created, God the Creator knew each of us. He wants everlasting happiness for us all.

Therefore, in this gathering today, more important than learning the Bible or mourning for our dearest Hideo Okane, is the realization of how much we are loved by Jesus. We will be compelled to appreciate it when we do. I cannot explain why we are loved so much. But, it is true. The sacrificial death of Jesus is by itself the proof of His love. After all, Jesus is the victor. He is the One who won the victory over the Devil, the enemy of God.

Those who have encountered Jesus desire to follow Him; that is to say, Jesus should be the foundation of their lives; He should be everything in their lives and at the same time, He should be the purpose of their lives. We will never understand what kind of man Jesus is no matter how hard we try. Whatever words we choose to describe Him, they will be all wrong and far from what He actually is. He is much better than what we can imagine—He is unimaginably great. This great Lord is alive and has won the victory over the Devil.

It is only in the midst of adversity or in the difficult circumstances of life that men come to realize what is hidden within themselves. Once, Jesus was left in agony that was too deep and horrible for words. It was in this solitude that He was tested through the temptations of the Devil. However, it was in the midst of these temptations that the greatness of Jesus was

revealed to the world. We can see in the Bible that "Jesus was led by the Spirit of God, by the Holy Spirit." That is to say, Jesus' actions were 100 percent based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God and it was simply unimaginable for Him to do something according to His own intention. He had never followed His own will even for a moment. Jesus had never acted based on His own thoughts, His emotions or His intentions throughout His life.

We will never understand this no matter how hard we struggle to. We all know how we actually are. We try to reason on our own when something happens to us. And we act on our own accord. We do so without prayers. It is not until we hit the wall that we regret having not prayed enough. We will all feel the same way when we get to heaven; we should have prayed more while we were alive. The Lord wanted to answer us. But, He could not because we did not ask Him.

From this very gathering today, let us begin to pray. Let us pray more and seek help from now on. It will be a wonderful blessing for us to have this determination. Let us look at this verse from John. Jesus once said:

John
14:30 "I will not talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me."

Why did all the attempts of the Devil on Jesus fail in spite of the fact that he is the "ruler of this world?" It was because Jesus never stopped being completely obedient to God, the Father in heaven. The Devil could have done absolutely nothing to this obedient Jesus. We see here two worlds colliding. One is the world of the Lord God and the other is the world ruled by the Devil. It is a conflict between light and darkness, truth, and deception.

Matthew
3:16 "When Jesus had been baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Suddenly, the heavens opened up for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.
3:17 Then a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with him!'"

God the Father, the Lord Jesus as God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit revealed "the Savior of this world." Jesus was baptized and through His baptism, He clearly declared His intention and willingness to offer His own life for the salvation of the world. Let us look at this most important verse in the gospel according to Mark:

Mark
10:45: "Because even the Son of Man did not

come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people.”

Why did Jesus come down to this world? It was in order for Him to be able to die. He could not die as long as He was God. However, if, by some miracle, He could have human flesh, He could sacrifice Himself for us. We were born to live, weren't we? Jesus was born so that He could die. It was an unimaginable sacrifice. When we understand the true meaning of what He did, we do not know what to do other than to worship Him. Not only did Jesus die on our behalf, He is still alive. His only concern is the everlasting happiness of each of us human beings.

Ephesians

1:6 “So that we would praise his glorious grace that he gave us in the Beloved One.”

Whoever accepted Jesus was given eternal life and became the one who pleases the Lord God. Contrarily, the wrath of the Lord God would remain upon those who refuse Jesus as clearly stated in the Bible.

It is written in the Bible that for forty days, Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness. This was the period of preparation for His public ministry in this world. His experience in the wilderness clearly proved that Jesus was now completely qualified to sacrifice Himself to save this world. And at the end of His life, Jesus could declare the completion of His task. He confessed this in His prayers:

John

17:4 “I glorified you on earth by completing the task you gave me to do.”

