

“The Four Characteristics of Chaff”

Psalm 1:3-4

February 9, 2025

Psalm 1:3-4 (PowerPoint)

Preface.

Last week, we looked at how David, whom we believe to be the author of Psalm 1, was led by the Spirit of God to classify people into two kinds.

The two kinds of people are the blessed or righteous, like a tree planted by a stream, and the unblessed or wicked, like chaff blown away by the wind.

The Bible speaks seriously of the difference between the two, and because of the seriousness of the difference, it confirms our need for salvation through the Savior, Jesus Christ.

This morning, I would like to explore the four characteristics of the chaff that are used to describe the unblessed and the wicked.

Part One

The first characteristic of the chaff is that it is a residue.

The husk (chaff) is the outer skin that used to cover the grain and is the residue left after threshing.

Chaff is the remnants after the grain kernels, which are the value, life, and strength of the harvest, are taken out, and I think they are usually discarded as garbage.

Because such characteristics are applied to men, people may want to cover one's ears, and it may not be pleasant to hear.

As we confirmed last week, the Bible says that the wicked are “all those who say, ‘There is no God,’ those in whom the Savior Jesus Christ is not, and those who do not adore the Word of God,” and this characteristic of the wicked is the residue, the dregs.

The person in whom Jesus Christ is not, says the Bible, “is like the residue after the fruit has been taken out, like the dregs from which all life, value, and power have vanished.”

I am sorry. Am I saying too extreme?

But that is what the Bible tells us, so that is what we have to say.

However, I don't think this expression could be more accurate in terms of the original image of human beings taught in the Bible.

When I first met Jesus and was touched by Him, I was exactly like a residue. I think I was garbage without substance that deserved to be thrown into the burning Gehenna.

And no one had ever told me or talked to me about such things so straightforwardly and openly.

So, I felt sorry and strangely understood when I learned the essential fact that I was nothing but a fruitless leftover, lacking the most important thing for a human being in front of God.

At the same time, I felt an indescribable sense of relief that Jesus had entered into my fruitlessness.

It was the ultimate relief that I did not have to go to hell anymore.

The Bible says, “Man has fallen. Man has lost his soul. He is a sinner who has lost his life, who has failed to live up to God’s original desire for him as a human being, who is dead, and who has become nothing more than a fruitless flake of skin. Before God, under heaven and earth, and under all things, we are nothing but flesh, having lost the Spirit of God.”

Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12 (PowerPoint)

Romans 3:10-18 (PowerPoint)

This is the natural state of our human nature, as an ugly, unclean, cunning, proud, and wicked person.

What this means is that man can no longer be born out in the original form in which he was created by God in the beginning.

The greatest and noblest aspect of man that God originally created has disappeared.

When I think about why there are so many rules in the world, I think it is because without rules, people will follow their greed and evil instincts wherever they go.

I sometimes think, “No, there is no need to enforce such things with rules and regulations.” But without regulations, rules, and the eyes of others, I believe that we humans, in our natural state, will fall as far as we want to go.

For example, even in a single sporting event that is governed by rules, we often do things that are on the edge of the rules.

Or, even if we break the rules, we may somehow acquire the skill to make it look like we are not breaking the rules.

In sports competitions, it would be fine if it were just a spectator's game, but it can turn into a proxy war by projecting the aggression and desire to win that wells up inside of us, and can lead to actual deaths or even slander of a particular person.

It is obvious at first glance that the various and colorful evil trends of people in the world, which come in uninterruptedly as information every day, are probably far removed from the way God first created man, and somehow all human beings seem to instinctively feel that this is not true.

God did not create man as such an evil creature in the beginning. And yet man has become like a fruitless, fruitless husk, chaff, residue, and dregs.

The life that God gave is gone, and he has lost the noble divine character and the soul.

That is why Jesus said, "I have come to seek and save the lost."

