

## Let us Offer to the Lord

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Luke

19:1 As Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it,

19:2 a man named Zacchaeus appeared. He was a leading tax collector, and a rich one at that!

19:3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he couldn't do so due to the crowd, since he was a short man.

19:4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way.

19:5 When Jesus came to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today."

19:6 Zacchaeus came down quickly and was glad to welcome him into his home.

19:7 But all the people who saw this began to complain: "Jesus is going to be the guest of a notorious sinner!"

19:8 Later, Zacchaeus stood up and announced to the Lord, "Lord, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor. I'll pay four times as much as I owe if I have cheated anyone in any way."

19:9 Then Jesus told him, "Today salvation has come to this home, because this man is also a descendant of Abraham,

19:10 and the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

[International Standard Version]

I believe that you have read this biblical account and heard about this story of Zacchaeus a number of times. By the term "Salvation has come," Zacchaeus meant that the Saviour has become the master of his house. This man, Zacchaeus seems to have been a clever man, but he was stupid somewhat because he believed that money makes him happy. I guess that many modern people think the same way. But nobody can be truly fulfilled by money or wealth.

In any case, Zacchaeus made a great success and became very rich. People were envious of his wealth and believed that he was living happily, while in actuality, his heart was not satisfied. However, he was changed by his encounter with Jesus. The change was so complete that words are not enough to express it. "I'll give half of my possessions to the people in need. I'll return all that I have cheated anyone in any way," he said. I guess that by that statement he meant almost everything he had. Practically, He would have nothing left after this—at least every thinking person would think this way. However, the salvation of God

came to Zacchaeus home that day. In other words, the Lord Jesus became the master of Zacchaeus' house.

Zacchaeus must have thought, until the end of his life that it was so good that he came to meet Jesus. He never had imagined that his life would turn this way. But, after all, this is more or less what all people who come to Jesus experience. There has been absolutely nobody, who was suffering so badly and came to see Jesus, who was disappointed and thought that meeting Jesus was pointless. Contrariwise, they all were happy about coming to see Him.

What is repeatedly mentioned in the gospels is the importance of knowing Jesus; it is encounter with Jesus Himself. But what kind of people came to see Jesus? They were the ones who were suffering from various problems.

Illness was an example of such problems. And I believe that the most horrible disease of all is loneliness. People in the depths of despair came to see Jesus. And they were all changed by their encounter with Him. They received strength and their sicknesses were all healed. "It helped me a lot that I came to see Jesus," they all said without exceptions. However, one thing I would like to mention here is that they all came only to receive something from Jesus.

We cannot even imagine how a day in the life of Jesus was like. Because so many people came to see and they were all healed. There were so many sick people those days. They heard that they would be healed if they come to see Jesus of Nazareth and they did not have to pay anything. It is not hard to imagine that people flew in from all over the country. That means that Jesus was really very busy.

It is written in the gospels that He did not even have time to eat. It was very hard. Therefore, it was absolutely impossible to come to see and talk to Jesus personally during daytime. A man by the name Nicodemus knew this, thus he came to see Jesus at midnight. He was a well-established man. He was a man of notable character and was esteemed as a great Bible Scholar. He came to see Jesus one midnight and that encounter turned him into a completely different man. He came to be convinced that Jesus was the only one he could trust.

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest." (See Matthew 11:28) This call of Jesus has not gone obsolete. Jesus' call is the same today. If you are not weary and have no problem in your life—you are doing well by yourself and you do not need Jesus, just strive to do your best and solve your problem on your own.

But, people today know the reality. We can struggle as hard as we can, but it only leaves us tired. It is totally meaningless.

But you see, wise people would stop struggling and surrender themselves to Jesus who can do all things. It is simple, it is easy and they would never regret it. Jesus said, "I have come to save the lost. It is sick people who need a physician." That simply means that it is only those who are in pain who need Him.

I would say that more than 99 percent of the people who came to see Jesus expected to receive something from Him. They only thought of getting something from Him. There were quite a few people who wanted to offer something to Jesus. However, at least, there was one exception.

Mark

14:3 While Jesus was in Bethany sitting at the table in the home of Simon the leper, a woman arrived with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

14:4 Irritated, some who were there asked one another, "Why was the perfume wasted like this?"

14:5 This perfume could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and the money given to the destitute." So they got extremely angry with her.

I feel sorry for her. People got extremely angry with her. But then, the defender jumped in.

14:6 But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me,

Nobody has ever been admired by Jesus like her. "She has done a beautiful thing for me."

14:7 because you will always have the destitute with you and can help them whenever you want, but you will not always have me.

14:8 She has done what she could.

This was the best compliment He has ever said.

