

Sunday, November 17, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「In the Face of Reality」 Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Ezra 8:21~23, Matthew 4:1~11

❶ **【Ezra's Prayer】** Ezra, who had received permission from King Cyrus of Persia to return to his homeland to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, called on the people traveling with him to fast and pray on the banks of the river. The long journey from Persia to Jerusalem must have taken 5,000 men and 15,000 children and women. We must protect them from our enemies. You must also safely deliver the gifts that the Persian kings and nobles have entrusted to the temple to offer. Bandits will attack you to take them away. You can also ask the king to accompany you with Persian soldiers and cavalry. Since it is the king's order to rebuild the temple, he will be happy to lend his troops. But the Bible says, "I was ashamed to ask the king for infantry and cavalry to protect me from my enemies during my journey" (Ezra 8:22). This is because God always told the king that He would always send help to anyone who believed in Him and called on His name. However, if you do something different from what you are saying, people will think that you are a person who only talks. I thought it was a shame. Here we see Ezra's faith. The shame of faith is to compromise with reality. So Ezra decided to turn to God. But I'm worried. That's why I fasted and prayed. A faith that does not cause anxiety is not true faith. Anxiety is a sign that you are on the path of following God. Anyone who tries to obey God feels "anxious."

●Pastor Yasuo Enomoto writes: "There are people who misunderstand prayer, and there are people who think that prayer is asking for whatever they want. But prayer is an act of faith. It is the cry that comes out when we hear the Word and try to obey it. So when our prayers have dried up, it means that our faith has been depleted. For when we do not need God's help, we live on our own, and we lack thorough obedience to God's word."

I've heard the saying, "The busier you are, the better you pray." If you don't pray, you can't do anything without God's help. Whether we sleep, wake up, walk, or do anything, we pray, "Lord, have mercy on me." Faith is always about needing God's help. Ezra means "help."

❷ **【The temptation that Jesus met】**

Matthew 4:1~11 describes the temptation that Jesus met. Verse 2 says, "Now Jesus was tempted by the devil and went into the wilderness, led by the Spirit." The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. It says that it is the devil or God who gives temptation, or both. God allows the devil to tempt. The temptation of the devil

is also in God's hands, in God's plan. This is because God can use His evil work to create good. Christianity is radically monistic. But cult religion is dualism. It teaches that God and the devil are equal, and that if one of them wins, the world will affect them.

"And after fasting day and night for forty days, he felt hungry" (verse 2). This "hunger" is called reality. Even if you hear and believe God's word in church, reality awaits you when you step outside. Even if you have faith, you will be hungry, you will need money, you will not be cured of your illness, and your problems will not go away. This is the reality. When we are confronted with this reality, "the tempter comes" (4:3). He who seduces says: "The world inside the church is different from the world outside. Those who believe in this belief say, "God controls inside the church, but not outside the church. So if you don't compromise with them, take their favor, and obey them, you can't live."

●The presidential election in the United States is over. Ms. Harris, a Democrat, lost, and Mr. Trump, a Republican, won. Mr. Trump is a racist. Yet, Hispanics in the United States voted for Trump even though they were discriminated against. The reason is that you can't live with high prices. I decided that it was better to live even if I was discriminated against. In the face of real life, everyone compromises. Reality has the power to turn our faith upside down and destroy it.

Jesus' response to these realities is described here. The first temptation is to "turn stones into bread." It is a temptation to obtain food and live with human scientific technology and knowledge. Jesus replied, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He replied that man lives by God. You are being asked whether you want to live by your own strength or by God. The second temptation is to test God. Testing is the temptation to control the other person as you wish. The devil also uses the words of the Bible (the Psalms) to justify himself and make him rule over God.

●A thinner-dependent child tried to control his parents as he wished, saying that he would commit suicide if he didn't give him thinner. Then the mother said, "Please, be free, whether you live or die is God's decision, and I can't do anything about it." I replied. I didn't do what my child was saying. This is called self-reliance. If parents are not independent, children will not be independent. If you are spoiled, you can live.

You must not control man or God, and you must not be controlled by man. A person who is controlled by a person will acknowledge his dominance. The third temptation is that it is the devil who rules the world, so we should join hands

with evil. At the end of the day, you are being asked who is sovereign, who rules the world, and who you live as your master. God rules the world. Only God can rule over me. Neither death nor man can control me. "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (4:10) This is the answer to everything. When I pray, my heart becomes clearer, and I feel that it is all about having God as my master, and I have a heart that believes in that master. Prayer creates a relationship between man and God and recreates a person into a coherent person.

●Let me tell you about Pastor Eiichi Ito's experience. When he was a pastor in Hofu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, he could not give up his desire to evangelize China, so he decided to go to China at his own expense. At that time, the gratuity was 30 yen, and I had 50 yen on hand. On the day of my departure, I remembered that I owed the church 49 yen, and when I returned it, I only had 1 yen left. He wondered if he should borrow money from his accountant or to borrow from his brother or friends. When he went to the treasurer's house, he said, "Wait, don't worry about what to eat or what to wear, for your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things." Didn't you say? Isn't this just relying on people? Why don't you pray to God?" With that in mind, I began to pray. "I only have one yen now, and I can't say I'm going to quit now. Please give me the money I need." But prayer has no power. And then I noticed. "I'm only thinking about my men, and if God really uses me, I'll bless you even if you only have a penny. We seek God's will and glory, not our own face-to-face. If it is God's will to leave with one yen, I will obey. If it is not in accordance with Thy will, please stop leaving." The next day, when he went to Hofu Station with 1 yen, a lot of people came to see him off, and he got a bean gift from 13 people, he got a bean gift from his friends at Moji, and he got a bean gift from two friends in Kyushu, and when he opened it, he found that it was 30 yen, 15 yen, and 4 yen, for a total of 49 yen. The teacher felt a solemn astonishment as if he had been whipped, and he wept. It was a call and encouragement from God that He really lives.

(From "Heaven's Ladder" by Ayako Miura)

How difficult it is to make God God, to truly serve Him, to keep the first of the Ten Commandments. Forgive me for my sins of not being able to make God God. Even if it takes a lifetime, I would like to pray that I will keep this commandment and get closer to that commandment as much as possible, and I will live like that.