

“The Blessing from the Age of Seventy-Five”

Genesis 12:1–4

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Genesis 12:1–4 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Until the year before last, the worship service that we offered under the name “Worship to Honor the Elderly” has, since last year, been offered under a new name, “Grand Generation Day.”

This morning, as I shared also last year, I would like once again to speak about the background that led us to change the name.

The WHO (World Health Organization) defines those aged sixty-five and older as elderly.

Those between sixty-five and seventy-four years old are called “early elderly,” and those seventy-five and older are called “late elderly.”

However, in the worship service to honor the elderly that had been offered until the year before last, the word “elderly” was used to refer to those aged seventy-five and above.

Also, when we look up the word *kenshō* (顕彰, “commendation”) in a dictionary, it says: “To make widely known hidden good deeds or achievements. To make known broadly and commend.”

That is to say, the “Worship to Honor the Elderly” was, I think, “a worship in which we express our respect to those aged seventy-five and older, give thanks for the grace of living together, and while presenting small gifts from our hearts, rejoice together in the blessing of growing older within the love of God.”

Of course, this also included introducing the work of the “Kira-Kira Service” and sharing together our support and prayers for it.

I believe that the fact that worship had been offered under the name “Worship to Honor the Elderly” until now has itself been the Lord’s blessing and grace.

In the midst of this, voices began to be heard saying that they “felt a sense of discomfort” about the name “Worship to Honor the Elderly.”

We began to hear comments such as, “I may have turned seventy-five, but I’m still healthy, and being called an elderly person doesn’t feel so pleasant... And being ‘commended’ doesn’t really sit well either...” — I began to hear such comments here and there, and also received direct feedback.

Therefore, beginning about six years ago, in the Worship Planning Committee, we have discussed every year about a new name to replace “Worship to Honor the Elderly.”

Names such as “Worship to Bless the Elderly,” “Senior Blessing Worship,” “Silver Generation Blessing Worship,” “Kira-Kira Day,” “Kira-Kira Service Day,” and in one church I visited recently, they were offering worship under the name “Happy Silver Day.”

After considering various possibilities, the name we finally agreed to go with was “Grand Generation Day.”

Part One

The previous name, “Worship to Honor the Elderly,” was written entirely in Chinese characters, whereas “Grand Generation Day,” so to speak, is the complete opposite — it is entirely in katakana. There was some concern that such a change might surprise people.

However, since at Megumi Church we already have annual worships such as “Mana Day” and “Morigaku Day,” and have used katakana names like “Eastertide,” “Advent,” and “Christmas Groove,” we concluded that this one, too, would likely be received in the same way.

And above all, the meaning of the term “Grand Generation” is wonderful — it not only contains the full intention of what we had meant by “Worship to Honor the Elderly,” but even adds a deeper meaning.

At first glance, the term “Grand Generation” may seem to be English, but in fact, it is *Japanese-made English* — it is not an original English expression.

It is a coined term created by a well-known broadcasting writer and scriptwriter.

It was invented to refer to people who, after retirement, live their second life actively and positively.

The word *grand* means “supreme” or “excellent.” The phrase expresses the wish that “the age that is called elderly may be regarded as the best generation of life, that one may age healthily, and with abundant knowledge and experience, enjoy life.” It is a term of respect toward older people — that is the meaning contained in the word “Grand Generation.”

In the Worship Planning Committee, we even considered writing “Grand Generation” in Japanese characters and calling it “The Worship to Bless the Supreme Generation.”

However, because it sounded rather grandiose and heavy, that idea was rejected.

Nearby, our neighboring AEON Mall has sympathized with this concept of “Grand Generation,” and for about ten years, they have been celebrating “Respect for the Aged Day” as “G.G. Day,” taking the initials of “Grand Generation” and promoting campaigns under that name.

(It is by no means “Ji-ji Day”!)

And above all, the reason why we ultimately decided, “Let’s go with Grand Generation Day!” is because the Bible never speaks of old age in a negative or passive way. Rather, it tells of many men and women of God who, *because of* their advanced age, were used by God to lead others into blessing. It records that, as a result, their old age became their finest season in the Lord.

Part Two

The Abram who appears in Genesis 12, which we just read, was precisely such a person whose life, beginning at the age of seventy-five — what we would today call “late elderly” — was dramatically changed by the hand of God.

At seventy-five years old, Abram received from the Lord, the Creator of all visible and invisible things, heaven and earth, the following promise: “I will bless you; you will be a blessing. All the peoples of the earth, all generations of the world, shall be blessed through you. You are the one I have chosen to be the starting point of My blessing.”

What is interesting is that before the age of seventy-five, God never spoke such a word to Abram.

It must have been that it *had to be* Abram as he was, having lived those seventy-five years on this earth.