Part Two

What we have lost that we are called "the lost" is the image of God. We have lost the image of God when He first created man.

Man was first created by God and for God.

Man was having relationship with God, created as God's friend, holy as God is holy.

It was a blessing to delight in God and to commune with Him.

As God is spirit, man is also a spiritual being, and it was a blessing to commune with God in spirit, to exchange words with God, and to have God's Word.

Blessed is the state of the spirit and soul, which is nurtured in and through in relationship with the Triune God.

In other words, I think the sinner that the Bible speaks of can also be said to be a person who has lost his or her true happiness.

One has become a sinner, fallen away, and now there is no form of what one can call "holiness" in one's natural state of birth.

Of course, each person may have his or her own "good qualities." But even those "good qualities" are, in fact, the result of being molded by all kinds of rules, regulations, morals, and ethics that we have been exposed to, taught, restrained, and persuaded to follow since the moment of our birth, and which we have no choice but to follow.

When I reflect on who I am as I was born, I honestly think, “If it were not for rules, regulations, and people’s eyes, I would not be able to live my life pretending to be a good person.”

And moreover, would I willingly rejoice in God? A spiritual being? I have to admit that I am a fleshly person who was born without any such thing, a person who has lost the fruit, a person who does not have even a trace of God’s image, a person who is like residue, dregs, and chaff, just a corrupt human being.

One of the Puritans of the 16th and 17th centuries, who were striving to return to biblical faith, compared man’s manifestation of sin and depravity to an old castle left in ruins in a country town somewhere.

The castle was surrounded by dense ivy, completely covered with cobwebs and mold, and even at a quick glance, one could easily tell that it was in ruins.

When you go near the castle, you will see a sign that reads, “The residence of such and such person,” indicating that the castle was once the home of a nobleman of high rank.

But now it is nothing more than a crumbling ruin, no longer inhabited by the nobleman.

He said, “This ruin is man.”

The ruins where the Spirit of God, who created the heavens and the earth and all things, once lived, is the form of man who has lost God.

Man was once the incomparable and most exalted of all creatures made by God.

He was the only one of all created things in whom God dwelt.

But man, who has lost God and become a lump of flesh through sin and depravity, has become chaff, a being without substance, without fruit, only skin without the Lord.

Therefore, the apostle Paul says that those who believe in Jesus Christ, the manifestation of the true God, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, are those who have been transformed into their true nature as human beings and have been restored to what is most important to them.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (PowerPoint)

John 14:17 (PowerPoint)

We all human beings must first know that we ourselves are like ruins.

And for every human being, the only thing necessary is the faith to believe in Jesus Christ, to be believed in, and the only One necessary is the Savior Jesus Christ, to whom no other name under heaven has been given to be saved.

Unless we realize that we ourselves are ruins, we will not be able to believe in the gospel that Jesus cannot return to us, and that we will be restored to our original humanity by Him.

But those who have believed, those who have been allowed to believe, are trees.

It is a living, organic body through which life passes.

It is not chaff without life.

Part Three

The second characteristic of rice husks is that they are formless.

It is just a pile of dust and dirt that has come out of the chaff.

At first glance, it looks as if a form has been formed, but due to the lack of strength to hold on, the formless pile crumbles away and is scattered little by little, exposing its formlessness.

This, Psalm 1 says, is the characteristic of the wicked.

They have lost their original character, God's image, thoughts, and fortune, and are so shapeless that we have no idea how to define them.

There is no law in this way of life.

It believes what it wants to believe in something that is not worth believing in, never knowing what it will do in the next moment.

Why is this so?

Because that way of life has no form.

There is no path to guide that life, and there is no such thing as a principle that is appropriate to continue to safely influence all aspects of the way we live.

In his worship message at Megumi Church, Rev. Takao Ichihashi, the missionary to Kenya once used the term "cursed diversity". It is a formless collection of things like dust, dirt, and chaff that could collapse at any moment, or rather, it has been collapsing for a long time, but only pretends that it is not collapsing.

