

"Our Essential Word, Life, and Light"

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
(John 1:1-5)

It is said that water, oxygen, and light (sun) are necessary for plants to grow. But the Bible tells us that there are indispensable things for humans as well. In the short Bible passage that we have read today, there are three key words; "word", "life", and "light" which are very important to us. And they all represent Jesus Christ. Today I will talk about these three things from the words of the Bible, relating to Christmas as the background. First of all, let's look at the word, "In the beginning was the Word".

In the beginning, was the Word.

When we are traveling in Japan, we realize that Japanese people have a very unique sensibility. When walking along a mountain road covered with trees, we often find a Jizo and a small shrine on the roadside, and there are flowers and foods provided for them several hours ago. There are huge trees called "Goshinboku" that are hundreds of years old in various parts of Japan. And the trees have been made objects of worship. Millions of people will wait for the sunrise to worship the sun on the first day of a New Year. We Japanese people have sacred thoughts in front of such things and put our hands together to worship them.

If you drive north from San Diego by car for about five hours, there are the biggest trees in the world. Yes, it is a large tree of 2,200 years old, called General Sherman in Sequoia National Park. I went there several times, but I have never seen anyone who is putting the hands together in front of that big tree. Regarding sunrise, for example, I have never seen a man who is putting the hands together for the sun that rises over the Grand Canyon or the Lake Galilee in Israel.

I have no intention to talk about such things as that the Japanese are better or that foreigners have no religious sensitivity. I can understand the feeling of putting hands together before a big tree and the sunrise. Because behind them are the hands of God, who controls all things in heaven and earth. However, for me, the sun is just a huge burning object, and big trees are plants that have survived the harsh natural environment for many years. They are created by God.

It is very important to feel the fear of God behind nature. But it is impossible for us to know the existence of God by itself. Even if we keep watching the sunrise for 30 years, or if we sit down fasting for 20 years before the big tree, we are not able to know what God wants for us or what God is trying to tell us.

Yes, what is essential for us to know about is the "word". If we do not listen to the "word", we cannot get specific guidelines for our lives, nor get encouragement and commandments. So, it is very important that John writes, **"In the beginning, was the Word"**. This word means that God had a relationship with mankind with the "word" from the beginning of the world, and that God wants to be deeply engaged in our lives.

Clearly in the mind of John who wrote this passage, there must be the word from Genesis Chapter 1. When God created the world, He first said, "Let there be light". Then Genesis writes that "There was light". As John writes in John 1:3, **"Through him all things were made"**. That is, the things happened when God's Word is issued. This is the power of the "word" of the Bible.

Psalm 33: 6 says, **"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth"**. As I said, the word of God has a power to create a new world and a new situation.

Psalm 107:20 says, **"He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave"**. This means that actually our wounded mind and body are healed by his word. In addition, the word of God has the power to rescue us and save us from the way to be ruined and destroyed.

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Isaiah 55:11 says, **"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"**. This means that if the word of God is sent to us and we take it with faith, that word will not pass in vain, but the thing will be done at the destination.

These are what we see within the word of God. Therefore, there is no Sunday worship service without the Bible words being spoken. And surprisingly, in John 1:14 it is written: **"The Word became flesh"**. What does it mean by the word becomes a body? The body is Jesus Christ, and the event refers to Christmas.

In other words, Jesus Christ was born to represent himself as the word of God. And Christ revealed himself to us through his deeds and words about the Father God, humanity, death, life, love, and grace.

More than ten years ago, the Dead Sea Scrolls were exhibited at the museum in San Diego. At that time, a security check comparable to that of the airport was made when entering the museum. That's right, because that is not only the treasure of Israel, but the treasure of mankind.

In February of this year, we saw the ruins of the community in Israel where a group of people lived and transcribed the Bible manuscripts carefully into the Scroll. At a time without a copy machine, day after day, they hand copied manuscripts older than the Dead Sea Scrolls that were available at that time. Possibly it might be the original Bible. They copied word by word, phrase by phrase every day. And the finished Scrolls were placed in a natural cave, which were discovered after 2000 years and we can see them today.

When thinking of these things, we know that God protected the Bible that is the words of God for a long time, and when the time has come, God has revealed the words to the world. If the Bible is not in our hands today, we have no way to learn about God other than expressing our feelings as "Ah, good feeling", "Oh, being healed", or "Wonderful Presence". In that case, of course there is no church, and I have nothing to tell everyone here. It is no use to listen to my life stories and experiences all year round.

