

“The Power That Changed the Disciples, The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus”

John 21:18-19

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By Senior Pastor Hong Poonghwa

John 21:18-19 (PowerPoint presentation)

Preface

Have you ever heard someone say something like, “People don't change that much even if they believe in Jesus Christ”?

Well, it is not wrong, and in some respects it seems as if it is right.

If you ask, “Whom should we look at to understand this?”, we can see it by looking at ourselves, and we can also see it by looking at the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Part One

They followed Jesus for three years.

They ate and slept together, left everything behind, put everything on Jesus, and followed Him saying, “I believe in Jesus.” They were truly, in the very sense of the word, “disciples.”

However, when we look at them, they don't seem to be such great men.

When they heard that Jesus was going to be crucified, they ran away and denied him, saying, “I don't know Jesus!” And ultimately, they ask outlandish and astonishing questions that make you wonder if they really lived and ate with Jesus and heard His words directly from Him until just before He went up to heaven.

“When will He restore and prosper our nation Israel?” they asked.

Though they had followed Jesus for three years, it was like different dreams in the same bed—Though they went to the same places, met the same people, and did the same things, their thoughts and expectations were different from Jesus’.

They were arguing, “When the Israel was rebuilt, prospered, and flourished, and Jesus became king, I am the left minister.” “I am the right minister.” “I am number two.” “I am number three.” Even up to the very moment before Jesus was crucified, they were arguing about who among them was the greatest.

Even though they had been with Jesus for three years, they did not abandon such things, but rather, they followed him in order to fulfill such things, thinking those things would be fulfilled.

In other words, people themselves have not changed.

I might wonder, “Why were the people called ‘disciples’ still like that up until the very moment when Jesus ascended to heaven?” And I might find myself asking, “What did Jesus think of such disciples?”

Of course, Jesus loved them.

Precisely because He loved them, He directly pointed out their unchanged condition, calling them “slow of heart and unable to believe all that was spoken.”

When will He rebuild Israel?” Jesus answered, “That is not for you to know. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will receive power and be my witnesses,” He spoke of the restoration and prosperity of the Kingdom of God.

But the disciples were so enthralled and blinded by worldliness, worldly honor, and profit that they were looking in a different place than Jesus was looking.

They don't change.

People don't change.

Part Two

But then, they changed.

The disciples were changed.

Should we say they had been cowardly or unfair? These people, who had been such as that, were transformed into courageous ones, just as the Lord’s words say: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid.”

First of all, most of the twelve disciples were martyred.

They were martyred for Jesus, because of Jesus.

Today's passage of Scripture:

John 21:18-19 (PowerPoint)

These are the prophetic words of Jesus concerning the martyrdom of Peter.

“With what kind of death he would glorify God”—Peter was to glorify God by a kind of death in which someone else would dress him and lead him where he did not want to go.

That was not the reason why he had left everything and followed Jesus.

When Jesus said, “fishers of men,” though that was not the original meaning, he had expected that people would flatter him, that he would be acknowledged by many as someone with much higher social status than before, and with that expectation, he had thrown everything away and followed Jesus.

But Jesus showed Peter that he would die a martyr’s death and glorify God through it.

For Peter at this time, he neither wanted to die that way, nor did he think of such a death as something glorious; he probably didn’t even want to think of it as such.

Because it was the exact opposite of the reason why he had believed in Jesus, followed Him, and placed his expectations in Him.

Here, one thing we can learn is this: “The way we die is something that relates to the glory of God.”

Peter, just as Jesus had prophesied, was martyred.

Moreover, he was martyred with joy, with boldness, with pride, and with hope.

It is said that he was crucified upside down.

He is said to have requested, “Please crucify me upside down,” because “someone like me, who denied Jesus three times, is not worthy to die in the same way as Jesus.”

It is also said that most of the other disciples were likewise martyred; and even those who likely were not martyred experienced sufferings equal to, or even surpassing, martyrdom.

For example, John, who wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation, as recorded in Revelation, was exiled to the island of Patmos at the age of 90.

So then, how did those disciples change so completely?

They were transformed 180 degrees.

The disciples who had been with Jesus for three years, and the apostles who appear in the Acts of the Apostles, were like entirely different people.

Once they became apostles, they no longer considered things like who was above and who was below—they themselves had changed.

Why did they change so much?

What happened? What occurred? It’s not as if they changed for no reason.

There were two great events.

The first one, as we considered previously when we studied Ephesians 5:18—“Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit”—was the “filling of the Holy Spirit”, the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them and filled them, the disciples were born anew.

And the second great event was the “resurrection of the Lord Jesus”.

Alongside receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, just as significant was the fact that they encountered the risen Lord Jesus, who had been raised from the dead.

In fact, the baptism of the Holy Spirit could not have occurred without the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; it was an event that served as proof of His resurrection.

The first fruit that the baptism of the Holy Spirit brought to the disciples was that they came to know as a certain fact that the risen Jesus they had met was beyond all doubt a true reality.

