

*From the editor*

For this issue, let us share the message from the Joint worship in New York, "Paradise Exists in Worship" by Michael Suzuki, together with a report from the Bible Study in the Wilderness in February, "Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet" by Yuki Shibuta, a headquarter staffs in Ashiya.

May the eternal light of Christ that redeemed all your life shine upon all the earth through worship!

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## Paradise Exists in Worship

Michael Suzuki

I would like to read the scriptures from Luke chapter 23, which is about the scene of Jesus being crucified with two criminals.

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"

"And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

(Luke 23:39-43 NKJ)

Two criminals were hanged on the cross with Jesus. One of the criminals blasphemed him. But the other said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Then in response to his humble plea, Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise."

This criminal encountered Jesus as his Savior in the final moment of his life on the cross. And he was forgiven and promised to live forever with Jesus. This is a deeply moving story.

But when I think of this criminal's life, I somehow feel a bit of misery. I imagine his life may not have been an easy one. In the end, he received the death penalty for the due reward of what he did. I understand that he was promised eternal life, yet I couldn't help but think he could have known the joy of living with God a little sooner on this earth.



From here, I began to think. And I focused on the single word Jesus spoke “Paradise.” What language do you think the word paradise comes from? It's not Hebrew, Greek, or Latin. As a word within the Bible, the word paradise is extremely rare, it is a borrowed word from Persian. I believe there was something that the Bible wanted to convey us even by using the borrowed word.

Before I became a missionary, I lived in Iran for three years engaged in an oil-related project. You know Persian is spoken in Iran. A local person who worked with me told me that the word Paradise used worldwide today originates from Persian. The original meaning of the word Paradise refers to a world completely set free from all burdens; a world filled with freedom, peace, and delight.

And according to the original definition, Paradise does not exist within utopian dreams. It is not an ideal world created by fake hope, but a reality that truly exists.

So, I believe that when Jesus said to this criminal, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise,” this man experienced Paradise that very day, at that very moment. Though it may have been only a few minutes of conversation with Jesus on the cross, yet he experienced Paradise where he was freed from all sins, sorrow, and pain. I believe he transcended even physical pain of being nailed on the cross. And his entire life was redeemed on the cross.

So, I now can believe this story contains no trace of misery. At that moment, I believe he was enveloped in heavenly light and sacred air.

*Jesus, remember me  
when You come into Your kingdom.*

*Jesus, remember me  
when You come into Your kingdom. Jesus.*

(H-375 Jesus, Remember Me)

*I do tell you the truth.  
Today you will be with Me in Paradise.*

(H-45 Today in Paradise)

From the story of Jesus and the criminal on the cross, one testimony I heard before came up to my mind. It’s about the grandfather of one of our church staff members. Her grandpa, at the end of his life, was also enveloped in heavenly light and sacred air.

This story is so amazing that I’d like to share it. It is a testimony truly like experiencing Paradise.

Her grandpa developed lung cancer in his final days. Realizing his time to return to heaven was near, he said, “I want to become a Christian and get baptized,” influenced by his cousin. Since he had no connection to any church, he

contacted a pastor who was hosting a Christian program at a radio station. Then the pastor was willing and said, “I’ll come and baptize you.” And he was baptized.

But his lung cancer progressed, and this is the story of the time when he was finally about to return to heaven. He was in severe pain due to lung cancer. He often pressed his chest and endured the agony quietly. When the time finally came to return to heaven, he called each family member over to speak with them and expressed his gratitude to everyone including doctors and nurses who had cared for him. Then, he said, “Bye,” and drew his last breath.

The family was stunned by it all. Soon they became ready for the funeral things. But right after a few minutes, he suddenly came back to life and said to his family, “Before me, I saw a path laying. Both sides of it were full of beautiful flowers. At the end of the path, a very beautiful light overflowed. I knew immediately that I was going to the place where Jesus was. But you know I haven’t eaten anything for a while, and I don’t have the strength to go that far. So, to build up my strength, please give me something to eat.” Astonishing enough, he said it.

Until then he was unable to eat anything due to the pain. The eating function was not working because his esophagus was also affected by cancer. But his family served his favorite food of “Katsudon” as he requested.

Katsudon is a popular Japanese food of deep-fried pork cutlet simmered in egg sauce and served over the rice. It’s a kind of heavy food though. But he completed a Katsudon in front of his family, said again “Bye” for a second farewell, and ascended back to heaven.

According to the people who were there, the place was filled with light, and no one was sad. The atmosphere was so sacred, so mysterious. This story is no fabrication—it’s a

genuine true story.

Her grandpa suffered terribly from cancer pain in the end, unable to eat anything. Yet as he was about to return to the Lord, he had been already freed from all pain. That's why he was able to enjoy a Katsudon, his favorite food.

