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Vision of Praise

From the editor

This time we would like to share a Bible study on Matthew 24, "Key to Salvation in the End Time" by Michael Suzuki, a Kohitsuji no Mure staff worker. We believe his message contains the key to live through this time of difficulty and confusion.

Key to Salvation in the End Time

Michael Suzuki

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? "

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom

against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

Then many false prophets will rise and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 24:1-13 NKJ)

This is not a soothing passage to read, but rather a scary one. You may prefer not to read or think about it, but at the same time those who are in Christ may now feel an urgency to face it squarely and think deeply beyond emotions and reasons more than ever. I feel now is the time. That is why I would like to do a Bible study from the scripture in Matthew chapter 24.

Power of Deceiving Spirits

Today let us focus on the power of deceiving spirits in this text.

The disciples asked Jesus a question. It was about the end time. They asked, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (v. 3)" Jesus thoroughly answered their question. The above text is about a third of what Jesus said. It is so long that I have cited only part of it.

The first thing Jesus said to the disciples is in the verses 4 and 5: "Take heed that no one deceives you" (v. 4). "Many

will come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will deceive many” (v. 5).

Then He went on to what would happen in the phenomenal world in the verses 6 and 7.

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars” (v. 6). In fact, right now there are places where armed conflicts are taking place, and the rumors of wars are constantly heard of. Frequent violations of airspace and territorial waters may cause international conflicts any time. Nuclear facilities may be attacked by hostile countries. We are definitely hearing the rumors of wars these days.

“Nation will rise against nation” (v. 7). Yes, people rise against people. One example of such division is recently surfacing in the United States. There are also conflicts among countries. And Jesus went on, saying “there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (v. 7).

What are written in the verses 6 and 7 are exactly happening right now. With the tremendous sense of reality, there looms out the fact that this is the end time. However, before speaking of the devastation of the phenomenal world and natural disasters, what Jesus mentioned at first as the sign of the end of the age is this: “Take heed that no one deceives you,” which is a caution in the realm of faith.

I have thought about it. Why did Jesus talk about our attitude of faith at first before the collapse of the phenomenal world which would be more obvious to everyone? It means there is something more important than visible events of the phenomenal world, that is the realm of our faith, because the key to salvation in the end time rests in our faith.

Paul also mentioned the deceiving power several times in

the Bible, saying that “deceiving spirits” were at work. False christs and false prophets are also of deceiving spirits.

For brand-name products, there are fake ones, right? The reason why people are confused by fake products is that they are so well-made that it is hard to tell the difference between fake and real unless having a trained eye. They are so deceptive!

Think from this point of view. If a false christ is someone who projects an air of greasy lust with a vulgar tie and a gold-plated bracelet and screams, “I am the reincarnation of Christ,” would people be deceived? I do not think so.

But what if a false christ is a humble and modest man who has profound biblical knowledge, helps others, and performs miracles? Many people would be deceived, I suspect.

You can never underestimate the power of deceiving spirits at work in false christs and false prophets. The Bible says that the power will deceive even the elect.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)

“The elect” in my understanding are those who are called to worship Christ and praise Him only. You can never be too careful. We should take the warning from Jesus seriously.

In the end time, false christs and false prophets are everywhere. This is especially true today through the internet. They are lurking in the information and knowledge through the internet. The internet is more popular now than ever before, and the amount of time spent on it has increased tremendously.

I am not saying that all information on the internet is

connected to deceiving spirits, false christs or false prophets. The internet has become embedded so much in our lives that we can no longer do without it. Certainly, I am one of its beneficiaries.

I want you to know, however, that it is one of the places deceptive spiritual powers lurk behind, trying to devour our faith.

Why will false christs and false prophets rise in the end time? I want to talk about their background and nature, but let me first clarify one significant point.

Discernment of What Is True

In my reading of Jesus' words in the Gospels, I have discovered that Jesus has very keen sensibility to what is real and what is not. And I am convinced that He also desires us to discern what is true and what is not.

For example, the Bible says that the "true light" was coming into the world. If it were not the true light, it could not defeat the darkness.

Jesus refers to Himself as the "true vine." Because Jesus is the true vine, we the branches can be connected to Him.

Jesus also says, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)" He emphasizes "the only true God," for being "true" concerns our life and salvation.

Furthermore, Jesus says in John chapter 4, "The time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." It would still make sense without the word "true," but Jesus says the "true worshippers." Here I find Jesus'

ardent desire and deep prayer for our worship to be pure and heavenly when we worship God as God.

Paul too utters the desire for discernment:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Paul says that our love may abound in discerning what the will of the Lord is and what comes from Him. I believe this sense of discernment is in every person who has received the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

However, this discernment works only when we abide in the redemption through the cross of Christ. The secure way to distinguish truth from the work of deceiving spirits is whether our hearts are moved by the redemptive love of the cross or not.

No matter how right or how true things seem to be, if the peaceful joy in the redemptive love of the cross is outweighed by criticism, resentment, and anger, it is a sign that we are entering a dangerous territory.

