

2020. 8.2.

Mennonite Japanese church in Vancouver

I Thessalians 5:1~11

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Children of the light

Recently, Taiga no Itteki written by Hiroshi Itsuki, which means a drop of the big river, has been read by all Japanese, so this book was sold over 3 million copies. Medias have reported the reason that all Japanese are anxious about their life in disaster of Covid19, so that they want to seek the way to solve this in philosophy or religion. I am also reading this book now, but I couldn't find any correct answer. I just thought that this can provide them some comfort, but it couldn't give the hope why human lives and dies. I am praying that all Japanese will read the Bible and meet Jesus to get the eternal life personally.

Now, how do we Christian live this age with Covid19? In fact, human can die not only because of Covid19. We may forget about dying in our peaceful daily lives. To us death means 2 ways that one is our natural death and the other is we meet to the Lord of Jesus in the end of day. But even we Christian do not realize that our death or Jesus' second coming is real as the unbelievers except that in those who have experienced the death of their own family. That is why I chose this topic today, I want you to know the meaning about Jesus' second coming and how we live in this time.

Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia province in Roman Empire. Now they call the city, Thessaloniki in Greece. Of course the city had developed commercially and culturally. In Acts 17:1-2, the church's members of Thessalonica believed in Jesus in only 3 weeks by Paul's preaching. We could imagine that they would be very pure and enthusiastic toward the gospel. But they headed to the troubles that they confused their belief about Jesus' second coming because of some false teachers that gave wrong teaching and also they misunderstood it by their own culture (I Thessalonians 3:5). For these reasons, Paul sent them this letter to correct their wrong belief. It was written about AD43, it is the earliest written of the 13 letters of Paul, especially it teaches the right understanding about Jesus' second coming and how to live right in our daily lives. Even we in modern ages could learn a lot from this scripture. Paul is teaching this truth very kindly and easily just like a mother. (I Thessalonian 2:7)

1. We all are children of the light. (5:1-7)

Look in I Thessalonian 4:13-17, we can find that the church's members of Thessalonica were sad and confused like unbelievers because they couldn't understand right about Jesus' second coming. They didn't have a strong faith of their salvation, so they wondered about those who died before the second coming whether they could be saved or not, and those who are living now would be saved or not. They were anxious and worry about their salvation. Even though it is different from today, we come to realize that it could be the same for us. It caused the bad influences to them in their daily lives.

Look in Thessalonian 4:11, some people didn't work because they believed Jesus will come soon and others returned to their previous life style that they lived in immoral. We can find that it could influence our daily lives when we do not understand correctly about the Jesus second coming. So Paul said ,do not have any anxiety and any ignorance of that and urged them to understand the truth correctly in I Thessalonian 4:13.

Now what is that we have to understand about Jesus' second coming?

Frist, we have to know that we don't need to know about the exact time of the second coming. According to the text 5:1 and Matthew 24:36, the reason is that only God the Father knows about it, but the angels and even the Son of God don't. Second, we have to know and understand that Jesus' second coming will come certainly and suddenly. As you know the time is closer to us who live in modern ages than to those who lived in the first generation of Christian in Thessalonica. But we would think why the time delayed until now. Let see Habakkuk 2:3, "For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." From this verse, we come to know again that Jesus' second coming will come certainly.

Next how will the second coming come?

According to verse 3 and 5, the time will come the time to all mankind like a thief and a labor pain on a pregnant woman. It is the destiny of human being and we can't avoid the time. When we hear these words, we come to be anxious and feel unsafe. But we don't need to worry about that, because God gave the promise to believers. Look at the verse 4 and 5, "But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons (children) of the light and sons (children) of the day." These verses encourage us who believe in Jesus. From Ephesians 5:8 we can understand

about the children of the light and the day. “For we were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” The children of light means believers who were saved from darkness of sin. When the time come, we won’t see the time as a thief. What an amazing grace! We are very special. But look at the verse 6, “So then, let us not be alert and self-controlled.” We got the privilege of children of light and we have to carry out our responsibility. It is the same as a pregnant woman can’t excuse ‘I didn’t know my baby would come and I couldn’t prepare for baby.’ Such as like this we also can’t give excuse to God.

