

"The Manger and The Cross"

Merry Christmas! Let us thank God for this day, and for his son from the bottom of our hearts. Let's greet each other!

We just celebrated and greeted each other with joy just now. I don't think anyone said "Merry Christmas" with a gloomy and sad feeling. Christmas is joy for us. We have no doubt about this.

But when Jesus was born, there were people who were full of fear and anxiety about his birth. I would like to share about these people today.

I preached about Jesus' birth and crucifixion last Sunday and today will also be the same.

The birth of Jesus is important because it is the starting point that lead to the cross. If we know His beginning, we should also know His last. The life of Jesus is largely characterized by these two things.

Jesus' birth and death both share something in common. Do you know what is? The common factor is that these both events involved a person with authority.

When Jesus was born, **king Herod** tried to kill baby Jesus. (Matthew 2:13)

Governor-General Pilate was involved with, and ultimately made the judgment for Jesus' crucifixion.

Both King Herod and Governor Pilate had power, power that ordinary people are not given. They could end the life of people they did not like. They had the power to do most things as they wished.

The authority of both these men were involved with Jesus' birth and death. However, both men, even with all their power, were restless. One because of Jesus' birth, and one because of Jesus' death.

When the son of God was born, what was in Herod's heart? In the Japanese translated Bible, it says that he was anxious. Herod became anxious from hearing that the king of Jews would be born in Jerusalem.

Why do we feel anxiety? Most of the time, our anxiety is closely related to our fear. We are now rejoicing his birth, but there was a person who was afraid of his birth.

But think about this. What Herod was afraid of is the little baby boy who was sleeping in a manger. Of course, the baby did not have any power. Does King Herod need to be afraid of him? What kind of person fears a little baby sleeping in a crib? Are there people who are afraid of going to babies-are-us? No! We peek into the crib and look at the little baby with a smile.

As a baby, Jesus did not say anything to Herod. However, Herod believed that this baby would threaten his status in the future. In other words, Herod feared Jesus **because he feared his power to do what he wants and wishes would be restricted by Jesus.**

We might criticize Herod and think, what a pitiful man he was. To be so obsessed with his status that he feared a newborn child.

However, his heart is not completely unrelated to ours. His heart actually reveals our own sinful nature. Not being handcuffed does not equate to not having sin. Sin is not something we ourselves decide if we have or not.

Sin is to fear and think that if we are involved with God, we would not be able to live as we wish, and therefore avoid God.

The fear of Herod was just like this. He was afraid of possibly losing his authority, which he was using as he had wished. However ironically, his life was made miserable because of his selfish use of authority.

I have had the opportunity to listen to and hear about many people's lives. As I listen to these various stories, I have come to find one thing. When we fear losing our freedom and walk away from God, we are actually losing true freedom by doing this.

There are people who define and pursue freedom by living the way they want. We love freedom! But I have to testify. In reality, freedom that is defined by doing what we want actually ties us up and makes us less free.

Jesus Christ came to the earth to set us truly free. Jesus once said; ³¹ "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Paul also mentioned about Jesus: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

Today, Luis and Reika will be baptized in this service. What a great joy for such young people to come to the Lord. Their life has just started, and their future is in their hands.

By becoming a Christian, they will not be losing their freedom from today. They are bringing their one lifetime before God, and will enjoy the true freedom that comes from God, as they walk their life.

When Jesus was crucified, What was in Governor Pilate's mind? According to the Bible, "Pilate wanting to satisfy the crowd and handed Jesus over to be crucified (Mark 15:15)

Pilate who had final authority over Jesus' future, instead of looking for truth, looked at the crowd. In his decision, he chose to save his face instead of choosing faith.

But Jesus in his crucifixion, was naked and beaten, abused, and spit on. He did not do anything to save his reputation or protect himself. It would have been easy for the son of God to protect himself.

Just like Jesus himself said before, he could have asked God to send an army down from heaven. He could have easily used his authority to save and protect himself, but he did not.

Sometimes we are afraid of what people think about us. We are in a way, afraid of people. And this is where the dissonant sound in our lives comes from.

The body of Jesus was completely beaten and worn. As the prophet Isaiah had prophesized, there was no dignity in him. The contrast between Pilate and Jesus here was that Jesus did not fear people, while Pilate was deeply afraid of how people perceived the situation.

Sometimes the thoughts of others are more important to us than Jesus Christ. If our lives are dictated by our fear of other's perceptions, can we truly say that we have fully lived our own life? That I lived MY life?

Dear everyone, the lives of Herod and Pilate had a problem. We have to learn from them, so that we do not walk over the same footprint.

The word "Christmas" captures everything about why we celebrate. However, our world today prefers to say, "season's greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas". Almost as to reflect Herod's heart, people today think, "Jesus Christ? If I let him in my heart, I cannot live freely". No!! That cannot be farther from the truth. We are losing our real freedom by denying him.

In our world, we want to affirm our value by the number of friends and likes we have on Facebook. We must already know inside, that this is not true. That our value is not determined by such a thing. But don't you think this is the same heart which Pilate had?

The baby on the manger is not an image that instills fear. Jesus, who was crucified on the cross has nothing but scars. It isn't necessary for us to feel fear in front of Jesus, or fear what people perceive.

Let us come near to Him. We have one life. We should fear what is truly worthy of awe, and loosen the control that unnecessary fear has over our lives. Let us obtain true freedom, and live our lives in that freedom.

This is the Christmas message and the message of His life.

Let's pray.

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