Now let me touch on the reasons why false christs and false prophets crop up at the end time. It is certainly affected by the end-time momentum. The world is in turmoil; the earth faces apocalyptic catastrophes; human society is deadlocked both politically and economically; and people's hearts collapse in uncertainties and anxieties.

And they seek answers to survive in such catastrophic

times. How can I be happy at a time like this?

Amid growing anxieties, if someone comes along and gives a clear answer, people will easily and gratefully jump in. In return for it, however, they stop thinking by themselves, and their faith fades away. I have seen many such cases.

Christ said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. (John14:6)” Without faith His answer is invisible and inconceivable, but by faith its absolute reality is manifested to our souls.

Purpose of Deceiving Spirits

In the end time there is a distinct atmosphere that the hidden truths, the sealed secrets, are being laid bare. There appear those who say, “I know the truth.” They assert that everything coming to the surface is manipulated with the truths hidden behind that no one knows. They explain in detail who are actually ruling the world economy, politics, and diplomacy. They are a kind of false prophet. Their voices can be identified as conspiracy theories.

Are all these theories fake? Probably not. There are things happening in the world which prove them. I myself do not believe that all public media information is true. There are times when we can obtain new knowledge and discover things we never knew before from the internet. I do not think that this itself is misleading us.

However, you should know that deceiving spirits are very clever at trapping you. I have seen even those who were called to this flock of praise fall into the snares of deceiving spirits.

From my observation, let me talk about the process of

how they make you stuck in the trap.

In the beginning you simply enjoy obtaining new knowledge and information while keeping a distance. As you start thinking that such information is true, you fall into an illusion that such knowledge is the right way to see the world. Then at once deceiving spirits come into full play.

You get annoyed and irritated by the ignorance of people. Intense resentment towards society and false information take root in you. A sense of righteousness and justice becomes your motivation for prayer, as if you are the only one who can pray for the world, knowing the “truth.”

Anger and criticism grow, but joy of the love of the cross fades away completely. Eventually you are filled with emptiness.

The purpose of deceiving spirits is not to prove what is right and true. It is to keep us away from the joy of being saved by the love of Christ.

Let us remember our first love. We were not saved by knowing what is right and what is not. We have been saved by the unconditional love of God.

If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. (Psalm 130:3-4)

The scripture signifies that no one can be righteous before God. The only righteous One is the Lord who has forgiven the unrighteous and redeemed the imperfect. When we get into conspiracy theories, the joy of His forgiveness and redemption fades away.

Jesus said:

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.
(Matthew 24:13)

Here is the secret of salvation when we see the rise of the deceptive power in the midst of the collapsing phenomenal world with divisions among and within nations. He who endures to the end will be saved.

How can such a simple, humble attitude of faith be the key to salvation in the critical time?

To endure to the end is to persevere to the end. It is to continue to believe in the perfection of the cross, no matter what happens, what we hear and see. It is indeed the confession of our faith: "The love of Christ alone is sufficient."

This powerful confession comes from the redemption of the cross. It is a declaration that can be made only by the ones who abide in the love of the cross. No deceiving power can come in here. Those who continue to believe in the redemption perfected by the cross shall be saved.

And it is not only us but also those who are suffering pains and sorrows in this end-time world that will be healed and saved by our confession.

Two Olive Trees in the End Time

In Matthew chapter 24, we find the ultimate resolution given by Jesus for the end time:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.
(Matthew 24:35)

When I read this, the following scripture came to my mind:

Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?”

So I said, “I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.

Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.” So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, “What are these, my lord?”

Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.” So he answered and said to me: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

(Zechariah 4:1-6)

Let me shortly describe the background of prophet Zechariah.

Around the 6th century B.C., Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon and its temple was broken down. The Israelites were held in captivity. Seventy years later, King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered Babylon, freed the Israelites and allowed them to return to Jerusalem. At that time, he ordered the people of Israel to rebuild the temple.

And the one who was appointed as the governor of Jerusalem in full charge of rebuilding the temple, was Zerubbabel in the above text.

It is a vision of two olive trees standing beside a lampstand.

About these two olive trees, Zechariah asked the angel, “What are these?”

Then the angel gave him an answer which was not like an answer. “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 4:6)”

One thing we can be sure of is that the two olive trees have nothing to do with human power, military might, authority, or even human abilities.

An olive tree is said to symbolize three things in the ancient Israeli era: peace, beauty, and endurance. And the olive tree symbolizes endurance in the famous story of Noah’s ark. God sent rain on the land for forty days and forty nights and flooded the earth, wiping out all lives on it, including all kinds of animals, except for those in Noah’s ark. When the rain stopped and the water receded, Noah sent a dove, and the dove brought in its beak a fresh olive leaf. The olive tree survived even through the flood as the continuation of life.

This is my own faith conviction. In the midst of end-time tribulations and trials, I believe there are two things which protect us and keep us alive in the love of the Lord: the Word of God and His praise. The true hope, peace and joy can be found only in them. The Word of God and His praise are the two olive trees in the end time.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. ”

Blessed are those who find hope, joy, and life which will not perish. It is the eternal salvation that the Lord has given us

through the cross of Christ Jesus.

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