

**Being Renewed by Knowing the Lord**  
 June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Oakayama Gospel Meeting  
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主を知る事によって新しくされること  
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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]

**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 will be fulfilled,  
 18:32 because he will be handed over to the unbelievers, and will be mocked, insulted, and spit on.  
 18:33 After they have whipped him, they will kill him, but on the third day he 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.

One thing is clearly shown in the four gospels. Nothing is more important than knowing the Lord—being renewed through an encounter with Him.

The other day, one person told me, "The Lord Jesus is so brilliant that I can't raise my head." Another couple said, "We want to devote our lives to the Lord." It is unthinkable important for us to have a mindset like this.

We can see from the Gospels that Jesus lived an extremely busy life indeed. People were told that they would all get well only if they came to Jesus. All their illnesses would be cured. There was nobody who saw Him and thought it was meaningless. They all thought that it was good that they came to see Him. Their diseases were cured and they were released from loneliness. Their desperation seemed to have fled away.

Through their encounter with Jesus, these people obtained healing, liberation, support, health, joy, and true happiness. After all, they all came to Jesus expecting to receive something material from Him.

Needless to say, not only did He invite the people of His day, but Jesus is still calling people to come to Him today. Come to me, all you who are suffering from heavy burdens. "Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest."

As we just read in Luke, chapter 19, verse 10, Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save the lost." As I just mentioned, I would say that more than 99 percent of the people who came to see Jesus expected to receive something from Him. However, there were quite a few people who wanted to offer something to Jesus in those days, and I suppose that this situation is still the same to this date.

One example of these few people is Mary of Bethany whose story can be found in the gospel according to Mark, chapter 14. She serves as a model of how we should live our lives of faith.

**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.  
 14:6 But Jesus said...

In defending her;

14:6 ...“Leave her alone. Why are you bothering 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. 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.”

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 spiritual growth? All saved people, of course, 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 are supposed to do rather than how our relationship with Jesus is, don't we? We first need to have an intimate fellowship with Jesus to become channels for Him.

When the fellowship with the Lord 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 poured the very expensive perfume made from pure nard on Jesus according to these verses. What she did was an expression of her heartfelt love. It was her sincere desire to offer everything to Jesus. No other person was admired by Jesus like this woman.

Jesus said, “she has done what she could.” 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 expensive perfume of nard to Him as proof of her sincere love. Mary's heart was filled with love.

At the center of the Bible is the crucified Jesus who was offered as a sacrifice to redeem 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 source of our true joy is in these verses we just read. The holy God laid all our sins on the crucified Jesus. In order to redeem our sins, Jesus was punished on our behalf, cursed, and abandoned as the Bible tells us. How are we supposed to understand this fact? Some of us may only think that it is just unreasonable. We cannot think of anything more unreasonable, can we?

We may even think that it is irrational. When His blood was all shed, the precious life of Jesus was taken away. As long as we think about His death from a human perspective, we cannot understand why He had to die that way. It is totally unimaginable. It is far beyond our imagination to pay such a price for someone like us who are so worthless and miserable. But, this is the fact.

Of course, most of the people who gathered here today already know the meaning of His death and are thankful in their hearts. Because Jesus took the punishment on our behalf, we do not need to be judged. 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. The liberation from all despair and isolation can be found only if we look up to Jesus. Let me read these very well-known 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, so that you may not become tired and give up.

Let us fix our attention on Jesus. Why don't we go back to chapter 18 of 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 will be fulfilled,  
 18:32 because he will be handed over to the unbelievers, and will be mocked, insulted, and spit on.  
 18:33 After they have whipped him, they will kill him, but on the third day he 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.

Unlike these disciples of Jesus, the woman called Mary whom I just mentioned, poured perfume on the body of Jesus in preparation for His burial while He was alive. Her heart was filled with gratitude and love. She did this to realize her one and only wish; she wondered how she could show her love for the Lord 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 in those days. It is believed that it was equivalent to the average annual income of ordinary people. Or, 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 other people.

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 for Him. Jesus Himself was very much pleased by what Mary did for Him. It is nothing but the perfect love that can truly please Jesus.

What was the reaction of the other people?

**Mark**  
 14:1 "The high priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and to have him put to death."

Hidden jealousy was changed to hatred, which made them decide to put Jesus to death. While some people were discussing how to kill Jesus, Mary was contemplating how she could prove her heartfelt love for Him. She thought that it was only possible by devoting everything she had to Jesus. One of His disciples, Judas, 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, 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?

Bible scholars 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. 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. It is only those whose sins were forgiven by the Lord Jesus, who can truly love Him. 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 kinds of people are very quick to retreat inside themselves when they feel that they are not respected enough or they do not get the attention from others they deserve. But, we need to ask this question of ourselves. Do we have true love for Jesus? Are we sincerely willing to come to Him and have fellowship with the Lord? Is Jesus truly 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?

Is your prayer placed at the center of your life and do you pray from the bottom of your heart? When Mary gave her true and wholehearted love to Jesus, it pleased Him so much. Now, how can we please Jesus 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 did not seem to have a lot of time, but she managed to make time to listen to His words.

Just reading the Bible is not enough, we need to ask the Bible. If you do not make time to ask the Bible, although you may believe in Jesus, you may not love Him in the true sense. 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 desire was to come to Jesus, listen to what He said and talk to Him. How about us? We are placing our own desires or worldly concerns as the main 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.

Mary sat down at the feet of Jesus and lent her ears to His Word. Unless we stay calm at the feet of Jesus just like Mary, we cannot live a life of prayers. Being well aware of how Jesus loved her with perfect love, Mary too loved Jesus completely without holding back anything. 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, Mary expressed her love to Him. The entire house became filled with the fragrance of the perfume of nard.

Just like this, are our hearts, houses, and each assembly filled with an atmosphere of love? Let me finish this sermon with one more verse. At one time, the brothers and sisters in Ephesus were brilliant believers who respected the Lord more than anything. But, they later changed.

#### Revelation

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

What is the love they had at first? It refers to the fellowship with Jesus. It is to believe that we should not ask for anything other than Jesus, and we cannot accomplish anything without Jesus. 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 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, instead, He had something against them.

What is the love we had at first? It is the undivided love for Jesus, truthful humility, unhesitating obedience to His will, eagerness for the second coming of Jesus

and having heartfelt affection for all brothers and sisters.

It is important for us to have a true determination to begin to live for Jesus today. When we do, Jesus will absolutely give us His grace and send the light necessary for us.

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