It was actually the mission given to the first man to reveal the glory of the Lord God on this earth. All things were entrusted to this man, Adam. In entrusting all things to Adam, one condition was given to him. It was to live fully under the control of the Lord. Adam lived in paradise as the ruler of all created things; it must have been an unimaginably wonderful place. But, when he was tempted by the Devil, he lent his ears to and believed his words. When he chose to live based on his own thoughts and intentions, he chose to disobey the Lord God. By being separated from the Lord God, human beings lost everything. We can find this interesting expression in the Bible, the first Adam and the last Adam.

1 Corinthians

15:45 “This, indeed, is what is written: “The first man, Adam, became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

15:46 The spiritual does not come first, but the physical does, and then comes the spiritual.

15:47 The first man came from the dust of the

earth; the second man came from heaven.”

In the Bible, the Lord Jesus is called the last Adam. This last Adam was also tempted by the Devil. However, unlike the first Adam who was placed in paradise, Jesus, the last Adam, was tempted by the Devil in this very wilderness. Furthermore, unlike the first Adam, Jesus was not placed in a position of being a ruler. Instead, He humbled Himself and took the form of a poor servant. This fact is testified in the Bible as follows:

Philippians

2:6 “In God's own form existed he, and shared with God equality, deemed nothing needed grasping.

2:7 Instead, poured out in emptiness, a servant's form did he possess, a mortal man becoming. In human form he chose to be,

2:8 and lived in all humility, death on a cross obeying.”

It was simply because Jesus was fully obedient that He could work as the Savior of all mankind, who were otherwise destined to perish. Through His full obedience to the Father God, Jesus recaptured everything that the first Adam lost. The first Adam lost the glory of God because of his disobedience. The Bible says:

Romans

3:23 “Since all have sinned and continue to fall short of God's glory.”

Human beings even came to deserve the wrath of God. According to Ephesians, by nature, human beings were destined for the wrath of God. And now, the Devil has become the ruler of this world:

2 Corinthians

4:4 “In their case, the god of this world (...who is the Devil...) has blinded the minds of those who do not believe to keep them from seeing the light of the glorious gospel of the Messiah, who is the image of God.”

Jesus is the victor and He is still alive. It makes us feel blessed when we think of this very fact; It makes us rejoice. Our dearest Hideo Okane is not here anymore but, we can see him again. Let us look at one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved.” It was not meant only for the family members who are still alive. Regardless of whether they are alive or dead, they will all be saved. The Lord has promised the salvation of families, which is a wonderful blessing for all of us. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live.”

Our beloved brother, Hideo just took off a little earlier

than us. We, who are left on this side, are miserable. He crossed the finish line before us, and we simply feel envious about it. It may not be so pleasant to live in this present life. All humans are troubled by something; they are all lonely. However, when we rely on Jesus, we are given a conviction that death is not the end. Everything starts when we die. It is beyond our imagination but, it is true. We have no hope if it is not.

I often wonder how come all people find a reason to live such a painful life. Why don't they end their lives by themselves? There must be many reasons. However, after all, they continue to live because they know that they were created by God the Creator. Amazing! It is unimaginable. And Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live" (John 11:25).

A man called Paul, not only despised Jesus for many years, but he persecuted the believers of Jesus. He thought that Christ was a false prophet and a great liar. But, eventually, he was changed. He became the greatest proclaimer of Jesus to the world. Let us look at what he said:

Philippians

1:23 "Indeed, I cannot decide between the two. I have the desire to leave this life and be with the Messiah, for that is far better."

To leave this life is to be with the Christ. It is a great relief for us to consider that this is exactly what has just happened to our dearest Hideo San. I would even say "congratulations" to him. It is such a wonderful and unimaginable blessing to be with Christ. We will be with Him not just for a few decades, not just for hundreds of million years, but forever! What a wonderful blessing it is for us to be with Jesus, the fountain of life, until the end of time.

Now, Mr. Hideo Okane came to share in this blessing, and he must be very happy. Congratulations! We still have to live in this world, which is pitiful. But, we are at least given a conviction that we will eventually meet our friend, Hideo San again, for which we should be grateful. Let us look at how the Bible talks about the dead ones:

Revelation

7:9 After these things, I looked, and there was a crowd so large that no one was able to count it! They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing in front of the throne and the lamb and were wearing white robes, with palm branches in their hands.
7:10 They cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the lamb!"