I think her grandpa had something he wanted to convey to his beloved family. This is my interpretation, her grandpa wanted to show his family the surpassing joy of knowing Christ's absolute love while still in the flesh. God granted his wish.

Her grandpa and that criminal on the cross tasted complete freedom while still possessing a physical body. It is the redeeming love of Jesus Christ that always makes it possible and in every circumstance.

Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." I believe that Paradise is encountering God's love and knowing God's love.

The two people I spoke of today—her grandpa and that criminal—happened to taste Paradise at the end of their lives. But I believe that if you encounter God's love, if you are touched by God's love, you can experience Paradise at every moment of life.

Paradise is revealed through worshipping Christ alone. I believe even the criminal's humble words to Jesus—"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"—were the worship for him. Though these are difficult times, we believe that through our worship, God's healing, God's forgiveness, and God's peace will be revealed right in the midst of them.

Today, I'd like us all to sing a new praise, "M'barach Ho Marya." The lyrics of this song are in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus.

*M'barach ho Marya*  
*ho ho ho*  
*M'barach ho Marya*

In English, it means “Blessed be the Lord.” Within the resonance of these simple words, I sense the concentrated essence of God’s redeeming life. God’s love overflows within the praise. I believe God’s peace will flow into the Middle East and all nations connected to the Middle East situation.

In the Aramaic the word used for peace is “shalom” which has a broad range of meanings. It could mean well-being, a tranquil mind, an end to hostilities between two people or nations. It could mean good health, a sense of wholeness, everything being in its proper place and so much more.

I find one source of definition of the word shalom that fits; it is an end to an estranged relationship. When a relationship is estranged, it is no longer a close relationship or an affectionate relationship. Peace crumbles when each person’s heart grows distant from God’s love. True peace is built upon a relationship with God’s love within. Therefore, blessed be the Prince of Peace.

March 8, 2026



*“Narcissus praying quietly  
for the peace of the earth.”*  
Drawing by Asayo Ikeda

**The theme of *Bible Study in the Wilderness*:**

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

(Psalms 119:105)

Please write freely about anything you felt that the Word of God was a lamp to your feet.

## **Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet**

Yuki Shibuta

Knowing that God exists and that Christ is my God, for the first time I realized the meaning of my life. Until then, I didn't understand the purpose of my existence. But when I knew that God is love and that this God of Love created me and knows everything about me, it completely transformed my life. I was not born into this world by mere chance, but born by the loving will of God. Therefore, I wanted to know the will of God. I started constantly praying to the Lord, reading the Bible, and listening to Him. I was so desperate to know the truth and overjoyed by each and everything that the Lord taught me. I was charging ahead recklessly.

I gradually came to understand that even among Christians, there are various views about God, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. But I wanted to know what the truth is. I don't remember exactly what it was about, but one time I desperately opened the Bible about some contradicting perspectives and was startled by the first passage I came to. It was over 30 years ago, and since then I haven't deliberately opened to that passage, so I didn't remember where in the Bible it was. But I looked it up online and found out that it was the words from Ecclesiastes Chapter 7.

Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise— why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool— why die before your time? It is good to grasp the

one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes. (Ecclesiastes 7:16-18 NIV)

To me who was desperately seeking “What is right? What is the Lord’s will?” This was a perfect answer. I was astonished and shocked that the Bible even contains such specific guidance! And while I had thought my earnest seeking was good, I understood that pursuing it to extremes would end up in destroying myself and that the most important thing is to fear God.

As I reflected on the theme of the Bible Study, several scriptures came to mind. But I felt this passage, which had made such a profound initial impact on me, was saying to me, “Remember me!” It is a passage rarely read in church. Yet, in this era of deepening division, where even Christians are being drawn into ideological battles, I felt it reminds us that our standing should not be based on our own righteousness. Moreover, this passage seems to point to where we should stand for the building up of the Body of Christ. Different opinions and perspectives are not about which is right. Christians do not all think the same, and that is fine, because that is what the multidimensional praise is all about. Even with different opinions, when they resonate together, the wisdom of the Body of Christ will be always revealed. There, another path opens where only the cross of Christ is revealed. As it was read in the first Sunday worship, Ephesians Chapter 3 declares that manifold wisdom is revealed through the church (the body of Christ).

…now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Ephesians 3:10,11 NKJ)

Back then, I was deeply convinced by the words in the Book of Ecclesiastes, “It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other.” Now, I truly believe it again. It is not that there is one correct opinion, but I believe that the Lord speaks to each member of the Body of Christ (the church) so that we may arrive at the manifold wisdom.

February 1, 2026

*Join the Bible Study in the Wilderness!*

Please send your report to [aranoseiken@kohitsuji.com](mailto:aranoseiken@kohitsuji.com) and join us!

“Resurrection” Due Date: April 1, 2026

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

(John 11:25-26)

Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead.  
What does His resurrection mean to you?