

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

## **“Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”**

You may have a friend that you have known for decades. There are some of you who have been with your spouse for over half a century. These are people that you have known for many years, but there is one person that you have spent more time with than everyone else in your life, and that is yourself.

When I see myself in the mirror, I notice that a lot has changed in my appearance over the years. But this person in the mirror has always been me since the day I was born. That person in the mirror is myself, and as I do now, I will spend the rest of my life with myself. This person will literally be with me till the very end, so I would like to continue to be on good terms with him.

When we are young, we are very conscious of our body. We are concerned about how fit or attractive our body appears and also take great care in choosing the things we wear, in other words we are mainly concerned about our physical appearance. But as we get older, our focus shifts from how tough or pretty we look to how healthy and comfortable we are. The fashion magazines we once read have been replaced by health magazines with articles on how to lower blood pressure. Many of us have had the experience of going to a class reunion and seeing our classmates for the first time in decades, and we end up spending most of the time talking about our health problems and what kind of medications we are taking.

Therefore we are always concerned about our own body in some way. But how should we really deal with this body of ours? When I was young, there were strange home remedies like putting egg whites on your face for skin-care and wrapping green onions around your neck as a remedy for sore throat, but I don't see people doing these anymore. Other health crazes like the Caspian Sea yogurt and the inversion table have come and gone. It seems like we are always being influenced by these health trends as we try to find the right way to take care of our body.

Whatever the object may be, the person who knows best about that object is the person who created it. So if we want to know about our body, we must first look at the instruction manual written by the person who created our body. If we are to read this manual, it will teach us the best way to take care of our own body. And this instruction manual is none other than the Bible we have before us.

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

The first thing we must examine regarding the human body is how it was first created. By learning about its beginning, we get an idea of the substance of our body. In the Bible, the beginning is written in Genesis. There we find an account of how God created the first human being Adam. The passage simply states: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

Here it says that man was formed from the dust of the ground, which means that the human body is a finite object, and that it will one day return to dust. The dust itself had no life. But after God breathed into this body made of dust, it became a living being. An important truth is to be seen here, that is that the human body itself is a lifeless object, and only after God breathes into it does it become a living being. We came to life because God breathed life into our bodies, so that means that we are in essence spiritual beings who have the breath of God within us.

Paul knew about this as he wrote in Romans 12, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2).

Here Paul tells us to “offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” and says that “this is your true and proper worship”. Just as we saw in Genesis, Paul also knew that our body is made up of both flesh and spirit. The human body includes not only the flesh, but also the spirit, and Paul instructs us to give both our flesh and spirit as a living sacrifice to God and says this is the true and proper way of worship.

When we have no faith or religion, we only focus our attention on things that are seen. One of the things that catches our attention the most is physical beauty. There is an ever-increasing market for health and beauty products. Most of the ads we see in magazines are for these kinds of products. As our interest in physical beauty becomes stronger, physical beauty itself becomes an object of worship, and it could evolve into a type of religion, we see this happening around the world even today.

On the other hand, when we are only focused on spiritual matters and view our body as a mere accessory to our spirit, we neglect our body and treat it as something inferior. We Christians are especially prone to have this sort of inclination, though we may not

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

even be aware of it.

Our body and spirit are not independent of each other, but are part of one being. In other words our body and spirit are linked to one another, so what we feel in our hearts affect our physical health, and what we feel in our body affect our spiritual health. When an issue that has been troubling our spirit is resolved we feel the burden lift from our shoulders, and when we recover from a physical illness, we regain our peace of mind.

Our Creator knows about this relationship between our spirit and body. Or I should say that there is no one else who knows more about this than God. He is the one who created the human body so He knows exactly what it needs and the limitations it has.

Around 2,900 years ago in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, there was a prophet named Elijah. He was a bold and fearless prophet. He was not someone who could be easily discouraged. Once he had to confront a group of 850 pagan prophets, and he challenged them alone as the prophet of the God of Israel. An average person would shrink away in such circumstances, but Elijah was unflinching as he faced his opponents, and won the battle not by his own might, but by the power of God. It was an overwhelming victory for Elijah and the battle appeared to be over.

