

① [Jesus will soon depart]

Jesus said to the Jews, "I am going away, and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come" (John 8:21). Jesus would soon die on the cross, rise again, and return to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. The Jews wasted the precious opportunity to meet God face-to-face on earth. Once Jesus departs, no one will be saved. When the light departs, darkness reigns; when life departs, death reigns; when wisdom departs, ignorance reigns; when God departs, the devil reigns. We must secure our salvation while Jesus is near. Grace does not last forever. I've been in Osaka for 47 years, yet I've never climbed Tsutenkaku Tower. I always think I can go anytime. But life might end before I do. And I realized: Even when the real thing is right before them, people don't seek it. They're quite content with the fake. Whether it's genuine or not hardly matters. They lack the discernment to tell the difference. Oh, how blind humanity has become! This is the symptom of sin.

② [To belong to this world is to die]

"You belong to the things below, but I belong to the things above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins." (John 8:23-24) "The things below" refers to "this world." Jesus belongs to "the things above," that is, "the kingdom of God," but the Jews belong to "the things below," that is, "this world." Therefore, Jesus told them they would die in their sins. In short, He said that unless you belong to the things above, you will die. What is this world? This world is a world without God. Lately, I've come to feel this deeply. Humans have driven God out of this world. It's a world of humans alone, a world that tries to think of everything without God. Humans dominate this world, using resources as they please, making judgments without consulting God, passing judgment themselves without waiting for God's judgment. They do not fear God. Since only God is life, a world separated from God is a dead world. It may appear alive, but it is actually dead. Human sin overflows upon the earth. Where sin exists, death exists; thus, this world is overflowing with death. Life descends from heaven, for only God possesses life. This life is Christ Himself. Those who live united to this life are drawn up from death into life. Those belonging to this world, belonging to the things below, will die. Unless one belongs to the things above—that is, to Christ—they will die.

● You've probably read Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story "The Spider's Thread." A great thief named Kandata was groaning in the depths of hell when a

single spider's thread descended from heaven. Because he had shown mercy to a spider and spared its life during his lifetime, the Buddha sent down the thread to save Kanda. The lifeline descends from heaven. Clutching that thread, Kandata tried to climb toward heaven. But seeing the sinners climbing up from below, he thought, "This thread is mine," and tried to push them down. The thread snapped, and he fell back to the bottom of hell. I remembered that.

If you believe that Christ came from heaven and belongs to heaven, you should cling to Him. For there is no one else who can take us to heaven. Yet the Jews cut off that lifeline of salvation themselves. How foolish! Are you clinging to Christ? Or do you think you can ascend to heaven without Him? If so, you too will fall into this world and die, just like the Jews.

③ [I must believe that I am, or I will die]

"If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins," the Lord said to the Jews. This was the third time He told them they would die in their sins. "I Am" is the name of God revealed to Moses. When Moses asked for God's name, the Lord answered, "I Am. I Am Who I Am." (Exodus 3:14). Jesus applied this name, used only by God Himself, to Himself. "Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I AM." (John 8:58) "And when I am lifted up from the earth, then everyone will know that I AM." (John 8:28) This means that only when He was crucified would it be understood that Jesus was God. The church depicted Christ as God by drawing a cross behind Jesus' head and inscribing within it the initial letters of "I AM"— α , ω , ν . The hidden God now appeared in the form of Jesus Christ. Here, Jesus told the Jews, "Unless you believe that I am God, you will die."

● I was utterly astonished when I heard a pastor say, "I don't want to portray Jesus as someone with special powers. I want to speak of him more as a human being." The purpose for which the Bible was written is clear. It states, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (John 20:31). It was written to teach you that the One you thought was merely human was, in fact, God. Paul clearly states that Christ created all things, and John also writes that Christ is God. The church established the Nicene Creed in 381, confessing: "Begotten, not made, being of God from God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being one God with the Father, through whom all things were made." The Chalcedonian Creed, established in 451, confessed: "He is fully God in His divinity and fully human in His humanity." Only when we reread the Bible with Christ as God do we begin to grasp its profound meaning.

There are teachers who still refuse to accept such basic teachings and argue, "Is Christ God or man?" This is foolishness. They remain stuck in the third century.

They are doing the same thing as heretical interpretations. If we rely solely on “Scripture alone,” as many Christologies as there are heads will emerge. Because we worship in this chaotic state, the church itself becomes chaotic and lacks a single coherent thread. We accept the elementary teachings, worship the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—without wavering, offer our prayers, and press forward toward the goal of becoming Christ-like. Our aim is not off-target. It is clear. Unless you believe that Christ is God, your very faith is in vain, and you will die.

Today I am speaking about “belonging to what is above.” To belong to what is above means “to belong to the kingdom of God.” Through baptism, we were buried with Christ and died to this world. Not only did we die, but we were also raised to belong to the kingdom of God. Though our bodies still dwell in this world, we already live in the kingdom of God, and our citizenship is in heaven. This also means our “master has changed.” Since we have made Christ our master, we must not serve earthly masters. As we confess in the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,” our master is Christ alone. That is why the early Christians rejected earthly masters (emperors) and joyfully accepted martyrdom.

● Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna in the second century, was a disciple of the Apostle John. Captured during persecution, he was led to the place of execution. The executioner offered him one last chance, saying, “Curse Christ, and we will spare you.” Polycarp replied: “For 86 years I have followed Christ, and in all that time He has never once brought me misfortune, but only bestowed His grace upon me. How could I curse a Lord who loves me so much?” With these words, he went to his martyrdom.

Since our Lord Jesus commanded us to keep His words, they are the law of heaven, and we must obey them. Why then do we live as if belonging to this world? The believers of the early church clearly understood that faith means dying to this world and being born into God's kingdom. This world is passing away. We should spend more time on what endures forever. As those belonging to Christ, as citizens of heaven, let us live wisely in this world.