

“Is it too late to pray for the dead?”

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Kobe International Christ Church

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Theme Scripture: Acts 16:31 (New International Version)

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’”

<Introduction>

We visited Minami Atami Marin Hall on our 2nd Atami Landslide Disaster Volunteer where the body were enshrined. When I contacted Atami City Hall on 19th (Monday) to get a permission to visit the facility where eighteen bodies were enshrined, I was rejected.

When a joint memorial service was held in Sendai City immediately after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the government officials were gathering bereaved families. However, as soon as the Buddhist priest who wearing a monk cloth, came to chant a Buddhist sutra, probably they want to maintain the separation of politics and religion, they went out. At the time of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, there were no such cases. With religious people of Nishikatain, Kakimotonohiromaro Shrine, and Kobe International Christ Church in Tarumi-ku Kobe City, and the professors of Kobe Shoin Women's University, which I had a relationship since I was teaching as a part-time at their university, we established “Hanshin Religious Society” in April 2011, because of the atmosphere of exclusion of religious people. A media reporter also joined this gathering online yester, 23rd, which has been going on for nearly 10 years.

After my message, “You too by a dam, Atami”, a lively opinion was given in the questions and answers session. Questions were asked about the resent rigid tendency of the government to regulate even being with the dead. Professor Kaneko Akira of Tenrikyo University, which religion is famous for “Hinokishin (daily contribution)”, also added a question to this worrying situation.

This morning, I would like to consider with you together what it is like in the Bible that there is no memorial service for the dead after the funeral at Protestant Church since the religious reformer Martin Luther [1483-1546].

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(1) What I noticed during the volunteering

a. Even religious people are silent in the era of technology-oriented

Atami Landslide Disaster is also a man-made disaster. It was caused by a sediment control dam. Nature is mourning in human society with overconfidence in technology (Romans 8:22). Media is telling a lie; “Catastrophic floods in Germany. The effects of climate change is creeping.” (National Geographic. July 21, 2021) Floods have killed 180 people in Germany and neighboring countries. The Yihetan Dam in Luoyang, Henan Province, China. The embankment has collapsed over a length of 20 meters. At 6 am on July 21, the People's Liberation Army blew up part of the dam for an emergency release.

It is due to climate change? At any rate, why didn't Germany report about the dam broke for the first? Dams transform rivers into “dead rivers”, and threaten life and property in the event of disasters. The existence of Japanese trout relied on the quality of river. River water is polluted by concrete. River fish moan for their survival on a warning. Therefore, scientists, researchers, and the government should scrutinize the occurrence of floods in the context of urban development plan.

Shouldn't we make genuine efforts to deal with man-made disasters caused by public works projects?

Japan promoted efficiency and rationalization even before and during the previous war. It imitated Germany by aiming to become a technocratic nation. One of the huge public work projects is the construction of the Sup'ung Dam along the border of Manchu Autonomous County. Japanese imperial engineers were crazy about the efficient colonization of Asian countries, and they raised dam construction in Southeast Asia as their policy. (2020. *ZuisouZuihitsu*. Chugainippoh. November 13) A representative Japanese company also invested in technology in the world great power station, the Three Gorges Dam in China.

To renewable energy so that we will not let out children and grandchildren pay for compensation that we had made. The Kobe International Sustaining Organization will continue to work on the “resurrection of Rice Field, Mountain, and Bay”.

b. Something made me think

If the state does not obey the law and order, and neglects human rights, I should not be silence as a prophet of the wilderness and a substitute for the world of God. For example, at a scene of disaster, the media, volunteers, and medical personnel are blocked by political judgment and even after 72 hours, nobody can enter at all. An organic body of “*Kyoshin* (共振: Sympathized resonance)”, “*Kyokan* (共感: empathy)”, and “*Kyoku* (共苦: Share sufferings)”, “*En* (縁: relationship)” are about to become a thing of the past throughout Japan. Control has been widespread even before the COVID-19 disaster. Although I want to be close to the sadness of others, I can't go through nor enter the area, and I am not informed about where there are people because of a “personal information” instruction. Our duty, sentiment, and love for neighbors as a human who try to overcome the challenges and help each other are also ignored. If we cannot pass the permission, application, and registration of the administration, we are not able to confirm the safety and life of people. The detailed question of the documents of the office is a cruel treatment for the elderly and other affected people.

c. Community

Eventually, the consciousness of the community diminishes, and I close my mouth for multiple paperwork

that is vertically divided and inflexible. The doctor does not examine a patient with the hand and does not look at the patient's face, and just tells the name of the disease only by the numerical value on the screen. The patient receives a prescription and hands it to the accounting. Although it is that kind of time, it has become a creepy society.