Today, words are overflowing around us. For example, compared to 20 years ago, we are now able to obtain a large amount of information instantly. Indeed, the modern times are saturated by words. As our body inoculates excessive calories, various problems will arise, so we are now surrounded by excessive words that the mankind has never experienced before. It has not been too long since the flood of words started, but someday you will find out what this has done to the human body and mind. Yes, the research title for this effect would be: “A consideration on the minds of human beings that have come to know too much about junky information”.

The prophet Amos was a prophet who was given God’s words in the eighth century BC and kept telling the words to the people. He wrote the following for the future generations. **“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.”** (Amos 8:11)

Certainly there is still a famine in this world. There is hunger. In some countries, it is extremely difficult to obtain drinking water. However, there are many countries where these things are already oversupplied. Although it may be said that the economies of the United States and Japan are in recession, we are facing the reality of “diet” that is to reduce what has been excessively supplied to our bodies. Likewise, the words surrounding us are already saturated.

When I was a student in the United States 25 years ago, I read a two month old Japanese newspaper from corner to corner that I found in a parcel from Japan as a wrapping paper that was sent by sea two months earlier. Today, nobody does such a thing. Because we can browse the same information through internet in a large amount, just as we live in Japan. But, as if Amos prophesied to us today, he wrote that while such words were overflowing, the people will face the famine of listening to the word of the Lord. Yes, in other words, because mankind has come to know such huge needless information, and do not know what they should know, they are feeling thirstiness in their hearts.

Through our worship service, we have been listening to the words that we should know every week. Why we receive the devotion guide, "One Day, One Life" every week? Because our souls need spiritual food, just as we take meals every day. We are made by God to live like that. It is impossible to make up for this by other means. Even if we gather words from all over the world through internet, they cannot satisfy our souls. And it is Jesus Christ, being the word of God, who became flesh and came to this world.

Let's talk about the second thing. Amazingly, John further wrote that this word has life. Let's look at the second point, "The word has life".

The word has life.

As I mentioned, there are a lot of words around us. But while we are in the flood of such words, we rarely say something like "This word has life". In the first place, what is the meaning of life in words?

As I told you earlier, John said that "Jesus is the word", and that "He dwelled among us". That is, Jesus came to this world. The fact that there was life in this word means "There was life within Jesus". And the Bible says that Jesus' life is also given to us. But, that life in Jesus Christ is completely different from the one we know in this world.

A writer called Kotaro Sawaki wrote a book called *Late Night Express*. The book is a travel journal of when he was young, traveling from Hong Kong to London by bus and train without using an airplane. He writes interesting things in this book. At that time, he stayed in a cheap dormitory in India where several cots were randomly arranged. Backpackers from all over the world gather in such a cheap hotel.

I think there are many people who are dreaming about the enjoyment of overseas trips on holidays and having dreams of visiting countries around the world without worrying about the time, when they retire. At that time, Mr. Sawaki and the young people, who he met through his journey, were realizing such a dream earlier due to the economic and social stability.

They did not have to worry about "the time limit to go back to Japan", or "wake-up time

in the morning". Moreover, "there is no schedule for the day". When summer comes, they visit the World Heritage sights in the northern hemisphere, and in winter, they visit those sights in the southern hemisphere freely. They could live like a dream, and some young people also had such lives for many years.

Mr. Sawaki wrote that one morning at the dormitory, he saw a young man, who left his home country a few years ago, gazing at the ceiling with the eyes of a dead fish. Mr. Sawaki thought, "This is bad, I have to do something!", because no life was found in his eyes. Indeed, they looked like eyes of a dead fish. Needless to say, the young man was not actually dead, and his heart was moving, and perhaps there was no major health problem as well. Therefore, he had a life. But the life mentioned in the Bible is not this kind of life.

Especially John wrote about "life" so many times in his Gospel. Actually, the number is more than 35 times. Let's look at an example, John 6:30-40 in particular. Here, John is talking about the mysterious food Manna that God gave to the people of Israel in the wilderness every day from heaven. I talked about this in the Thanksgiving worship service two weeks ago. It reads as follows:

³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise

them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

The "bread" written here is food that becomes our flesh and blood, entering from our mouths. The people of Israel knew that once they had been fed with the bread called Manna from God, they were nourished by it. So, they sought such a food from Jesus. But interestingly Jesus said in verse 35 that **"I am the bread of life"**. And he also said, **"Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"**.

The young man who I mentioned before certainly took food from his mouth, and his physical life was kept. But the life that Jesus talked about here was not in him. He probably had seen all the countries of the world with his eyes. We manage to take a week-long vacation and go sightseeing to some place occasionally, but he routinely went around to sightseeing spots everywhere. However, the starvation in his heart was never satisfied by doing such things. After seeing all those places that people thought wonderful, he was no longer touched by anything that he saw, and he was just laying down there, looking at the ceiling with an empty soul.

