**Message: The Rapture, the Second coming and the last temple.**

Eschatology is an important doctrine in Christianity. It is the last part of future events that the Bible sheds light on and also gives the believer great hope. In recent years some believers are under the impression that as long as they only understand the redemption by the Cross of Jesus, they are allowed to go heaven and all is well. Such believers tend to grasp the Gospel lightly without studying the Bible deeply and are unable to clearly explain their future hope. These believers are on the rise.

When I was given the above theme to speak about at this summer conference, I first wondered whether to explain the differences of eschatology among the different Christian denominations. However, even among churches in Japan, their understanding of the eschatology appears questionable so I decided to speak about eschatology in general as taught by Evangelical churches.

The general understanding is there is a Rapture (refers to the Lord’s Second coming in the mid-air), a Tribulation period and the Lord’s Second Coming (coming to the earth); and after that the Kingdom of a thousand years is established on earth. Then a new heaven and a new earth (the new Jerusalem) is created.

It can be confusing; defining the Second Coming in mid-air and the timing of Jesus’ coming back to the earth. Also there are various opinions about the Rapture and the Tribulation though a large number of denominations consider the Rapture happens before the Tribulation.

Putting aside some minor differences, belief in the Second Coming completes the Christian faith. If this is destroyed then faith in creation, faith in Jesus’ cross and his resurrection becomes futile. The proper understanding of the Second coming is so important to the believer.

Uchimura Kanzo says “If the cross is the heart of the Bible, the Second Coming is its brain. Without the Second Coming, the cross is meaningless so we Christian with strong belief need to examine the Second Coming in the Bible.” I also feel the same so I’ve put my thought in order.

1. The Rapture as the beginning of all (the Lord’s Second Coming in mid-air)

The Christians in the early church considered that the Rapture could happen any time so they discussed the theme “the fulfilment of the faith”. They also prepared for the Rapture by seeking their sanctification while enduring persecutions and hardships. They waited ardently for “that day”.

According to the Gospel, if you were not sanctified, you had no chance to meet and have fellowship with God, let alone see God. No one in the early church thought they’d be left behind, on the contrary they firmly believed they would be chosen because even the dead in Christ would be resurrected and raised. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18) It is also written “Therefore encourage each other with these words”, which means, I think, they must have had a strong conviction in the Rapture.

In recent years we often come across films that engage with the theme, the Rapture, but they are focused on the people who are left behind due to their weak faith and their survival stories, standing firmly in the middle of the Tribulation. However, if the Christian of the early church saw such a film, they would surely say, “That’s unthinkable”.

It is interesting that Paul characteristically interprets the mystery of the Rapture in the New Testament; the mystery that the Christian would be transported to heaven in a second while waiting earnestly for the Lord’s Second coming.

Following the Great Tribulation it is written that God’s wrath will be poured out so as to save the hardened Jewish people, yet those who believe in the Lord will be blessed by escaping from the hardship. This is the reality. If a Christian thinks he doesn’t need to be raptured then such a Christian has an awful and corrupted faith???.

That means he doesn’t believe the Second Coming and the Rapture as a fact. He thinks he can survive boldly like Nicholas Cage during the Tribulation. I think the work of the Cross includes rescuing the Christian from needless hardships. The faithful Christian ought to have fellowship with the Lord daily with the natural expectation and desire of being Raptured.

If you are swayed by the busyness of day to day life so that you notice you haven’t been raptured but you say “That’s fine”, then it can be said that you have nullified the work of Cross.

2. The Tribulation period

I like to talk a little about the Tribulation period. Generally speaking the Tribulation period lasts seven years. It is considered that God’s purpose of delivering from hardship is to give the Jewish people the last chance of salvation. Dividing the Tribulation into two parts, the latter part of three and a half years is called “The Great Tribulation”. It seems that hardship will increase towards the end of the period.

In the middle of the Tribulation where there is a strong connection with Jewish people’s salvation, the phrase, “The abomination of desolation” appears. If you see the person standing in the Holy place, many regard this as the Jewish temple but I personally think there is no need for a Jewish temple since it says the holy place not temple.

Any way it says by the act of his trampling down the place which the Jewish people regard as holy their stubbornness is crushed completely and with great sadness this will lead to their repentance to God. The purpose of the Tribulation is to rescue the chosen people but will the hardened Gentiles also be saved?

A passage in the Bible states that the Gospel will be preached all over the world. It looks like the activity of evangelism will continue during the Tribulations period. Either way the purpose of the Tribulation is; for the Jewish people to restore God’s Kingdom on earth and for the Gentiles for the forgiveness of their sins through the Gospel that leads to the restoration of their relationship with God.

3. Jesus’s Second coming and the Kingdom of a thousand years

It is apparent to everyone that the Lord’s coming, riding on the clouds takes place towards the end of the Tribulation. The Lord of the 1000 year kingdom will return to earth (Matthew 24:30~31). He is said to be riding on the clouds, you may associate him with Son-Go-Ku**.** It is the matter of how to represent the word “clouds”. When I checked the preposition prior to the noun in the original language I found out the following.