14:8 She has done what she could. She poured perfume on my body in preparation for my burial.  
14:9 I tell all of you with certainty, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

It was the memorial party for this woman, wasn't it? When we think of what she did, it makes us feel sad and embarrassed, doesn't it?

14:10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the high priests to betray Jesus to them.

14:11 After they had listened to him, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he began to look for a good opportunity to betray him.

Why do such differences arise between believers of Jesus in terms of the degree of growth? All believers of Jesus are certainly saved and have experienced the love of Jesus. However, I guess that there are quite a few people who are willing to devote their true and deep love for the Lord. Very often, we care much more about what we have to do for Jesus rather than how our relationship with Him is, don't we? We first need to have an intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus before we begin to serve as channels for Him. Otherwise, we will be totally useless to Him.

When the fellowship of love with Jesus is lost, our sense of responsibility is reduced, we pray less or we even stop wanting to pray; we get tensed up all the time and get nervous about everything. A woman called Mary we just read about poured the very expensive perfume of nard on Jesus. This behaviour was an expression of her heartfelt love. It was her sincere desire to offer everything to Jesus. No other person was admired by Jesus as much as this woman. was

"She has done what she could." This was the judgment of Jesus. These words indicated that Jesus was completely satisfied by what she did. She experienced that it was nobody but Jesus who could provide her with true happiness and real peace. Because of this, she offered this very expensive perfume of nard to Him as proof of her sincere love. Her heart was filled with gratitude and love.

At the center of the Bible is, as you all are aware of, the crucified Jesus, the lamb who was offered as a sacrifice to cancel our sins. The Scripture described Jesus nailed to the cross this way:

Isaiah

53:4 Surely he has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows; yet we considered him stricken, and struck down by God, and afflicted.

53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed.

53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, each of us, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The foundation of our true joy, or its source is in these verses we just read. The holy God laid all our sins on

the crucified Jesus. In order to redeem our sins, the Lord Jesus was punished on our behalf, cursed, and abandoned. We only say that it is just unreasonable. We cannot think of anything more unreasonable, can we?

Some people even think that it is irrational. When His blood was all offered, the precious life of Jesus was taken away. It is far beyond our imagination to pay such a price for someone like us who are so worthless and miserable.

For example, it is just absurd to pay one hundred thousand yen for a box of caramel. It is not worth that kind of money. The life of Jesus was far more precious for the Creator Father God than this whole universe.

However, most of us, who have encountered Jesus are thankful in our hearts. Because Jesus took the punishment on our behalf, we do not need to be judged anymore. We are convinced that we have already been transferred from death to life.

What we are urged to do is to fix our eyes on Jesus nailed to the cross. This the most important commandment in the Scripture. That is to say, the only way for us to be liberated from despair and loneliness is to look up to Jesus. Let me read some verses. These are often-cited verses. They are remarkable verses.

#### Hebrews

12:1 Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us.

What does it mean to run? The answer is in the next verse.

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.

12:3 Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners (who is Jesus... but why?), so that you may not become tired and give up.

Why don't we go back to the gospel according to Luke?

#### Luke

18:31 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "Pay attention! We're going up to Jerusalem. Everything written by the prophets about the Son of

Man (me) will be fulfilled, 18:32 because he (I) will be handed over to the unbelievers, and will be mocked, insulted, and spit on.

Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to Him.

18:33 After they have whipped him (me), they will kill him, but on the third day he (I) will rise again." 18:34 But they didn't understand any of this. What he said was hidden from them, and they didn't know what he meant.

They heard all this. They might have had ears to hear. But, it did not move them.

However, unlike these Jesus' disciples, Mary we just read about, Mary of Bethany poured perfume on the body of Jesus in preparation for His burial while He was alive. Why did she do such thing? Mary's heart was filled with gratitude and love. She must have done this in order to realize her one and only wish; she wondered how she could show her love for Jesus and how she could express her deep gratitude to Him.

Then she remembered the perfume made from nard. The perfume of nard was very expensive. It was equivalent to the average annual income of ordinary people. In other words, it was as high as the price of bread that could feed 7500 people. Therefore, she could never afford the perfume for herself. She must have thought that she did not deserve it. It was even more impossible to buy the perfume for someone else.

However, suddenly, she came to believe that Jesus was the one who deserved this perfume and that it was the best way to express her love. Jesus Himself was very much pleased by what Mary did for Him. It is nothing but the perfect love that can truly please Jesus. But, what was the reaction of the other people?

#### Mark

14:1 "The high priests and the scribes (bible scholars of those times) were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and to have him put to death."