From a place where they could not see even when looking, not hear even when listening, not feel even when touching, they were made able to “perceive directly as truth” the resurrection they saw with their eyes, heard with their ears, and touched with their hands.

This is one of the great blessings given through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We, today, believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus “without having seen”, but the disciples actually saw it with their eyes.

They saw the risen Jesus with their physical eyes, met Him, talked with Him, touched Him, and even had a meal—like a barbecue—together.

They spent forty days with the risen Jesus.

That is what changed them.

Because they were able to believe fully that the resurrection of Jesus was real, the desires for this world naturally vanished, and what you might call cowardice or deceitfulness disappeared.

Instead of being motivated to try to complete or win in this visible world, they became moved by something much more certain: the kingdom of God, which, though not yet fully visible to the naked eye, exists on a completely different level from the transient present world.

By fully believing in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, they came to “truly feel” that this world is not everything, but rather, a fleeting, empty wind with no substance.

Their perspective on the world changed, they gained a kind of composure toward the world, and they came to see people not as competitors, targets of criticism, or objects to be looked down upon or used, but as precious beings who are loved by God and should partake in the salvation of Christ—while at the same time, spiritually pitiable and unfortunate. They came to desire to be more tolerant toward others.

They came to see the futility of fighting over matters of the flesh, and they became people who could be conscious of the real battle—against the rulers of the darkness of this world, the evil spirits that create the flow of this world.

Part Three

Are you familiar with the book, “The Japanese Who Aim to Shrink”, which is said to be a masterpiece of Japanese cultural theory?

It is also a book that became a bestseller after being published in 1982, and even now continues to sell and is widely read.

The author, Lee O-Young, passed away about three years ago, but in his later years, he became a Christian and left behind many testimonies of his faith.

Among those remaining testimonies, there was an instance where he spoke about the reason why the disciples of Jesus changed.

He said, “I think the reason the disciples of Jesus changed as if they were completely different people is because they experienced that the resurrection was real,” and, “If there had not been the event of the resurrection, it would be impossible for people to change so drastically.”

I think, “Ah, certainly, that’s true. The resurrection has that much power.” And I think, “Truly, if one completely believes in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—if one can believe—then a person, we, would be changed like the disciples.”

No matter how much we say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” if we cannot believe in the resurrection, then the outcome in this world, the profits, the prosperous life will be everything, and inevitably we would become base, and become greedy and expose an unsightly, shameful appearance.

About a month ago, in a worship service, I preached a sermon titled “Make the Most of the Opportunity,” and in that sermon, I spoke about a respected pastor who, after retiring from being a pastor, contracted three kinds of cancer.

When that pastor came to feel death approaching because of his cancer, he began to frequently say the phrase “Beautiful Landing” in the sermons he was distributing daily. “Beautiful Landing” is a term that refers to the landing of an airplane—a safe and beautiful landing.

Airplanes are made to land on the ground, but when they suddenly hit the ground, that is called a crash.

On the other hand, gradually lowering altitude, landing stably, safely, and beautifully is called a “Beautiful Landing.”

Even though both involve touching down on the ground, the two are completely different, aren’t they?

Having become ill with cancer himself and coming to think about death, he said, “I came to think, ‘I must die properly.’”

He said, “Just like an airplane lands beautifully and gracefully, since I’m going to die anyway, isn’t it possible to die in a splendid way? Since I’ve lived my life believing in Jesus, I came to think, can’t I die in a cool and wonderful way?”

He said, “I don’t want to be trembling in fear, or die in a greedy and base way at the time of death, after believing in Jesus all my life. If that were the case, then what would be the meaning of believing in Jesus?”

I think, “That’s certainly true.”

“To conquer death,” “Whoever believes in me will live even though they die”—these words of Jesus are the very core, the most important nucleus of the faith of believing in Jesus Christ.

If the way of death of the person who believes in Jesus can reveal the glory of God, then I think there is no greater “Beautiful Landing” than that.

As we go on living in this world, I think there are various factors that could lead us to a “Beautiful Landing’s” opposite—a shameful landing, an “Ugly Landing,” a life ending in disgrace. This pastor said, “There are two things that stick in my heart as factors that might lead me in that direction.”

The first is: if one becomes greedy, one becomes uncool, disgraceful.

People, from the time they are small children, as they age little by little, develop desires—strange desires—what you could call aged desires.

The desire of a five-year-old is less shameful than that of a ten-year-old.

The desire of a ten-year-old is less shameful than that of a twenty-year-old.

The desire of a twenty-year-old is less shameful than that of a fifty-year-old.

And more than fifty, the desires of older age become more shameful. “There are aged desires that are shameful and disgraceful that everyone has,” he said.

“With age and the passage of time, one may gradually give up on desires for big things, but desires for small things increase, and before one realizes it, one is obsessed with those small things, and can end up losing many things,” he said. “If it weren’t for that, one could make a Beautiful Landing,” he said.

The second is cowardice. Malicious hearts, cunning and sly feelings.

Courage makes people beautiful, but cowardice, malice, and slyness make people ugly, he said.