Sasaki Miwa (Project Assistant Professor of Osaka Graduate University), who volunteered together twice at Atami tells; "Houses of childhood friends are swept away in front of me. Even my family is caught in a debris flow, my hands cannot reach them. Even if I want to see my family for a once, that is not allowed. Why does the expert hold a preponderant position than giving victims a last moment to say good-by? Why is the cavalier treatment tolerating in the disaster affected area for the victims who regret for their situation? Isn't it the priority behind them that the expert supreme principle and the people are rushing forward? Whether or not Japan is suffering from COVID-19, the preparation of meeting to the dead, which is still warm, has taken away. Even the last moment to say good-by to the lived person is controlled by the government, and the person's life ends with clerical processing. However, the dead is alive. 'Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. (John 11:26)'"

Not for "everything is the end when you die", but I would like to savor the themes of eternity, transcendence of time and space, and coexistence with the dead and alive.

(2) Is it fine to be as self-relieve without doing relief?

a. Is it right for Christian end up with indifference, ignorance, and self-relief?

Just because the world is fleeting, so we don't look at the tragedy of reality. Isn't the inside of the church a dualistic theory? Is the ethics of responsibility for politics, ideas, social movements paralyzed?

The threshold of the church is high for small and poor people such as, young children of Flower Demo who have been sexually abused, single mothers who lost their houses and their breadwinner in marginal villages due to disasters, and street people who are left uninformed of vaccinations. I have never seen a priest who can speak exactly from the Bible about the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Holy Communion, sacrament of baptism, and a tithe. They say the Protestant church is a gift from God, and if you receive faith for free, you will blindly obey the arrangement. It is not a place for receiving grace, but the place become a salon for supporting the lives of priests, increasing believers, and serving. The gift from God is a "work" for "one of the least", and it should be done according to the conscience of anyone, even without the faith. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)" You need to know the characteristics of the Protestant church that is waterlogged with grace. People are intoxicated by the church choirs, hymnaries, long prayers of rhetoric (not found in Roman Catholic churches, Arab orthodox churches, and Eastern churches), and euphoric liturgy that make sinners to kneel down in solemn synagogue architecture. "They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely. (Mark 12:40)"

There are about 8,000 churches and about 7,000 baptized people in Japan, and about half of them, 3,500 are said to be returnees from abroad. However, many of returnees are not connected to the church. The average of Christian-life of Japanese is about two and a half years. (Christian Information Book. Word of Life) The baptized one run away if there is no salvation in the church. Because the Protestant church is full of rumors,

exchange of insults, and curiosity about others, and it has become a lifeless Protestant church. Especially, there is a phenomenon to be a church gypsy.

Are we waiting for the pandemic to pass without doing anything against the COVID-19, same as the time of the Spanish flu 100 years ago? The biggest victims of the COVID-19 are people with disabilities, mental illness and major neurocognitive disorder. Despite the fact that clusters have occurred in isolation facilities such as mental hospital and geriatric facilities, and residents have died, only hear the voice of “Let’s pray that the second vaccination will end promptly, and we can escape from the COVID-19” in the church. A repeating media reports and prayers of “Medical personnel, professionals, and supporters are having tough time” are common phrases now. As soon as I stand up as a Christian with a heart, who cannot keep quiet for the hypocritical attitude, concept of eugenics, and triage, I was told, “It’s easy to say. But there are more other things to do”. Reproving voice of senior members of the church rise; “The world would not change only by a good intention, so just don’t do it.” Or an opinion from an elderly believer tolerates, who has been faithful to the church for many years, “I don’t want to ask again if you can’t come up with an alternative idea for a change”. Perhaps such noise smolders so that the Protestant that distinguishes the sacred and the profane can do nothing.

