

Sunday, February 9, 2025 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"To See Jesus" Pastor Takaaki Inoue

1 John 1:1~, Luke 19:1~10

❶ 【Zacchaeus's good longing】

There was a tax collector named Zacchaeus in the city of Jericho. Because the tax collectors were collecting taxes from the Israelites on behalf of the occupying country, Rome, they were disliked by their brethren, ostracized, and not included in the worship community. Zacchaeus was such a tax collector and a rich man. For some reason, Zacchaeus "tried to see what kind of person Jesus was." It must have been because he heard a rumor that there was a disciple of the same tax collector (Matthew) as himself, and he became interested in that person named Jesus. I thought it would be good just to look at it from a distance, so I went out to see Jesus. However, because he was "short" (19:3), he was blocked by the crowd and could not see it. However, the desire to see in him does not subside, and he tries to fulfill his wish at all costs. He ran ahead and climbed a fig mulberry tree and saw Jesus in the shadow of its leaves. When I read this story, I am reminded of Adam in the Garden of Eden. A long time ago, Adam hid among the trees in the garden, avoiding the face of God, but Zacchaeus climbed the tree to see the face of God. Here we see the beginning of human recovery. Zacchaeus' short stature symbolizes our weakness, sinfulness, and immaturity. But Zacchaeus' desperate desire to see Jesus overcame his weakness. No matter how sinful we are, it is not an obstacle to meeting God. The real obstacle is not sinfulness, but the lack of expectation of Christ.

❷ 【The importance of seeing Christ】

In this story, the word "see" is repeated five times: "I tried to see" and "I could not see" (verse 3), "to see" (verse 4), "I looked up" (verse 5), and "those who saw this" (verse 7). The five human senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, were originally created as tools to know God. But it came to be addressed to the world other than God. It is written, "When a woman looked at it, the tree was so delicious that it attracted her eyes" (Genesis 3:6). The tree of knowledge of good and evil is a symbol of this world. The first Fall began with "seeing" the world. The monks said, "The devil comes in through the holes," but our souls were polluted by dirty images from our eyes, unclean words from our ears, and excessive eating and drinking from our mouths. But when you come to church, you will see the icon of Christ in your eyes, the voice of praise and prayer and the recitation of the Word of God in your ears, the smell of frankincense in your nose, and the Eucharist in your mouth. When we return to church, our senses

are reset correctly toward God, so we can return to who we are. Therefore, we must look at God. But how do we see the invisible God? It's about seeing Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father (God the Being)," St. Paul says, "The Son is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and the book of Hebrews says, "The Son ... It is the perfect manifestation of God's essence" (Hebrews 1:3). To see Christ is to see God. But we don't want to know the immense effect of seeing God. We think that the things of this world will satisfy us, and we try to see the things of this world rather than God. But look at the Bible. When Jesus came to the bottom of the fig tree, He stopped in His tracks, looked up, and said: "Zacchaeus, hurry down and come down, I want to stay at your house today." (19:5) Amazingly, Jesus approached Zacchaeus and asked for fellowship. The Lord insisted on fellowship with Him, knowing not only his name, but also all of who he was and what sins he had committed. Zacchaeus knew that Jesus wanted him more than he wanted Jesus, that he knew before he knew it. I think Zacchaeus was delighted. He hurriedly came down from the tree and joyfully welcomed Jesus into his home. When we see Christ in this way, He also sees us, and our eyes meet each other's. That's when great blessings come in. It teaches us the profound effects of seeing Christ. "I want to be your best friend," the Lord's desire gives us courage. Do not be afraid to come down from on high. He wants to be best friends with you, even if you don't stretch yourself or be respectable. At this time, Zacchaeus's senses and whole body were focused on Christ, not on this world. This is called conversion. Conversion is not about repenting of our mistakes, but about turning our whole body (life) to Christ.

③ [To start a Christ-centered life]

Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus: "I will give half of my wealth to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will return it in quadruple." According to Jewish law, when you return something you have stolen, you have to double it. But he would give it back to the poor by fourfold it, and he would give half of his wealth to the poor. So much so that his encounter with Jesus filled him. Zacchaeus's life changed 180 degrees. He later became a disciple of Peter and the bishop of Caesarea. Jesus says: "Salvation came to this house today, for he is also the son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost." (Verses 9~10)

The purpose of Christ's coming to this earth was "to search for the lost." "Lost" means that something has moved away from where it should have been, and has been placed in the wrong place. Man was created to be placed on God's side. Therefore, our lives must change to a God-centered life, a Christ-centered life. To change our lives, to change from world-centered to the kingdom-centered, to die in this world and live in the kingdom of God, to abandon the values of this

world and change to the values of Christ. I believe that this is why we were created anew by Christ. It's all for the sake of living in the kingdom of God. I felt this very strongly during my morning prayers.

●In the Meiji era, there was a pastor named Kanzo Uchimura, but he was criticized for not saluting the signature of Emperor Meiji. He did not do it out of antipathy towards the Emperor. "What made me salute at that moment was not refusal, but in fact hesitation and conscience," he said. A man named Issei Muramoto refused to serve in the military during the Pacific War. After the war, he said, "Please leave me alone, I just obeyed my conscience before God. I don't have any pride or emotion." I said. They did so because they died in this world and lived in the kingdom of God. Also, there was a professor named Murakami at the Faculty of Theology at Doshisha. He was an excellent man with a strong sense of faith, and was expected to be the leader of Doshisha in the future, but he was called up at the end of the Pacific War and defeated in Sakhalin City. He became a prisoner of war in the USSR and was engaged in logging operations. Life there, especially the food, was terrible. There was black bread with straw, hot soup, and rotting herring, and only a few. Therefore, the captives lived in such a way that they robbed each other of food. But every morning, he shaved his beard, dressed neatly, and read the Bible quietly in the midst of the noise. Those who could not meet their quotas and were forced to cut down on a small amount of food were silently given their own food. His rank was second class, but gradually the wonders of the people turned into respect and admiration. However, when he was felled, he was buried under a tree and died there. When the day of the evacuation came, the people who worked with the teacher did not have any of their own belongings, but they all divided their belongings and took the teacher's belongings home and delivered them to the teacher's wife. It was the Bible, hymns, and theological books. I think that Professor Murakami also lived in a different world that was not this world.

It is said that "those who are involved in the affairs of the world should be like those who have nothing to do with them" (1 Corinthians 7:31) and "Do not love the world or the things of the world" (1 John 2:15), but unfortunately Christians today feel that they live in the center of the world. They are passionate about the challenges of the world. Because we are not dead in this world, we are not living in the kingdom of God. That's why we argue and judge each other about the things of this world. I admire the life of the monks very much. Because it smells like heaven. Remember, Christ brought you out of this world and gathered you to heaven. Remember that you were created anew for this purpose. And I would like you to use the time you have left to learn to live in heaven.