Certainly, if we don’t become greedy about small things, if we’re not malicious to others, if we don’t have cowardly thoughts, then anyone can make a “Beautiful Landing.”

However—the big problem is—how can we keep ourselves from being greedy?

How can we be not malicious, not sly, not cowardly?

Saying “Beautiful Landing” in words is easy, but we are such sinners—we who picked and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which we should not have touched—we who harbor the very source of greed, slyness, and malice. How can we, weak humans with no power against this world that stands strong like Goliath, manage to live without greed and without malice?

No matter how hard we try, we can’t help being greedy, can’t help showing malice.

We compromise, use cowardice as a convenient tool, and when exposed, suffer shame. How can such people be changed?

Part Four

I think that the disciples of Jesus were ordinary human beings.

Ordinarily greedy, ordinarily mean, ordinarily sneaky, ordinarily thinking that others are wrong but they are right, ordinarily wanting to be above others, ordinarily being in a good mood with oneself and in a bad mood with others, ordinarily feeling that one's own sorrow is a more sorrowful event than someone else's, ordinarily feeling anxious when material desires are not satisfied, ordinarily believing in God for the purpose of fulfilling one's own desires rather than living according to the will of God, and ordinarily thinking that their wishes should be God's wishes. I think they were ordinary sinners, thoroughly ordinary.

Even after believing in Jesus, even after following Jesus, even while living a life of devotion and serving Jesus, they were still no more than ordinary sinners.

Such disciples were changed.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus changed them.

Because they believed the resurrection of Jesus without hesitation, without wavering, without a shred of doubt—when they were able to believe—it changed them.

At the beginning, I said, “Even if someone believes in Jesus, people don’t change that much.” But in truth, it may be that the reason they haven’t changed is because they don’t actually believe in Jesus—don’t really believe—in other words, they don’t truly believe in the “resurrection” of Jesus.

That pastor, whom I mentioned earlier with fifty years of ministry experience, said that after being diagnosed with cancer, he came to realize this anew, and his prayers changed.

He began to pray like this: “Since the disciples, who were compromising, cowardly, and afraid of being exposed and humiliated, were changed by the resurrection, please make me—not just in words—but truly someone who believes in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Please let me believe in the resurrection. Let me be someone who has no doubt concerning the resurrection.”

Looking back on myself, I also feel that—just the same—as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus has not permeated every corner of my daily life, every corner of my whole being, I become angry, driven by anxiety, dissatisfied with what I lack instead of being grateful for what I already have, I find myself feeling I have to win in some way in this world, and I act as if this visible world is everything. I look more at people than at Jesus, I take my

eyes off Jesus and become controlled by the emotions I feel when I look at people. If I can show that I am right, I feel good; if I cannot, I get angry.

My heart is captivated by the battles of flesh and blood in this world, my prayers are all about the flesh and blood of this world, and I feel I have been made aware of the fact that the resurrection has not permeated my actual way of living, my thoughts, my way of life.

Conclusion

Truly, truly, if one believes in the resurrection of Jesus, a person is changed.

Just as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus transformed the disciples into apostles, if one truly believes in the resurrection of Jesus, a person is changed.

Through the real-life example of the disciples—whom Jesus cherished and treated with utmost care, even to the point of laying down His life—we, who live today, are being taught that people can indeed be transformed.

The area in which we should be greedy is in faith in the resurrection.

It is precisely in being able to truly believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that we should desire with intensity.

I want to pray, “Lord, please, let me believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus without hesitation, without even a speck of doubt. Make me one who believes. Enable me to believe.”

If so, just like the apostle Peter—who was greedy for things not worth being greedy for and who was once base—we too, through a “Beautiful Landing,” by glorifying God even in the way we die, may be able to finish our lives in a way that is beautiful and pleasing in God’s eyes, and share in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Every time we confess, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,” may that very confession become the expression of our lives, our flesh and blood, and the confession of our entire lives. Wouldn’t that be a true blessing?

If we could all make a “Beautiful Landing” together, there would be no greater joy than that.

Let us pray.

Prayer:

Lord God, throughout my life, I believe in Jesus, and yet I am afraid of dying in shame, in baseness.

Please, never let it come to that—make me a person of courage in the Lord, so that I may end my life in beauty and grace.

Lord, take hold of our lives, so that we do not foolishly chase after greed and end our lives in disgrace.

The disciples of Jesus were changed.

Those who denied Jesus and fled were transformed into people who all became martyrs for Jesus, into people who no longer avoided suffering for the sake of Jesus but stepped into it, into people who were once greedy for their own positions and opinions, but who gave up greed, paid the price for Jesus, and dedicated themselves.

Lord, that is because they witnessed Your resurrection with their own eyes.

Not only confessing the resurrection with our mouths, but make us able to believe it with our whole being—body, mind, and soul. May we, because of faith in the resurrection, be transformed from base people into people of courage, who are not greedy, but sanctified, and live lives that are beautiful and full of grace.

It is the resurrection that is the power which transformed the disciples.

By the power of the resurrection, please also transform us.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the risen Savior.

Benediction: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die." (John 11:25)