Indeed, death is not the end. Those who do not know the Bible do not have true hope. They have no idea at all what will happen to them ultimately. One of the most important teachings of the Bible is that death is not the end. This is truly a revolutionary fact. It is the source of all hope. And this is the secret to obtaining true joy. The Bible is given to us so that we may find a reason to live. The Bible is, thus, unthinkably important to our lives.

The One who sees the depth of the human mind, the One who would never accuse humans but loves us wholeheartedly is the Creator of all things. It is no one but the governor of all created things, the true living God, who loves us all. This God, the Creator, the One who governs all things has manifested Himself through Jesus Christ to us. Jesus Christ is referred to by many names, one of which is the "God of Hope." As far as the God of Hope is alive and stands with us, we have nothing to worry about. We can live peaceful and constructive lives. This "God of Hope" is also called the "God of Consolation."

I understand that the remaining family will be lonely for a while. But death is not the end. The Lord God is perfect and so is the plan He has in His mind. The Lord God never wants humans to suffer from pain. He actually is willing to give what is best for each one of us human beings. When we think of this, all we can do is to thank Him.

It is true that Jesus has said so many things we cannot understand. We keep asking Him to explain what He meant by His Word. For example, Jesus said that those who mourn are blessed. What was He talking about? What we consider unhappiness is given to us because it is necessary for us to receive true happiness; it is to obtain true salvation in our hands. After all, if we do not seek help from above even when we suffer from worries and pains, we will have to end up with no hope at all. The Lord cannot work for you unless you ask for His help. The Lord God will never force you to do so. Seek, and it will be given. This is what He has promised to us.

The true God who knows no lie but is completely sincere has promised that He will never turn away the one who comes to Him. It is not the person who belongs to some Christian organization, but the one who comes to Jesus. But, how do we come to Jesus? We actually can do so wherever we are. We can do so in a commuter train or in a bathroom. "Jesus, I am sorry. Have mercy on me. Please forgive me." All you need to do is to have this attitude, and it is simply enough for the Lord God. Just humble yourself, and you will be fine. One disciple of Jesus summarized the entire Bible very well in this simple sentence, although he may not realize that he was doing so. What the entire Bible wants to tell us is that "God opposes the arrogant, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Therefore, what is most important for human beings is to have this attitude: "I'm sorry. Forgive me. Have mercy on me." This is all we need, and we will be okay if we do it; we will be able to live peaceful and constructive lives. After all, those who humble themselves with their heads down in front of Jesus and ask for His mercy will be accepted and saved. My point is that to believe in Jesus is to acknowledge your own weaknesses, your own worthlessness, and your own sinfulness. The Bible clearly states that those who humble themselves will be justified and accepted.

True salvation, therefore, is not given as a consequence of any human effort or studying the Bible. It is the revelation of the grace of the Lord God. When we get to heaven, we may ask each other, "How did you get in here?" But, nobody can explain. There should be no other answer than that it was because the Lord had mercy on us.

What does the death of our dearest Hideo Okane mean to us? After all, it is telling us that we too need to be prepared for our death. The Bible is telling us, "Prepare to be summoned to your God!" And Jesus, as the One who conquered death has promised to us, "I am the resurrection and the life itself. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live." In simpler words, as the saying goes, "If you are prepared, you don't have to worry." It is a blessing for us to die with peace of mind.

Our dearest Hideo Okane must have thought that Jesus was the only one he could believe in, which was a consequence of the prayers so many people offered for him. This kind of prayer will absolutely be heard. What kind of person is Jesus? He has absolutely nothing to do with a man-made religion called Christianity. Christianity was made by humans after all. The true God will never ever accept anything made by humans. The One who created the heaven and earth has nothing to do with any man-made religions. Jesus acted on this belief, which eventually caused Him to be hated and eventually, be slaughtered. What kind of man is Jesus? We can see in the New Testament, that Jesus performed a number of miracles. We can see from the Bible that He brought dead people back to life on several occasions.

The first incident revolves around a man called Jairus. His daughter died when she was 12 years old. The Bible does not say what happened to her mother. Maybe, she was dead already. This man called Jairus was a man of great character, and he was well-esteemed in the society. He might have been lonely without his wife, and I suppose that his daughter was a great comfort to him. Now, this daughter died when she was only 12 years old. But, when Jesus commanded, she resurrected.