In contrast, look at a tree.

How beautiful, solid, and stable is the tree?

The shape does not change so easily.

Yet, it is not eccentric or stubborn.

Sometimes it waits patiently, sometimes it drops its leaves, but because its axis and foundation are solid, it blossoms and bears fruit when the time is right.

It is the tree that sustains the life of all possible life forms on this earth of ours.

The Bible says that such a person is a righteous and blessed person who believes in the Lord Jesus.

The Lord God once said, "If there are ten righteous men, Sodom will not be destroyed."

A believer in Jesus Christ is like a tree.

It does not crumble away without shape according to moods and emotions.

Because there is an axis on the path of faith, even if you take a wrong turn, you can and will be turned back.

Moses declares in Deuteronomy 30; "If you turn to Me, to the Lord your God, and do as I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your life, and obey His voice, the Lord your God will restore you, will have mercy on you, and will gather you again from among all the peoples to whom the Lord your God has scattered you. He will gather you again from among all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. Even if you are driven to the ends of the heavens, the LORD your God will gather you from there and bring you back from there."

A person like a tree who believes in Jesus has an axis, so even when he or she seems to be shaken, he or she keeps his or her balance.

He experiences God through life itself and blossoms the blessed flower of fellowship with God.

The person who has Jesus in him or her is a certain person who can calmly reevaluate the fruitlessness of what is before him or her, and who can think about the eternal things that are certain and invisible to the eye, and who can look forward to the Kingdom of God.

Part Four

The third characteristic of the chaff is that it has no roots.

Trees have roots, but chaff has no roots.

They are just piled up on the ground.

It is the chaff that "the wind blows away," as the verse in Psalm 1:4 says.

Because trees have roots, they do not fly away when the wind blows.

But the tragedy of the wicked one, the one who does not have the Lord Jesus within him, is that he has no roots.

Because he or she has no roots, his or her life will be superficial.

Of course, he or she may be able to create something superficially attractive, cool, something that looks like it could be something, something glamorous, something that will attract and hold people's attention, but because there is no root, it has no weight.

It is only on the surface.

There is no solid, unshakable, timeless rock to which one can safely entrust oneself.

With the passage of time, the facade peels away, and uncertainty and a lack of perspective sets in.

What do we really know in our lives?

What do we know about death?

How can we really deal with all the things that may happen in the future?

This is the problem.

Without roots, we can only be anxious.

When you meet people, your feelings change, your beliefs change, your religion changes, your thoughts and ideas change because you don't have roots.

In Acts 17, we read that 2,000 years ago, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who boasted of the highest learning and would have had the best education, "spent their days only speaking and hearing what was new," but even those who were considered wise in the world were blown away like chaff without roots by what is said to be new and strange.

But not those who have Christ in them.

He rejoices in the Lord's instruction, which will never fade away even if heaven and earth and all things fade away, and he takes root in what he utters day and night.

Let us go to the book of Colossians.

Colossians 2:7-10, 3 (PowerPoint)

A Christian is not a kind person, a good person, a person who is doing something good, a person who is somehow always happy and joyful.

A Christian is someone who knows who they believe, what they believe in, and is rooted in that.

I think the biggest lie that people are being lied to is, “If you believe in something, even if it’s not Jesus Christ, and you live life to the fullest in your own way, that’s fine, and all those people will go to heaven.”

It is the greatest propaganda of Satan the Devil.

If that were true, there would be neither wood nor chaff.

There is no difference between the tree and the chaff.

Only the tree has roots, and only the tree has roots that anchor it to the earth in a strong and unyielding way.

Christians believe in Jesus, the Son of God, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the only begotten Son of God, the Savior who had no biological father and was born as a sinless man by God the Holy Spirit through Mary the Maiden to this sick and perishing earth for the redemption of our human sins, even though He is God.

