

1.Introduction

Last message was about the tabernacle's gate, stand and basin as the third installment of the series, "Worship in God's Presence." The tabernacle and offerings in Exodus and Leviticus have meanings and are also related to Jesus Christ's life and cross. The Bible has 66 books in total, and the oldest one was written about 3,500 years ago and the newest about 2,000 years ago. It is amazing that they were written with no outside influence and that especially the Old Testament was written in such a harmonious way as "a copy and shadow of what comes later." The tabernacle may look like a mere religious ritual men created, but when we look into the meanings of the items, rituals and offerings, we can see that everything was not randomly placed but was done intentionally. The intention was to prepare the Jews to hope for and welcome the Savior to come. Unfortunately, in the Old Testament, the Jews repeatedly refused God's hand and made selfish decisions. However, that applies not only to the Jews but to ourselves. Our issue may be even deeper since God's hand, which is Jesus Christ's cross, has been shown to us more clearly than to the Jews, yet we may have taken the cross for granted.

We have learned about the tabernacle and offerings in several messages, and today let us focus on Jesus Christ's cross and several stories in which Jesus talked about His own death.

2. Who is Jesus to you?

Read Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus had 12 disciples. Among them, Peter was very symbolic and appears often in New Testament. He seems a little show-offish and also in other articles in the Bible we can see that personality coming out of him. For example, in Luke 9:28-33 (the article called "The Transfiguration") Jesus took Peter, John and James to a mountain, and there Moses and Elijah appeared mysteriously. Jesus also talked about his death there. Peter saw all this and declared he would put up three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. However, that wasn't what was required of Peter, and Luke mentions in Luke 9:33 that "He did not know what he was saying." We can easily guess that he often spoke without thinking. He probably didn't have any ill intention, but in other situations, too, he would say something out of a whim.

In Matthew 16, to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?," Peter rushes to answer, saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." We don't know how much Peter understood and believed in the fact that Jesus was "the Son of the living God" at this point, but as a disciple of God, it was the best answer to give. Moreover, since he was also the first one to give this answer, Peter must have been very proud of himself.

To all of you gathered here today, who is Jesus to you? How would you answer this question?

Peter answered the question with the perfect answer, but after this, he makes a very big mistake.

Read Matthew 16:21-23

Right before this happened, Peter gave the perfect answer in the conversation with Jesus and must have been on cloud nine. It must have been quite a shock for him to hear Jesus say to him, "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus told his disciples about his death and resurrection. If Peter truly had believed that Jesus is the Son of the living God and his personal Savior, he wouldn't have rebuked Jesus like he did, even if he didn't fully understand what Jesus was saying. It is out of question for men to rebuke God.

If you have read the Bible or come to church services a couple of times, you probably know how the Bible teaches who Jesus is. Sometimes it's talked about in history or religion classes in school. It's not hard to remember that the Bible teaches us Jesus is the Son of the living God and Savior. However, that's not what's important. What's really important is "to whom" Jesus is the Son of the living God. In other words, whether or not each one of us really accepts and believes that Jesus is the Son of the living God is very important. If you don't know who Jesus is to you, although everybody around you knows who He is, I would like you to consider this point and find your own answer today.

3. Why did Jesus tell his disciples about his death?

Read Matthew 16:21 again

Why do you think Jesus told his disciples about his death? Have you had any experience telling somebody something very crucial about your life?

I'd like to tell you a little about myself. Fortunately I never had any life-threatening illness so far in my life. But still I get a little nervous when I get results of my annual checkup every year. As I get older, results come back with messages like, "Please come back for more tests", "Please watch for how figures change over the course", or "You need to receive treatments". These messages make me feel that something life-threatening may be looming.