The words of blessing promised to Abram were, for humankind, something impossible to measure — the most important, the most magnificent, and the ultimate work of God’s salvation.

For it was through Abram’s descendant that the Savior, the very appearance of God Himself, came into this world — to rescue humanity from the wages of sin, from eternal ruin, from the burning Gehenna of hell, and to redeem and transform human lives.

Thus, the final fulfillment of that promise word was realized.

When we look at what God does for human beings, it is often not in a short time span — not in a month or two, nor even in a year or two, as we might wish when we pray earnestly. Rather, in Scripture, we see that God often works on a scale of hundreds or even thousands of years — a span almost unimaginable for us, whose human lives rarely reach even one hundred years.

The scale of the story may feel too vast to grasp, but for Abram himself, it must also have been difficult to comprehend. He might have thought: “Why now? Why me? Even if it were me, wouldn’t it have been better when I was younger — when I still had strength and a future ahead of me? Why now, when I am old? And the birth of the Savior, of all things!?” We can imagine such doubts and confusion from other passages in Scripture.

Further, in Genesis 12:7, it is written:

Genesis 12:7 (PowerPoint)

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

To Abram, who at seventy-five had no children at all, God spoke such an incomprehensible word.

Already bewildered that God had chosen and appointed him in his old age, Abram must have been even more puzzled by these words.

Then, after twenty-five more years without a child, when Abram was one hundred years old, God told him something even more incomprehensible — that He would give a son to Abram, as old as he was, through his wife Sarah, who was also ninety years old.

Abram and Sarah could not believe this promise of God. They talked back to Him and laughed in their hearts, saying, “How could such a thing be possible?!”

From our limited, finite human perspective, such a reaction was, in a way, quite natural. But from God’s perspective, that very time — when human strength had reached its absolute limit, when no possibility remained — was the most fitting time to show and teach us that He alone is God.

This reminds us of the confession of the Apostle Paul:

“For Christ’s sake, I am strong when I am weak. If I must boast, I will boast of my weaknesses. We are weak in Him, yet by God’s power we live with Him.” That confession of Paul — that “the time when I am powerless is precisely the time of God” — comes to mind.

Physically, mentally, or even spiritually — the time when we are weak is the time of the Lord.

In a sense, as we grow older and gradually find more and more things we can no longer do, we might say that this is precisely the time when opportunities for the Lord’s time to be revealed are, whether we like it or not, opened to us.

There was a time when, being struck down by various thoughts, all the strength in my body left me, and I was overtaken by a feeling of powerlessness that made it impossible to get up from bed. At that time, my wife said to me, “Then, you should pray. Just pray, ‘I can’t do it.’ That’s where it begins.”

While I thought in my heart, “I already know that. I know it, and still can’t do it — can’t even pray — and that’s why it’s painful,” even so, gradually, the thought, “That’s true,” began to rise up in me, as if a small light were beginning to shine into utter darkness. When all is said and done, I have been living each day with the attitude, “I will do it, so God, please help me with that.”

In the end, I try to rely on my own strength — on my own thoughts, my own ideas, my own sense of rightness, my own virtues, my pride and boasting — trying to make my own abilities stand out more, only to stumble, to be crushed, to despair, and to decide that I am no good.

I refuse to yield even the smallest gap through which God's power might be revealed. I don't want to admit it.

While saying, "I rely on God," in reality I am using God, trying to make my own desires achieved and fulfilled, and according to the degree of that achievement or fulfillment, saying, "My prayer was answered," or "It wasn't answered," or "I received," or "I didn't receive," and thus perhaps misunderstanding it as being "according to God's will." I feel that I am being questioned daily by God Himself about such things.

But being questioned in such ways itself is the very process of grace — the process through which, while believing in the true God, in Jesus Christ, I may come to recognize as fact the spiritual reality that says, "I have died, and Christ lives in me."

In that sense, growing old, adding years, is to be placed in a situation where, both physically and bodily, one becomes aware of decline and inevitably must face one's own weakness.

What may appear, at first glance, to be a negative element, in the faith of believing in the true God, the Lord Jesus, becomes an opportunity through which one is made to experience the power, the honor, the strength, the wisdom, and the glory of the Lord God Himself — this is what I feel the Word of God teaches us.

When one feels physical decline, one likely feels "death" closer than before; and when one feels death, one cannot help but think about or expect whether or not there is life beyond it.

One is compelled to recognize one's own helplessness in being driven toward death against one's own will, and before the reality that one's life — what one thought was one's own — does not move according to one's own will, one is led to think, "Could it be that there is someone who governs life? There must be. No, there must be — otherwise my life would have no meaning. If such a one exists, I want to rely on Him." Perhaps being led, inevitably or even naturally, to such an encounter with God is what it means to age, to grow old.

Part Three

Moses was also such a person.