Everyone, there is a life in God's word that really revives such a human being. About this life in Christ, Jesus said, **"Yet you refuse to come to me to have life."** as written in John 5:40. This young man would have left his home country with the expectation of seeing the world that he had never seen before with his own eyes. And he might have looked around the nature and the buildings that are called the legacy of mankind in various parts of the world. However, even though he looked at all those things, he could not satisfy his thirst. No matter where he went, he could not find the "true life".

Do we have the life promised by this Christ? This young man did not have to go around the world to find this life. Jesus Christ was born in a stable. Why? Because we humans can never approach God, God Himself was born in the world we live in. Moreover, Christ was born in the form of a baby in a stable which anyone can approach, rather than in a palace that is difficult to approach.

That is why Jesus lamented saying, **"Yet you refuse to come to me to have life"**. The young man was unaware of this true life in the vicinity, travelling around the world and going astray. Such people are countless in this world as well as this youth. Christmas is the day to declare that everyone can go to Jesus who said, "I will give you a true life". The life of Christ is now before your eyes. If you would like to receive it today, there is no chance that you will be repelled by hearing, "The life is not in stock right now, so please wait until next year's Christmas". Today, you can get it for sure. Let's talk about the third thing. That is "Life was Light".

The Life was Light of Men.

John wrote in John 1:4-5; **"⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."** The word "light" comes out more than 21 times in the Gospel of John. Sometimes people are told that "You are the light of hope of Japan or America". But eventually their names will be forgotten. Moreover, if they die, they are no longer called "the light of hope". That light is extremely limited in time.

The light that John is mentioning here is Jesus Christ. No one today thinks of Jesus Christ as an imaginary person like Peter Pan. Surely he was born in Bethlehem of Judea, 2000 years ago. And the man who was born 2000 years ago is our Light today.

This is impossible in commonsense. As I mentioned earlier, the word, "You are our light of hope" is usually for the people living with us today. But today more and more people stand up from the abyss of despair with Christ as the Light.

The other day, a young person visited me saying, "Why is this unfair world in the presence of God? Even though I have been given enough food to eat and a place to sleep, there are many people who are not so in the world. Is not this unfair?" Everyone might think like that. Have you ever thought of such a thing? Why does that person suffer from this kind of thing? Why is that bad guy not punished? Considering such a thing, we tend to think that the world is full of various doubts and uncertainties in darkness.

I said to him that "The world certainly looks unfair, so what is God doing then? It may look like God is the source of injustice, but I think that you should not get to the conclusion in a hurry. It certainly seems to be unfair now, but since the one who will surely match the scoop is God. Matching the scoop is to mean that things of different amounts will finally become the same amount. The truth is, at the end, God will match the scoop of this unfair world that is presently full of darkness.

If only our experiences in the past, present, and future are everything we have, it is certainly unfair. There are many people in the world who sigh about the unfairness and even think about doing rampage in an inattentive manner. But it should not be so, because all the results have yet to come out. And if that settlement is done in the hands of God without fail, the world will never be unfair. When we realize that, our guess and search time is over and doubt, uncertainty, and hesitation will pass away. The dark road is illuminated and the light shines in the darkness of anxiety.

Earlier, I talked about the word that had life. But I did not mention one important thing about this life. That is about the life that God gives us through Jesus Christ. It is written in John 6:38-40 as follows: **"³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."**

Here the life of Christ is eternal life, and the will of our Father God is that we are to gain this eternal life by believing in Christ who is the word, the life, and the light. And this "eternal life" promises us that any one of us will not receive unfair treatment. The time will come when God surely match the scoop on all the things on this earth where we have lived.

When we go out to the town, the streets are illuminated by lights like noon at night. It sometimes seems to me as if the lighting desperately tries to deceive our darkness of reality. There is still darkness in our hearts. Various doubts, desperation, and disappointment contribute to the darkness of our hearts. Considering death, it seems

more desperate. But this light still shines in such darkness. And the Bible tells us firmly that, **“⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** (John 1:5) Christ was born in this world as the “light” to shine us all.

I would like to ask everyone here before welcoming Christmas in 2016. Does the word of the Lord that I told you today, leads your daily life to the foundation on which we should stand? Have you received the life of Christ that I told you today? And does the light of Christ shine in your life? Let’s finish this message with the last two words that John wrote in his Gospel.

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” (John 12:46)

“Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” (John 12:36)

Let us pray.

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