Through the miracles He performed and the words He spoke, we believe that He proved that He is the promised Messiah, that He hung on the cross as the substitute for our sins, and that because of His substitutionary sacrifice, we are saved from eternal destruction and punishment that we deserve, and that our sins are forgiven.

As forgiven sinners, we believe in the literal resurrection from the dead, spiritually, physically, and materially, just as Christ resurrected.

I believe that I have been made a witness of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and that He is in me to intercede.

This is the root.

But the chaff has no root and nothing, so it does not know what it believes. It doesn’t even know where it is.

It is unstable and uneasy, going this way and that, blowing in the wind.

And death, the eventual disappearance, is the destination of anxiety, the end point, or rather, the destruction of eternal suffering that lies beyond it.

But for those who truly believe in Christ, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain. My desire is to leave the world and be with Christ. It is much more desirable.” Roots like the confession of the apostle Paul in Philippians 1, who has conquered death, will be planted.

Part Five

Finally, the fourth characteristic of the chaff is that it is lifeless. Because there is no life, there is no growth and no fruit. Everything that we thought was fruitful comes to nothing with death. No achievement, no accomplishment, no work, no experience, no memory, no matter how wonderful, can be carried with us beyond death.

No matter how much one says or thinks before death, “This is a wonderful thing that will remain for posterity,” or no matter how much one enshrines it in this life, it is nothing to the dead person.

But a tree has life.

There is growth.

It matures.

It blossoms.

It bears fruit.

Because of its fruit, it helps someone.

It can benefit someone.

It can love someone.

The wind, rain, snow, heat, and cold that we endure, and all that we go through, all of it, will show up as fruit, and with that fruit, we can encourage someone, make someone happy, comfort someone, strengthen someone, and be there for someone.

And we receive Jesus’ words, “What you did to this little one, you did to me.”

At some point, loving others and loving God becomes a joy.

And that joy will not decay, but when you go to the Kingdom of Heaven, you will be told, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, so I will entrust you with many things. Rejoice with me in the joy of my master.” With these words of God, you will rejoice in more fruit.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by sharing something that has been on my mind while preparing today’s sermon.

It is about rice bran, which is the dregs of the grain after it has been threshed.

In this Psalm, the word translated as “chaff” seems to refer to the dregs of wheat after threshing, but in Japan, the word “chaff” brings to mind rice bran which is used to make delicious pickles, or bran soybean paste.

There is also a dish called “rice bran minced meat” made by mixing roasted rice bran and minced meat in a frying pan without oil, and I kept thinking “rice husks have their uses and can be used to make delicious food.”

But when I thought about it, I realized that no matter how delicious the food is, it will be gone after it is eaten. And even fermented bran can be rotten if it is not properly managed by adding salt, water, soup stock, chili peppers, etc. Therefore, in the end, the chaff is just chaff, and the delicious food produced ends up being consumed.

In contrast, as Isaiah 65:22 describes the life span of those who have been given eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus as “equal to the life span of a tree,” the truth is that the life span of a tree is not known to us, who live less than 120 years at most.

Unless we cut down the tree or something special happens to it, it will continue to grow for a long time.

In fact, the largest life form ever identified on this planet is also a tree.

When I was in the U.S., I went to see “The General Sherman Tree” in Sequoia National Park many times because I liked it. It is 83 meters tall, 11 meters in diameter at the base, weighs 6167 tons, and is estimated to be 2,200 years old, and it is still alive and growing.

It will probably continue to grow and live until the time of Jesus’ second coming.

Remembering General Sherman’s tree, I was able to confirm, even through my small life experience, that “ah, after all, chaff is very different from wood.”

We, who are like chaff, have already been offered a way to be reborn as trees by the Triune God, the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who created heaven, earth, and all things.

With the salvation that has been presented to us, we hope to continue to live and grow as a tree.

Let’s pray.

Benediction: Psalm 1:3-4