But when the news of this defeat reached king Ahab's wife Jezebel, who was on the side of the pagan prophets, she sent a messenger to Elijah and said: “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them” (1 Kings 19:2). Jezebel's words expressed her strong desire to take Elijah's life. She was determined to kill Elijah.

When Elijah heard these words, he was gripped with fear. His heart failed him. So he fled from where he was to go into hiding and begged God for his own death saying: “I have had enough, Lord...Take my life” (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah was bold and courageous, but he was not almighty. He was completely exhausted and a sense of hopelessness filled his heart, even to the point of him asking for his own death. He had just come out of a great victory over his enemies, but then he suddenly hit rock bottom. This is what we refer to today as burnout.

So what did God do when He saw this? Did He rebuke Elijah and call him a failure? Instead of rebuking Elijah, God sent an angel to give him “some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water” (1 Kings 19:6). It wasn't just bread, but bread baked over hot

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

coals, today that would be like hot toasted bread. God baked some bread for him and gave him water to drink. So Elijah ate and drank and went to sleep. After he got some rest, the angel came again and said to him, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you” (1 Kings 19:7). God knew exactly what Elijah needed to recover from that state. He was restored both physically and spiritually, and after this period of recovery he was able to go back to face Ahab and Jezebel.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spent most of His time with the disciples training them as apostles, and in the midst of their hectic schedule, He told them to go to a quiet place away from the crowd to get some rest. And we find many passages in the Bible where Jesus is at the table sharing a meal with someone. It is essential for us humans to get rest and be fed, and Jesus knew this more than anyone else.

When Jesus was in Samaria and He met the woman at the well, He asked the woman to give Him a drink of water. Just like us, Jesus became thirsty. When Jesus was on the cross, He spoke His seven last words. One of these was the words, “I thirst”. Just like us, Jesus had a body with physical needs that had to be met. He experienced everything we as humans experience, whether its hunger, thirst, or exhaustion. So He knew very well that the condition of our body has a great effect on our spirit.

Once a crowd of more than 4000 people followed Jesus for three days without having anything to eat. Mark gives us the following account in his Gospel:

“During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance” (Mark 8:1-3).

When Jesus saw the large crowd that had been following Him, He was filled with compassion for those people. He knew they were hungry and was concerned that they wouldn't have enough energy to make it back home. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cared that those people had hungry stomachs.

I recently saw a documentary on NHK titled “Bacchan”. The documentary followed the life of Chikako Nakamoto, an 82-year-old woman in the suburbs of Hiroshima who has been given the nickname Bacchan (which means grandma in Japanese). Since her forties, Mrs. Nakamoto has been making dinner for the neighborhood children. In the

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

evening, after the kids get out of school, they would all gather at Mrs. Nakamoto's house. They affectionately call her Bacchan. These kids come from troubled homes where they face poverty and neglect, and they are always hungry because they couldn't get enough to eat at home.

For many years, Bacchan volunteered as a probation officer for juvenile delinquents to help them rehabilitate back into society. After beginning her work as a probation officer, she quickly realized that what drove these kids to crime was hunger. Since then she began cooking food for these kids. Before long, she was cooking not only for the children who were assigned to her but for their friends also, and eventually the women from the neighborhood also came to help her. Kids who had been acting tough in the streets open up before Bacchan, and when she scolds them, they listen carefully without talking back.

Speaking about the children, Bacchan says, “If they're hungry, it's no use telling them to get their act together. It's always best to feed them handmade food. Any child, no matter how troubled they may be, would calm down after their fed. I know because I've seen it happen myself...These kids, when they are hungry they could only think of doing something bad. If it's a girl she might sell her body, if it's a boy he would rob someone or shoplift. That's about all they could think of when they are hungry. Ten out of ten kids would all behave this way”. And sure enough when their stomachs are filled, these boys and girls open up their hearts. They would open up and talk to Bacchan, and she would carefully listen to each word they say.