My father had a stroke and passed away 2 months later, 11 years ago. Before he suffered a stroke, he wasn't feeling well, so I took him to the hospital for some tests, but they couldn't find anything wrong with him. But two days after that, he collapsed and was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. They ran some tests and told me he suffered a stroke, and as a result his brainstem got greatly damaged with no hope of recovery. I still remember that day vividly and believe that he fought for his life bravely for those two months. He had his own company and was still working when he got ill at the age of 67. After he collapsed, I needed to contact his employees and business associates to explain what was going on with him. I needed to tell them he was in coma with no hope of recovery and could die any day. As his son, I wanted to keep hope for his recovery although looking at him lying in bed I knew there was no hope from a medical point of view. Since he was in coma and wasn't able to talk, I explained to people how he was on his behalf, but I still wonder how he would have explained his own situation if he could have talked. I told his business associates he wouldn't

be able to keep his company running anymore, he couldn't even talk, and his company wouldn't be able to carry on any longer. In other words, it was the end of his company. Even though it wasn't my own company, it was very hard to tell everybody the company was no more, but to wrap up everything smoothly for everybody, I needed to do so and still remember visiting everybody with a heavy heart and heavy feet.

Let's go back to today's Bible story. Jesus told his disciples about his death. When you think about purposes of Jesus' telling it to them, they must have been to prepare them to accept the cross which was very brutal and to make them understand that it had been planned by God from the beginning, not happening accidentally. In order for his disciples to understand God's plan and accomplish the great mission Jesus handed down to them, Jesus needed to tell them about his own death and death on the cross before it happened.

What I learn from this article is that **God knows us very well.** Based on this fact, I realize that I'm often too busy to know God, understand God and learn about God to recognize this fact of God knowing me. We wish to know and learn more about God, but more than that God knows us, and Paul teaches this point in Galatians.

Read Galatians 4:9

Also David teaches it in Psalms.

Psalms 103:14

We are known to God. He knows not only about our existence, our characteristics or our situations but also how we exist, what we need and when and how they should be given to us according to His best knowledge.

Knowing this gives us enormous comfort. Not only does God know us, but He also knows our needs. As He told his disciples about his death in order for them to accomplish their missions, He also fills us with complete grace

and blessings for our needs in His perfect timing. All we need is to accept it in faith. If you haven't accepted Jesus as your savior yet, I would like you to believe and accept that Jesus Christ is God who fills your needs in your life in His perfect timing. God is indeed that kind of God.

4. God who came to serve

Read Matthew 20:25-28

I thought about what kind of experience it would be to be served by somebody. Have you had anybody serve you?

In the Bible days, to serve would usually be a relationship between a master and slaves. In modern days, slavery is banned in most of the world, but as the UN has December 2 as International Day for the Abolition of Slavery,

there must be still slavery going on in parts of the world. In Japan, there used to be a system called "kosaku-

nin”, or “tenant farmer” system, which was considered a form of slavery. Slavery has such a negative connotation

since it means there is no right given to workers, and work simply is a duty for them.

Jesus tells us He came to serve men. From our point of view, work is something we sometimes do and sometimes don't. But in the Bible days, if we think work is that of slavery, it has a stronger meaning. No matter what or how late it is, you have to serve. There is no consideration whatsoever to workers' convenience or situation, just serve. This is what the word “serve” meant back in the Bible days.

It isn't that Jesus does something for us when convenient for Him according to His schedule, but He tells us He came to this world as one who serves men. Also He is God who knows us very well. He who knows us more than we know ourselves and he became one who serves us. There is nothing better than this for us; knowing where we come from and what we need now and for times to come. He came to serve us. Sometimes we feel anxious about what God deals us, get frustrated with our situations, and often worry about future, but God knows all that about us. And if God serves us with all His might, should we feel anxious about anything in life at all? Even if we feel unfulfilled right now, God put us in that situation since He thinks we need to experience it in His plans for our future. If you feel uneasy about your future, I would like you to understand and accept Jesus who serves and supports us constantly and who deserves our trust over any visible existence in this world although He is invisible to us. The Bible clearly tells us Jesus is that kind of God.

5. Jesus died for our sins

Read Matthew 21:33-41

Here Jesus told that His death would be brought about by men. In this vineyard parable, “A landowner planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers.” Farmers were given a job to take care of the vineyard, harvest the fruits and make wine.

This landowner is very generous. Farmers didn't need to till the land to make a vineyard. Everything they needed was there in the beginning. All they needed was take care of the vineyard under good terms and conditions. All the landowner wants is his share of crops. He respects the farmers and has them work in a good environment. He would be very generous even in our modern societies.