b. Elite-oriented

It is selfishness and narcissism to think that Christ loves only those of us who have the opportunity to meet the gospel. In the early hours on July 26, 2016, there was a harrowing incident at the facility for people with disabilities, “Tsukui Yamayurien” in Sagami-hara City. The perpetrator killed 19 residents, “People with disabilities have no meaning to live”. The name of the victims of disability don’t show up. On the other hand, the media aired the name of the perpetrator of hate crimes and genocide and they made him famous. It is a perverted act without restoration of honor of victims. It was the act that based on the distorted worldview of concept of eugenics. Even in Japan, there is the concept of eugenics. of “homogeneous nature”. This idea appeared in the late 1920 in the Taisho era. Hasebe Kotondo, a professor of medical department at Tohoku Imperial University, insisted that according from his research of body measurements in various parts of Japan, the Ainu people were not the Stone Age people. He said that the Stone Age people are the true Japanese. This idea led to the establishment of the Eugenics Society.

(2019. My thesis “*The God of Disasters and the Bible – The Poor and Victims are Blessed*”. June 9. 3)

Perhaps, Christianity, which was grafted on Bushido in the early Meiji era that aims to become indigenous, had no way to escape from a mentorship of concept of eugenics. The apostle Paul was regarded as “a true samurai and a person who embodies the spirit of Bushido”. (1920. *Collection of Uchimura Kanzo. Vol.25. 362-363*)

c. Now again, Japan is under the strong government control

The number of Christians expanded at once in the Meiji era. It is because the missionary work of missionaries under “the Europeanization policy” from 1885 to 1890. In 1873, there were only 59 Japanese Protestant followers. The number of church members in 1891 was 31,361. However, the leaders of the Meiji government promulgated the Meiji Constitution (Constitution of the Empire of Japan) in 1889 and instilled nationalism by

the Imperial Rescript on Education in the following year. As the result, the growth of Christianity has stopped. When anti-American sentiment subsided in the 1890s, the economy progressed and a white-collar class increased in cities. Expansion was possible, but it was hampered by the rise of totalitarianism. After the war, the “Western” of Christianity aroused the interest of the Japanese, and the Protestant church expanded as a result of English learning opportunity. However, it has not been indigenized in Japan, because it is still a “foreign religion”. It can be said that the Japanese are now rejecting Christianity at the morgue in Atami. Why?

(3) Do the dead from disasters actually exist in the spiritual world?

a. Protestant theology is selfish that don't regard to the dead

150 years ago, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions presented their conditions for employment that they need the one who believe in the belief that the soul of foreigners who did not believe in Christ would be subject to eternal punishment. They asserted that they would never recommend anyone who does not believe in this doctrine as a missionary. (Kubushiro Naokatsu. *Constructive Christology*. Shinjin. Vol.16. No.11. 47-48)

Disposing of Buddhist altars, mortuary tablets, and statues were an absolute requirement for entering Christianity. The religious nature of stubbornly refusing to worship ancestors caused friction, *mura hachibu* (村八分: social ostracism) and disassociation. “*Mura* (村)” means “village” and “*hachibu* (八分)” means “eight out of ten”. There were ten things that village people cooperate together. But if a person (ex; family) is socially obstructed, other village people would not help eight things beside two things, death and fire. Rest of eight things were, adulthood, marriage, birth, owning a home, caring of illness, restoration from water flood damages, and memorial services. Missionaries persistently taught that memorial service after the funeral is forbidden. The Japanese could not be familiar with Christianity as an “anti-family” religion that did not fully care for the dead. Therefore, the Protestant church was forced to derail from long-standing village customs at funerals because it did not worship its ancestors. They believed in the doctrine of Saint Augustine [354-430], the father of Western church theology, that they must confess Jesus as the Savior and the Redeemer of Original Sin for eternal life. In other words, they have believed for nearly 1,500 years that if you do not confess Jesus as the Savior in your lifetime, you will fall into hell after death. Then, is it biblical that those who reject the grace of the blood of the cross without knowing Jesus are in the torture of eternal fire?

b. God takes care the death, same as the alive

Jesus is the Lord of both this world and the spirit world.