The age of eighty, at which God called and chose him as the leader to bring up the people of Israel, was an age when, as Moses himself sang in Psalm 90 — "The length of our days is seventy years, or eighty, if we have the strength. Yet their span is but toil and trouble" — he was living each day conscious of death, as if to say, "It would not be strange if I died today or tomorrow."

Indeed, when God said to Moses, “I will use you, eighty years old as you are, to lead more than two million Israelites out of slavery in Egypt,” he reacted just like Abram: “Please do not say such unrealistic, foolish things. As I am now, I have nothing — I am merely an old man living day by day, and it would be no surprise if I died at any moment.”

However, from that point on, Moses lived in the Lord in good health for another forty years, until he was 120 years old. And when Moses died at the age of 120, his condition was described in:

Deuteronomy 34:7 (PowerPoint)

That is to say, no matter how much one may prepare oneself for death, one cannot bring one's own life to an end.

On the other hand, no matter how vigorous one may be — even if one's eyes are not dim and one's vigor is unabated — when God says, “That is enough,” that life ends there. All of life, and all of its possibilities, are in the hands of God.

At the age of forty, Moses carried the feeling of having suffered the greatest failure and defeat of his life, lived another forty years without leaving any notable record, and by the time he became eighty — an age conscious of death — God appeared to him in a mysterious way.

A bush that, once set on fire, should have burned up in an instant, kept on burning and shining without ever being consumed — and within that very burning bush, God appeared to him, showing him the true state of a human life that rests in the hand of God.

Exodus 3:1–6 (PowerPoint)

To Moses, who had reached an age conscious of his death, God appeared in the midst of a bush that burned yet was not consumed, as if to teach him that human life, when it is in the hand of God, is at its best — that when one expects the Lord's work and seeks to live by His will, that life shines, and one may be made to taste the essence of life itself.

“Our lives,” Moses seems to teach us through his life and through the living experience of his years with the Lord after that mysterious encounter at eighty, “are truly blessed when the work of God is being done through them — for then, like the bush that should have burned up yet did not, our lives continue to burn without being consumed.

Because we are allowed to fulfill God's will, we can rejoice with a joy not bound by circumstances and realize that the life we are given is indeed the best life." Feeling physical decline, or even mental and spiritual weakness, is by no means a bad thing in the hand of God. Rather, it is God's time — the time for which God waits, the time to know God. Psalm 92 sings of this truth:

Psalm 92:14 (PowerPoint)

And further, David's confession says:

Psalm 71:17–18 (PowerPoint)

"O God, You have taught me from my youth, and even when I am old and gray, O God, You are my God."

Grand Generation Day.

Whether it is at ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, a hundred, a hundred and ten, or a hundred and twenty years — what age one calls the "Grand Generation," the "Best Generation," may differ from person to person. Yet one fact that Scripture, and this Psalm of praise, teach us is that if one lives in God, if one lives in the Lord Jesus, if one lives in the Word — all of it is the Grand Generation, the best generation.

In the midst of difficulties and frustrations that we can do nothing about — whether they are the rust born of our own deeds, or some destiny we cannot control, or weakness, or the proper decline of age, or sufferings to be endured, or walls to break through — whether helplessness or frailty, acceptance or resistance — as we walk through these inexpressible paths of life, one fact Scripture teaches us is that all of it, all of it, if it is in Jesus Christ, is the Grand Generation, the Best Generation.

Abram, at seventy-five, and Moses, at eighty — each met God in their so-called old age.

David walked with God all his life.

Their lives contained great suffering, seemingly unrecoverable failures, helplessness, and weakness — and yet their entire lives, in the Triune God, were the Grand Generation.

Conclusion

There was a time I visited an elderly person who had fallen ill and could no longer live as before.

As I went to meet that person, wondering, “What kind of face should I wear, what kind of expression should I show?” they welcomed me with a bright expression, as if to say, “Why do you look so worried?”

And they said this:

“Though I can no longer go to church whenever I wish as before, and though my body no longer moves freely as it once did, I am truly happy now.

I recall in my mind the Sunday messages I have heard so far and savor them again. I recite the words of Scripture I have stored up over the years, and I speak to Jesus.

Never before have I been able to spend twenty-four hours entirely in conversation with Jesus. That is why I am happy now.”

This person, even in old age and with gray hair, joyfully proclaimed to me the power of God and His mighty works.

The Grand Generation — the best generation — for a person lies in the fact that Jesus is with that person, that the person lives in the words of Jesus, and that Jesus lives in that person.

Whether over seventy-five or under seventy-five, all, if they are in the Lord Jesus, are the Grand Generation.

In the Lord Jesus, may we, together, savor the blessing of being made to live our own Grand Generation, and take yet another new step forward.

Let us pray.

Benediction: Genesis 12:2 — “You shall be a blessing.”