The second record of the resurrection of the dead in the Bible is the son of a widow. She was a widow, which implies that she already had lost her husband and her life totally depended on her son. But, she lost her son too. They were on their way to carry his body to the cemetery. When Jesus cut into this funeral line, He commanded this son to wake up and brought him back to life. Many of the people living today would not believe it. But nobody doubted in those days that it actually happened. They saw it with their eyes.

The third incident was the resurrecting of Lazarus, who had been buried for as long as four days. Israel is much hotter than Japan, generally speaking. The body of Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, and it must have been rotten already. It already had begun to decay. But it did not stop Jesus. He called Lazarus, and he came out of the tomb like a healthy man. Many people saw it and believed in Jesus according to the Bible.

What kind of man is Jesus? As I just mentioned, He is life itself. He is the one who gives us true hope to live. When Jesus appears, even death runs away. Jesus is strong and incomparable to anyone else. He is the true God. He created all things and all things exist for Him according to the Bible.

We try to somehow comprehend the greatness of Jesus in our heads, but we always have to give up after all. It is beyond our imagination. We try hard to explain in our words but when we come back to the Bible, we must say, "No, no, no!" His greatness is far beyond expression by words. The Bible is great because it does not tell us what we humans are supposed to believe in or what we are supposed to do. The call of the Bible, the call of the true living God is simply this: "I love you."

This is not a vain and empty promise. The Creator of the whole universe, the governor of all things is calling each one of you, who came here today, "I love you!" If you rely on Jesus, you will absolutely receive the forgiveness of your sins, peace with the Lord God and eternal life in your hands. This call of Jesus is truly wonderful and is worth reading again and again, "I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me, even though he dies, will live."

I heard that Hideo San just died. But, today, he is in better shape than we are. I even feel jealous. After all, we can meet with each other again one day. We are lonely for a little while. However, we will see him eventually; it is what Jesus who knows no lie has promised to us.

What is the salvation that is offered through the Bible? It has nothing to do with what humans

conceive as "happiness." It is neither health nor a temporal solution of problems in our lives. What is true salvation? It is overcoming the past. It is the conviction that you are forgiven! It is written in the Bible, "I will never again remember their sins." Humans are so unwise that they struggle desperately to forget their past, but it always fails. However, all sins that are confessed in front of the Lord are forgotten. When we get to heaven and see Jesus, we will say, "Jesus, I was a horrible person. You must have seen it. I did this and I did not do that." The answer of Jesus will be, "What are you talking about? I do not remember anything at all!" As far as Jesus does not remember, we do not have to worry about it. We will be able to die in peace.

True salvation is the overcoming of the past, the solution for the problem of our sins and liberation from the fear of our sins. Death is not the end. Some people come and ask me, "Well, you keep talking about heaven, heaven, heaven. So, tell me how the Bible describes realistically what kind of place heaven is." I am afraid I cannot answer this question. Nothing much is written about it because we do not have adequate words to describe it.

We struggle to express the greatness of heaven, it will be too far from reality. It is far better than what words can express. After all, our vocabulary is too poor to describe what heaven is like. The Bible says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There won't be death anymore. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain" (Revelation 21:4). It is beyond our imagination. It is a dream world. However, Jesus is alive. And the Bible tells us:

Romans

8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us."

Our present life may be full of pain, but we will understand it in just a little while. We went through lots of agony, pain, and loneliness; it has been so difficult. But, it was necessary for us. It was not only necessary, but it was even good for us. It was not just good for us, but it was the best for us. When you get to heaven and realize it, you will be so busy thanking Him. You will desperately want to thank Him there. So, the words of greeting when we believers meet with each other on this side should be this: "It will be soon!" We will see our beloved Hideo San soon. Paul wrote to people who were suffering from various things:

Philippians

4:5 "The Lord is near:

4:6 Never worry about anything. Instead, in every situation let your petitions be made known to God through prayers and requests, with thanksgiving.

4:7 Then God's peace, which goes far beyond

anything we can imagine, will guard your hearts and minds in union with the Messiah Jesus."

We too should experience this feeling anew every day, shouldn't we?

End