He is the one who lead people, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18-19)” The following context states; “After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits”. So, what do you think about that Christ preached to “the imprisoned spirits” after death? Last week, Mizutani Yayoi, office staff of the Kobe International Sustaining Organization, asked if I knew about Yonezu Genshi, while she was dealing with accounting work. I don't watch TV at all, so I replied with joking that “Yonezu” is my grandfather's surname. Then I was advised to watch a short video called “*Shinigami* (死神: Death)” on my

computer. I was confused to it. He cast the spell “*Ajarakamokuren tererextunopa* (just a made-up phrase)”. Then the god of death leaves immediately, and the sick person becomes fine that is hard to believe it. I have experienced many times of helplessness in front of families those were crying over the doctor’s words, “He (She) passed away” at the disaster areas inside and outside of Japan. I would like to use such a spell if it exists. Maybe it sounds irreligious, but this kind of thought came up in my mind. Is there another world inhabited by souls and supernatural beings that have the power to work on our world?

Isn’t it selfish and self-centered to think that Christ loves only those of us who have had the opportunity to meet the gospel? It is the concept of eugenics. However, God cares about the dead as well as the alive. Because the Bible, which is an eternal bestseller, states that the gospel is preached to the dead.

The people “who are now dead (**νεκρός** [*nekros*] <meaning, dead>)” from “For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit” are not those who are in heaven, that means being with God in arms of Abraham.

We must not forget the work of Christ that “the gospel was preached” even to the dark *nekros* (Peter 4:6).

c. Dead families are saved as well

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” (Revelation 20:12)

Ultimately, it is God who decides whose name will be on the book of life. It is not decided by missionaries, ministers and theologians of the Protestant church. The Protestant church arrogantly has taught for nearly 500 years that the Lords of both this world and the spirit world decide.

The dead who drowned in the tsunami in the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami 10 years ago. The disaster areas suggested to me that another world would be existed where souls and supernatural beings that has a power to work on our world. Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18) Since 1995, I have been preaching the Bible from the pulpit every week. I have seriously been intently talking about the logos of the Bible as, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) However, the essential truth was not included. The theory is that the spirits of the dead cannot eat material bread, but they can eat the word of God.

I want to declare it clearly as a pipe that flows the word of God. Even if the “household” of “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household” did not join Christianity or were already buried in the graveyard or the dead without any surviving relatives to pray for his (her) soul, if a living one pray for them, they will be saved. (Acts 16:31).

That would be the gospel.

<Conclusion>

Let’s pray alone in front of God. You will naturally be pushed forward by the Holy Spirit. Every week, we prepare meals at the East Park (next to Kobe City Hall) in Kobe City. It is intended for street living people who

do not receive livelihood protection. They don't receive a letter of vaccination notice. They don't receive 100,000 yen of Special Fixed Benefit Payment neither.

When Christ spoke of a good Samaritan who cared for a half-dead person, he said “God and do likewise ποιέω (*poieo*)”. (Luke 10:37) It does not preach about God and increase the number of believers. Let's listen to what God is telling us. You don't need an organization, qualifications, or projects to listen to God. At John chapter 10 verse 15, Jesus set an example of “lay down my life” for “the least”. Kagawa Toyohiko [1888-1960] said, “One for all, all for one”. Pray alone. If you are naturally pushed forward by the Holy Spirit, Christ will accompany you. I am encouraged by the back of *ochlos* (people) with depression, hikikomori (a social recluse) and schizophrenia.

Because there is no internal change of being freed from the sin that stays on the bottom of my heart. A Protestant church without the freedom, conviction, and a fix of love that transforms into voluntary action is not the kingdom of God. At the *topos* (place) where you can eat with Jesus would be the place of poor in the wilderness, the oppressed lowest class, and moaning of the handicap. The family eats together with Jesus. It's not a lonely meal time. Your dead father and the aunt are all together. It is the kingdom of God.

Let's eat together with lonely victims by aiming to the wilderness from the synagogue of partisanship, pride, and hierarchy. Just like meeting with a family you didn't know.

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