However, these farmers would beat and kill the landowner's servants who showed up to collect his share. Usually, they would be fired and punished heavily. But the landowner would send more servants after this. Did he think if more people showed up, the farmers would be more obedient? Or did he think his generosity would make them reconsider their bad behaviors, repent and give him his share? Still these servants, too, were met with the same cruel treatment. This must be end of them, right? No, the landowner shows them his generosity once again by sending his son to them. They killed his servants twice, and surely anybody wouldn't send his son to them, but this landowner trusts the farmers. His expectation and trust to the farmers was that they would surely respect his son. But unfortunately, his son, too, was chased out of the vineyard and killed. Even though we know it's just a parable, it spooks us. This can't be happening in the real world.

In this parable, the reason they killed the son was to steal the son's inheritance. This reason is unforgivable. The farmers would not only return their landowner's expectation but also repay his generosity with their evil, and even kill his precious son ruthlessly. This is absolutely outrageous.

Through this parable, Jesus teaches us about God sending prophets to the Jews so many times but they didn't accept them at all and even killed them in the end. God sent so many prophets, but the Jews never obeyed their advice or teaching. In the end, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, but the Jews even killed His only son. In the parable, the reason to kill the son was to steal his inheritance. Then why did the Jews crucify Jesus and kill him?

Since He was born and until He died on the Cross, Jesus Christ had been a very inconvenient existence to the Jewish leaders. When He was born, Eastern scholars prophesied that He would be born as a Jewish king. When He started preaching, He taught God's words to so many people with enormous influence unlike the lawmakers' teachings. He healed the sick, took the pain from the sufferers, and testified about the big hope God would give them.

The more Jesus talked, the more were people encouraged and healed, but also the bigger did the Jewish leaders' hatred grow. Why was that? Jesus did something they couldn't do, therefore, they lost power among people and feared that Romans would conquer Israel.

Read John 11:45-50,53

As Jesus' influence grew, the Jewish leaders were afraid that their influence would weaken, and they wouldn't be able to reign to their advantage. Because they wanted to keep reigning in the same condition, they captured Jesus who healed, comforted, and lessened the pain of people, and crucified Him.

Jesus was a very inconvenient existence to the Jewish leaders, but also it's the same to us. If we want to live a convenient life according to our desires, which the Bible identifies as sins, we become obsessed. We would never consider repenting, and Jesus would be a very inconvenient existence since He would show us that sin is sin just as He showed the Jewish leaders back then. Physically Jesus was crucified by the Jewish leaders some 2,000 years ago, but the Bible taught even before the Cross that everybody's sin would kill Jesus on the Cross.

Read Isaiah 53:6

Through Prophet Isaiah, God taught us that He would lay the iniquity of us on Jesus way before Jesus would come to this world. Our sins crucified Jesus. As we live in a very selfish way and sin in our lives, to pay for our sins and for them to be forgiven, instead of our being crucified, Jesus was crucified on our behalf. In order to forgive us and restore our relationship with Him, God punished Jesus on the Cross. Because of Jesus' Cross, through the Bible, we are able to receive Jesus' salvation.

The new life given to us by Jesus Christ is totally different from what we have before believing in Jesus Christ. For those who haven't accepted Jesus as your savior, receiving this new life might take some courage. But as I talked in No.4, God is a God who serves us. The new life given by the Cross gives us big and irreplaceable comfort and peace which we didn't have in our old life which we give up by accepting Jesus. God is always with us and protects and supports us. It may be incredible to think that almighty God would serve us, but indeed God is God who serves us.

In closing let us read Isaiah 40:27-31

In v. 27, consider "my" as your own "my." At times in life we may whine like this author. When we face unreasonableness, our frustrations grow. Why would I be treated this way? Why me? Why not them? We may think if there were God out there, why would He let this happen to us? But Isaiah gives us a big hint in v.31. "...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." God promised us this kind of life through Jesus' Cross. When we accept Jesus and hope in the Lord, God gives us strength, which renews within continuously. If any of you hasn't accepted Jesus as your personal savior yet, would you consider accepting Jesus as your savior, your God, today? If you have accepted Jesus as your savior already, would you take another look at the life and salvation you received, and reaffirm what God has done for us and how big that is, and experience life in faith filled with strength Isaiah prophesied?

Let's pray.