How did they have to come this way? Hidden jealousy was changed to hatred, which made them decide to put Jesus to death. While some people were discussing how to kill Jesus, a woman called Mary was contemplating how she could prove her heartfelt love for Him. She was compelled to devote everything she had to Jesus. One of His disciples, a man called Judas could not pass over and criticized what she did.

He blamed her saying that what Mary did was just

absurd and wasteful. He claimed that there must have been a better way to use the money and it was far better to use it to feed the 7500 people in need. However, we all know that Judas did not say these words out of true sympathy or care for the poor. He thought that way because he was a greedy miser. What makes people have different attitudes towards Jesus?

Religious leaders and scribes of those days pursued nothing but their own honor. They were scared that they might lose the respect of the people. Their jealousy turned into hatred against Jesus, and they came to a decision to put Him to death. A man called Judas only cared about money and he wanted to have as much as possible. He stole money, became hypocritical, betrayed his Master and finally killed himself.

Contrarily, Mary sincerely thought of how she could prove her love for Jesus. What kind of people can truly love Him? It is only those whose sins were forgiven by Jesus. Sins are forgiven for those who are prepared to admit all their sins, confess them, and separate themselves from them. Until they take this attitude, they could only live a self-centered life and only care about themselves.

Some people are very quick to retreat in themselves or even abandon their faith, when they feel that they are not cared about or they are not respected enough. We need to ask this question of ourselves. Do we have true love for Jesus? It is not whether we believe in Him or not that matters. It is whether we truly love Him or not. Or, it is whether Jesus truly is placed at the center of our thoughts and emotions?

Do we serve Jesus out of obligation? Or, do we obey Him out of love? Is prayer the indispensable part of our lives? Do we sincerely pray from our hearts when we do pray?

When Mary gave her true and wholehearted love to Jesus, it pleased Him so much. Now, how can we please the Lord like she did? Mary sat down at the feet of Jesus and listened to what He said. She did not just listen to His words, but she listened with determination to obey everything she heard from Him. She must have been very busy and she did not seem to have a lot of time, but she managed to make time to listen to His words. Many people living today say that they are too busy and they have no time. It is not true. Anyone can make time for the Lord if they try.

Just reading the Bible is not enough, we need to ask the Bible. If you do not make time to ask the Bible, you are pitiful; it is questionable whether you love Him in

the true sense or not. Jesus is looking for ears that are ready to listen to His Word. The first step in loving Jesus is to listen to His Word and come close to the Lord in prayer. All other things are of no importance in our lives.

Mary did not only come close to Jesus, but she talked to Him. Her only and desperate desire was to come to Jesus, listen to what He said and talk to Him. In our case, many of us are placing our own desires or our own plans as the central subject of our prayers, aren't we?

We are attracted by the blessings Jesus gives us more than Jesus Himself, aren't we? It is not the real love like what Mary had for Him. At first, Mary only wanted to listen to the word of the Lord, then she wanted to talk to Jesus and finally, she desired to devote everything to Him from the bottom of her heart.

She sat down at the feet of Jesus and lent her ears to His Word. Unless we stay calm at the feet of the Lord just like Mary did, we cannot live a life of prayers. Being well aware of how the Lord Jesus loved her with perfect love, Mary too loved Jesus completely without holding back anything. As I just mentioned, it was out of this love that she poured very expensive perfume of nard on His head without hesitation.

That is to say, by pouring the perfume on the Lord Jesus without hesitation, without reservation, she expressed her love to Him. The entire house became filled with the fragrance of the perfume of nard according to the Bible.

Question is, are our hearts, houses, and each assembly filled with an atmosphere of love? One of the saddest words in the Bible can be found in the Book of Revelation, chapter 2, verse 4. Once, the brothers and sisters who gathered in a town called Ephesus formed an exemplary flock of believers, which pleased the Lord. They were greatly blessed and were used by Him. But, they were suddenly degenerated.

#### Revelation

2:4 "However, I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first."

Their first love refers to their fellowship with Jesus. This implies that we should not ask for anything other than Jesus, and we cannot accomplish anything without Him also. If the Bible, which consists of the Word of the Lord becomes our fountain, our comfort, our strength and our wisdom in our daily lives and if Jesus is at the center of all our thoughts and deeds, it is the very proof that the love we had at first is still there.

The hearts of the brothers and sisters in Ephesus of those days were no longer in intimate fellowship with Jesus. They forgot to stay calm at His feet. Consequently, Jesus had no other choice but to tell them that, "He was not with them anymore, but He had something against them."

What is the "love we had at first?" As I just said, it is the undivided love for Jesus, truthful humility, unhesitating obedience to His will, eagerness for the Second Coming of the Lord and having heartfelt affection for all brothers and sisters.

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