

1. Introduction

In the last message, there were four main points to think about in the theme of looking into the meaning of Jesus Christ's Cross.

1) Who is Jesus to you?

It's not about who Jesus is to your family and friends, or who you are taught Jesus was in history or in church messages, but who Jesus is to you personally.

2) Why did Jesus tell his disciples about his death?

God knows us well. There isn't anything happening without God's intention. God told the disciples about Jesus' death on the cross in advance and prepared them in order for them to accept the meaning and purpose of the Cross.

Read Psalm 103:14

3) God who came to serve

God doesn't serve us whenever He feels like doing so or whenever it's convenient for Him. He serves always, no matter what, and consistently. Although God is invisible, He is worthy of our trust more than any visible existence in this world.

4) Jesus died for our sins

Jesus was crucified on our behalf.

Read Isaiah 53:6

Who is Jesus to you? What kind of existence is He? As long as your relationship with Jesus is not clear to you, no matter what kind of message you hear from the Bible, or no matter how moved you feel from it, you won't be able to receive the real message of the Bible. Without any further delay, find your answer today.

2. Do You Feel Intimate About the Cross?

Read Matthew 20:17-24

In the first half, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and told them about his death and resurrection. Then the mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John, came to Jesus with them, knelt down and asked a favor of Him, saying she would like them to sit next to Jesus in His kingdom. Mark 10:35-41 tells us it was James and John who asked for the favor.

In these two paragraphs, it seems unlikely that James and John had understood or accepted that Jesus would be crucified. If they had accepted the fact, they should have known better than asking that kind of favor. The other ten were described to have been angry at them; they must have been upset with them not because they thought the two asked an outrageous favor of Jesus, but because they thought the two tried to get a head start over them. In Mark 9:34 and Luke 9:46, they are described as having an argument about who is the greatest among the twelve. It's obvious that there was a rivalry among them.

Jesus repeatedly told them about His imminent death on the Cross. When he told them for the first time, Peter rebuked Jesus, and as a result Jesus told him, "Get behind me, Satan!" From that time on every time Jesus told them about His fate, all their responses seemed to have missed the point.

In that sense we might be as same as the disciples. Messages we hear at church should be centered at the Cross. They may not mention the Cross directly, but everything would be meaningless, from our gathering at church every Sunday to worshipping God, without the Cross which has solved all problems. Now, how much are we interested in the Cross or do we feel very intimate about the Cross?

We have so many interests in our daily lives and feel intimate about many things in life. They may be about our own

interests, about families, or about something we may feel strongly, but if we could remember, be more interested in, or feel more strongly about the Cross than those things, that would bless us even more.

Paul teaches this to us in Galatians 6:17

Just like Paul in this scripture, if we always remember the Cross and feel very intimate about it as if we bore the marks of Jesus on our bodies, we should be able to understand Jesus and the Cross more deeply through knowledge and experiences.

3. Jesus' seven words on the Cross

Jesus spoke seven times on the Cross.

1) Luke 23:34

2) Luke 23:43

3) John 19:26-27

4) Matthew 27:46

5) John 19:28

6) John 19:30

7) John 23:46

Today we'll look at the first two among the seven. The first three words are about Jesus' relationship with men. The other four are about His relationship with His Father in heaven.

4. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

The Jews crucified Jesus. It's not that they didn't know the fact that they were crucifying a person named Jesus from Nazareth, but they didn't know that person named Jesus they were about to crucify was in fact God's only son who was sinless. Sinful men were crucifying God's sinless son.

With this word Jesus interceded with God for us. Someone who intercedes with someone has to have power to influence that person. When something happens, we owe it to that person, and we are powerless in solving it ourselves, all we need is someone who is capable of influencing and solving the problem. If a problem is between persons, another person could intervene and solve a situation. However, the problem between people and God couldn't be solved at all since there was no one who is capable enough of influencing God and solving the problem completely.

In Old Testament, there is a prophetic symbol of intercession in the story of Abraham in the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Read Genesis 18:17, 20-21, 23-28, 32-33

In this town of Sodom lived Lot, Abraham's nephew, and his family. Sodom was full of sins and filth beyond turning around. God tried to sweep it away, but Abraham interceded with God for the town. First Abraham asks God if He is going to sweep it away even when there are 50 innocent people in it, and God forgives it. And from there on, Abraham keeps reducing the number of the innocent little by little and keeps interceding with God, only to see God completely sweeping the town away in the end in Genesis 19.

Read Genesis 19:24-25, 27-28

In Genesis 18:17 God wondered, "I shouldn't hide what I am going to do from Abraham." God wanted to share His thoughts with Abraham. If we are to share our thoughts with somebody, that person has to be very important

and trustworthy to us. The more important the thought is, the more important should be that person. Abraham was merely a man, but he was very important to God. Thus God patiently responded to every single one of Abraham's intercessions for the town of Sodom. However, in the end God swept the town away. Surely God promised not to do so if there were 10 innocent people, but He ended up sweeping it away, which shows there weren't even 10 innocent people in Sodom. And Abraham himself, too, failed to intercede for Sodom with his righteousness or holiness.

There are two things we can learn from this story.

- 1) Just like Sodom was full of sin and filth and there weren't even 10 innocent people who could stand before God, in this world of ours, too, there is nobody who could stand before God and prove his/her innocence.
- 2) There is no one who could intercede with God for the sinful.

In Romans 3:10 Paul speaks on this desperate situation in a brief statement.

Read Romans 3:10

Nobody could stand before God with one's righteousness or another's intercession nor could be approved. There is no one who is innocent. Not even one.

In this desperate situation, Jesus Christ was the only one who stood before God and interceded with God for us. When Jesus was on the Cross, He interceded with God for us.

Read Luke 23:34

If you wish to be forgiven, have a righteous relationship with God, and have a sin-free life, seek and pray for Jesus Christ to intercede with God for you. God never asks us to go through a hardship in order to receive eternal life and God's salvation. He requires us to just accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and ask Jesus to intercede with God for us. That's it. I sincerely wish today would be the day you decide to do so.

5. "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise."(Luke 23:43)

Jesus tells this to one of the two criminals being crucified along with him. One of the criminals told Jesus if He was really a Jesus Christ, He should save himself and also them. If he really had believed He was Jesus Christ, the Savior, he probably wouldn't have talked to Him this way. We, too, may say something like this even when we really don't believe in Him. Especially us Japanese tend to bow our heads to anything with wish or expectation to be saved or for something good to happen to us, not out of faith necessarily.

Jesus never responded to this criminal who didn't seem to have faith in Him. But the other criminal was different. He talked to the first criminal and Jesus this way.

Read Luke 23:40-42

He faced himself and accepted that he was a criminal and was being crucified as a result of his own doing. Also, he believed that Jesus was the Son of God and Savior. Therefore, he asked Jesus to remember him when He enter into His kingdom. He believed Jesus was not to be finished on the Cross but to enter into His kingdom and judge everybody. He sincerely wished Jesus to remember the criminal who repented at the end of his life. Jesus responded to him with this word, "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise." To the criminal who repented at the end of his life, right there on the Cross, Jesus told him that very day he would be with Him in paradise.

Just like this criminal who accepted Jesus as his Savior, would you accept Jesus as God having come to us and choose to live a life in which you would be able to receive God's words directly? Or just like the first criminal, would you live a life wondering if Jesus may or may not save you?

In closing let us read Psalms 18:1-2, 6, 9-10, 16-19, 30-32

Psalms 18 is a confession of David, King of Israel and the song he sang when he was rescued from his suffering.

I would like to pray that David's confession will be your confession today as we close today's message.

Let us pray.