Sometimes we might hear someone say, “I am feeling down spiritually. Is it because I don't pray enough? Should I spend more time reading the Bible? It must be because I lack faith”. Then someone else comes and says to that person, “Absolutely, you are not spending enough time praying and reading the Bible. Pray more and read more”. This kind of advice may help in some circumstances. But it is not the advice of someone who sees and cares about that person as a whole.

Are you eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and exercise regularly? If you are eating an unbalanced diet, staying up late every night, or not getting enough exercise, the first thing you must do to tackle that spiritual low is to restore your physical condition. If you are hungry, you have to start by filling your stomach.

I want you to remember this. Please make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and check to see if you have any kind of health condition before you rush to the conclusion that you are feeling down because you lack faith. For a long time, the

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

church has had this sort of unhealthy view of our spiritual condition. When we are sleep deprived, lack appetite, or have an illness, our faith too can become weak. God didn't tell Elijah that he didn't pray long enough. God fed him and gave him rest.

Although Peter was Jesus' closest disciple, he denied Jesus before His crucifixion. Jesus went to the cross all by Himself. But after His resurrection, Jesus appeared before Peter by the Sea of Galilee. After fishing all night without a single catch, Peter saw Jesus standing on the shore, so he jumped in the water and rushed toward Jesus.

When Peter reached the shore, his body all wet from the swim, he found Jesus waiting there with a fire started and some fish Jesus had grilled for him. The Lord's heart for us never changes. When He gave Elijah bread, he baked them on hot coals. The Lord adds that extra touch so that we can enjoy the food He prepares for us.

At the time it was already spring, but it was still cold that morning. Peter jumped into the lake so his body was freezing. He was out fishing all night without food so he must have been starving. Jesus found Peter in such a state before his restoration took place. That moment when Jesus asked three times “Simon...Do you love me?”, Jesus not only saw Peter's heart, but was also mindful about Peter's physical condition.

This was the first time Peter came face-to-face with Jesus after his denial of Jesus. But when Peter came to Him, Jesus did not scorn Peter for betraying Him, and instead He gave Peter the fish He had just grilled on the fire. As he ate the fish, Peter must have felt his body being warmed up by the fire.

We can imagine Jesus smiling as He watched Peter munching on the fish. Just like Bacchan said, “If they're hungry, it's no use telling them to get their act together. It's always best to feed them handmade food”. Jesus fed Peter the fish He prepared with His own hands and made sure Peter had a full stomach, and it was after this that He said to Peter, “Simon...do you love me?”.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us an amazing truth about our bodies: “19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Paul says that our body is an “temple of the Holy Spirit” and that this temple is not our own. He then makes the shocking announcement that this body of ours has been

April 2, 2017 “Elijah: Do Not Neglect Your Body”

bought at a price.

Dear brothers and sisters, no matter how many years we've had our body, or whatever illness it is battling right now, our body is still the temple of the Holy Spirit. And this body has been bought at a price. Our body has been bought in exchange for the very life of Jesus. As long as we have this earthly body, we must struggle against sin. But Christ died for our sins, and took the cross for us so that we may not perish in sin. We are saved today because Christ gave His life for us. A price had already been paid for our body. Therefore this body is not our own, so we are to use this body to honor and glorify God. After his encounter with the resurrected Jesus, the once cowardly Peter devoted the rest of his life to glorifying God through his body.

Today we are having our monthly curry lunch. I am very excited. Eating a meal isn't the same thing as putting gas in your car. Eating is a spiritual act. Some of you were peeling potatoes and carrots last night as you prepared today's curry. You might find this surprising, but in doing so you were performing a sacred duty. The baked bread for Elijah and the grilled fish for Peter were both sacred works of God and an expression of His love.

Those of you who cook at home, I encourage you to prepare your food prayerfully and with love. What you are doing should not be called a chore. For the food you prepare nourishes and becomes part of our body, our body which had been bought by Jesus in exchange for His own life. And the food not only strengthens our body, but also lifts up our spirit.

The Apostle Paul himself knew about these things. At the end of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we find that he didn't just pray for the protection of their spirits. Let us read what Paul said as we close today's message:

“ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Let us pray.

Translated by Keita Machida