2. Let’s prepare to Jesus’ second coming with faith, love and salvation. (5:8-10)

Look at the verse 8, “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”

What is the faith and love? In the verse 9 it says, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We believe in that God’s love which give us the salvation through Jesus. Look in John3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” When we believe in Jesus, we will be saved without exception. We know that it is very limited to enter the famous college, for example Tokyo Univ. and Toronto Univ., even though we have done our best. But God allows and gives salvation to those who believe in Jesus without exception. It is the faith that we believe in this simple truth which God loves us.

And salvation means that we receive eternal life. Look at the verse 10, “He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” We know about the eternal life from this verse, which is to be with Jesus whether we live or die. Paul says that the eternal life the hope of the salvation. We can hold on to this hope while we live and even after we die. And also the hope of the salvation will be completed at Jesus’ second coming. John 11:25, 26, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Jesus is the life by itself. And Jesus lives in us now and even after we die. Even though our heart beat stops and our spirit gets off our own body, we can live in Jesus eternally. Hallelujah!

Did you get the strange expression of Paul in the verse 8? For examples, ‘faith and love as a breastplate, the hope of salvation as a helmet’. It sounds that the spiritual life looks like a war. Ephesians 6:11, 12 “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take

your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Yes, our spiritual life is the war to evil. Do you think that Paul exaggerated this?

How embarrassed I was that I had thought that Paul would exaggerated about that before I came to understand about spiritual war of Christian. But I came to realize the spiritual war through my failure to the devil for over 10 years. At that time, I only focused to my problems which are family, marriage and raising children and so on, so that I was in deep depression. I had come to lose the faith, the love and the hope of salvation that God gave me.

As you know I started arming for my faith with the Bible in J TJ mission seminary 2 years ago. During my study, I realized that I had been attacked by the devil while I was in suffering, but God had made me stand firm. Now I am taking back the faith, the love and the hope of salvation that God gave me. And I realized one thing that the Holy Spirit had helped me at that moment. Look at Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Sprit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Sprit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." When I was in my trouble, the Holy Spirit has been helping and praying for us even now. Also I realized another thing that we will always win from the devil. Because Jesus has won from Satan. Jesus told us in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." From this truth, we can be confident in any trails in the world. But we have to continue this spiritual war without losing.

3. Do love brothers and sisters just as you are doing. (5:11)

Lastly, how do we live with faith in the end of the world? Some believers in Thessalonians quitted their job suddenly and even returned to their previous immoral life before they believed in Jesus. I think that it may happened the same to us. Then how do we live and discipline ourselves right here? Should we buy pure gold or virtual currency? NO. Paul said in 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." Paul said to love each other even in the end of the world. Even though all people protect to themselves because the emergency of the end of the world, we Christian must make effort to love each other who are believers and also unbelievers.

From last July 17th, Mrs. Sanae started a prayer meeting at 6 am Vancouver time

and at 10pm Japanese time on Friday because she wanted to encourage Mr. Akira. Because he returned to Japan several years ago, but he couldn't find a church that he can adjust. Now at that prayer meeting, 5, 6 church members gather and pray for not only Mr. Akira but also other members who is suffering with their sickness. We are encouraging one another and building each other up just as we are doing.

Next there is also another love to unbelievers. It is evangelism, when we tell them the gospel and pray for their salvation. I pray that we all will be received this mission from God and will continue to do this until the end of the world.

Here is a good example.

I remember that it was the day of sports which was Kenta's preschool.

There was a game to get a small bun with using our mouth.

It was about 5 or 6 meters to the goal where their moms await.

Kenta stood on the start line with his friend, Hayato. Start!!

They are running as fast they possibly can. Oh, Hayato tumbles down.

All people got around him, the teachers, other parents and friends, cheered him up.

"Hayato! Get up! You can do it!"

He got up as soon as listened to the voice and rushed to the goal again.

Further away, Kenta almost reached the finish. He got the bun with his mouth and cut the line of goal. And he rushed to his mom, me! I hugged him strongly with big smile.

On the other hand, Hayato was also hugged by his mom.

They all rejoiced with full of joy!

This example seems like very different with our spiritual life. But I think that our life as Christian looks like the race in the Kenta's sports day. In the race there is no failure and any disqualification. We all are given the eternal life by God.

In conclusion, the end of the world which means the last day of our individual life and others is Jesus' second coming. From today's text, Paul gave some guidance to us of how to live in the end of the world First we have to be awoken and discipline ourselves as the children of light and we have to continue to fight to the devil with the faith, love and hope of salvation. Second we must continue to love each other in our daily lives until Jesus' second coming. When we do what pleases God, we can be prepared for the end of the world with no fear and will win this world.

Let's pray.