In Matthew 24:30, it says “Epi” (επι) but in the parallel description in Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27, “En” (εν) is used. In Matthew 26:64, “Epi” (επι) is used and in the parallel description in Mark 14:26, “meta” (μετα) is used. In the Revelation 1:7, “Meta” (μετα) is used. Epi’s (επι) original meaning is “sitting on top of~”. En’s (εν) original meaning is “inside ~ or surrounded by~”. Meta’s (μετα) original meaning is “ together with~ or accompanied by~”.

The Bible passages I listed above use the different prepositions, however, all the Bible passages translated into Japanese use the language “riding on the clouds”. The image of Jesus’ Second Coming is more like “inside the clouds”, “surrounded by the clouds”, “together with the clouds” or “accompanied by the clouds” rather than “riding on the clouds”.

The above translations seem more appropriate for expressing Jesus surrounded by God’s glory. The clouds are also used to express God’s glory and his presence. In short the Lord returns to earth together with his glory. The Lord’s promise will be fulfilled so the chosen people, the Jews, who have been redeemed on earth and the Gentiles who have been made God’s children through the Cross become one in the Lord.

Universal peace is brought on earth and the all the promises God made in the Old Testament and New Testament will be fulfilled within the Kingdom of a thousand years. When the Lord first came on earth, he came as a servant not a King, yet here it has a significant meaning that He reigns as King.

About the King’s duties as Messiah, they are vague at this stage, but the things already mentioned in parts and other spiritual symbols will be fulfilled as reality. It is recorded that heaven and earth will be actually governed under the Lord’s sovereignty and they will be filled with the Lord’s bright and glorious presence and together with the Lord we shall also govern them. After the rule of a thousand years, the Satan, so called dragon, will be thrown into the fire eternally and the Lord’s last judgment will be carried out.

4. New Heaven and the last temple

God’s last word extends to New Heaven and earth, the New Jerusalem. Up to this point I have a feeling that the Bible’s inspiration is beyond time and beyond the restrictions of space and it takes us to an unthinkable place. The Lord revealed to John through a vision: the fulfilment of everything written in the Bible and to the point of New Heaven and earth. He has also shown us and every believe will be struck with great admiration.

To show the scale of God, the city is 12.000 stadia in square. To put it today’s measurements, it is a super great city of 22.000 square km. The distance from this venue to Cluj where I live is 15.000km. It doesn’t even reach one side of New Jerusalem. Even after 18 hours’ driving!

The new Heaven and earth is also the conclusion of the Bible. For the Lord there will be no difficulty in building a larger building. The Holy City, New Jerusalem, has no temple, “Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” Revelation 21:22.

The former sanctuaries (tabernacles and temples) were provided as meeting places for God and people, yet in the New Jerusalem the sanctuary is not required because God and people are together.

The revelation of the last temple written at the end of the Revelation tells us about the absolutely fundamental thing, our relation with God, yet we find it difficult to understand. This is the temple that appears at the end of the Bible. There were Moses’ tabernacle, David’s tabernacle and temples of Solomon’s and Herod’s of which the Jewish people were very proud. We often project God onto our buildings, our abilities, our organisations or people. As a result we sometimes fail to notice that God is seeking after us.

神ご自身が神殿としてあがめられる信仰の回復が必要なのでしょう。

In order to restore our faith, we need to worship God himself as a temple. ?????

In addition to that God wishes to be involved with our lives by turning his face to us. The Lord’s face that shines as the city’s light is very similar to the Jewish prayer “The Lord’s face shine on you”. Jewish people often prayed this in their prayers.

To live face to face with God seems like before Adam had committed sin in Eden, yet this is the kind of restoration that God has promised to us at the end of all his works. Through the intimate “face to face” intimate fellowship God’s glory starts to shine. This teaches us that after experiencing redemption, our faith needs to be brought to a higher level.

God has not merely redeemed us so that we are free from sin but God wants us to have intimate fellowship with Him, a face to face relationship. Furthermore God has renewed us through Jesus. We are travelling towards the eternal Kingdom until it is established completely.

What we are looking for in our daily worship (Sunday service) is awareness of God’s presence. The purpose of our worship is to look up to God’s beautiful face - it’s for this very reason we have been created. If we could see his unlimited kindness and face filled with compassion, we’d see everything else as trivial and stale. We mustn’t swayed by visible things. We can live with ブレルことのない ？？ unshakeable faith.

Therefore as we live in the discolored 地上の褐藻 world ???, I would like to pray that we set up our own sanctuary where God dwells with us so that we will become someone who keeps seeking and longing for God’s presence. For those who have been redeemed by the Lord; their ultimate purpose for existence is indeed found in this.

NOTES:

From Wikepedia, Japan about the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation.

患難時代、大患難時代（かんなんじだい、だいかんなんじだい）とは、[イエス・キリスト](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%82%A4%E3%82%A8%E3%82%B9%E3%83%BB%E3%82%AD%E3%83%AA%E3%82%B9%E3%83%88)のことばで[新約聖書](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%96%B0%E7%B4%84%E8%81%96%E6%9B%B8)、[マタイによる福音書](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%83%9E%E3%82%BF%E3%82%A4%E3%81%AB%E3%82%88%E3%82%8B%E7%A6%8F%E9%9F%B3%E6%9B%B8)24章21節に「大いなる患難あらん（[文語訳聖書](https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%96%87%E8%AA%9E%E8%A8%B3%E8%81%96%E6%9B%B8)）」[1][2][3][4]と言われているものである。