

A Precious Moment that Lasts into Eternity
Psalm 90:1-12, 2 Timothy 4:1-8, Luke 19:1-10

Did you know that today is the Grandparents' Day? Surely, today is grandparents' day. I would like to congratulate those who have grandchildren for being grandparents. I have a nine-month-old grandson, Benjamin Bryce. Being a grandparent is yet another experience than that of being a parent. Every grandchild is so cute and adorable. I have many pictures displayed in my house. All of those pictures are pictures of our grandson, Benjamin.

My wife, Sun, loves to see her grandson. She wants to do anything for Benjamin. When she goes to the shopping center, she always visits the baby section to find anything for Benjamin. That is the distinctive experience of being a grandma. Those who have grandchildren are happy. Also, grandparents are God's gift to children.

The Bible says of those with wisdom, "Blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou..." 1 Samuel 25:33. Some have said it like this: "Grandparents give generously of themselves over the years, with hugs and words to ease young fears, telling lively stories that light up a child's face, living in faith while finding strength in God's grace, showing that each day is filled with love. Grandparents are a gift from Heaven above." Grandparents have a lot of wisdom to guide, and generous hearts to hold their grandchildren.

Sometimes, we human beings learn the most important things at last minute. We learn some things at a time that is too late to apply in our life. If we knew earlier what we learn at last minutes, we would not neglect and regret our life. Grandparents may know what is the most important in life. Eternal things are much more important than anything in this life.

Grandparents are eager to teach and advise their grandchildren not because the grandchildren have failed in anything, yet, or have done anything wrong, but because they want to guide their grandchildren with what the grandparents have learned from their own failures and mistakes, so that the grandchildren may not have to go through the same wrong ways.

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. In it, the Psalmist writes that the old man knows "the years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."

The Psalmist taught us to pray; "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12) What does it mean to teach us to number our days aright!? Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but the moments that take our breath away. This is the way of how to count our days aright. We need to hold the moments that last for eternity in our life.

I would like to share with you my life story. I met a young lady forty years ago at a train station in Chu-An, near by Incheon in Korea, on a rainy day. Incheon has now become a big city in Korea. It is where the current International Airport is located.

At that time, the village, Chu-An that I had lived in was just a rice field. There were no paved roads, and not even any wide roads, but only a curved foot-path, two feet wide, stamped down between the rice fields that was the path I took to walk home everyday from the train station. If I were to use the public road, I would have had to walk around the fields for two miles to get from the train station to the village. So, every body used the short cut through the rice fields, on the two foot-wide foot-path.

On that rainy day, I met the young lady at the train station. The path to the village was not only slippery, but also muddy, ankle-deep when one stepped into the muddy path. Nobody could walk through this mud with ordinary shoes. Everybody had to wear rubber boots to get through this muddy path on this particularly rainy day.

Because it was such a rainy day evening, I had the assignment to deliver a pair of rubber boots to the train station for my sister, who was four years older than I, at 6:00 p.m. She commuted to work into Seoul from our village by train. This train ran once every hour. If someone missed the train, he or she should have to wait for another hour to get on the next train.

Most of the ladies in my village who commuted by train for work into the big city didn't like to wear rubber boots at work. They felt embarrassed when they had to walk around with rubber boots in the city, where roads were paved. So it was a custom among the families whose family members were commuting that someone in family had to bring rubber boots to the train station for those coming back from work on rainy days.

On that day, I went to the train station carrying women's rubber boots for my sister, who was waiting for my service. Unfortunately, my sister was not on that train, which meant that I had to wait another hour at the station, or go back home and come back again.

I had waited for my sister until everybody got off of the 6:00 train, and disappeared from the train station. Meanwhile, I found a young lady who was wearing high-heeled shoes, waiting for somebody. She must be a new comer, I thought, or must be stupid. Otherwise, she would never even consider walking through the slippery, muddy path on this rainy day in her high heels! So, I approached to her, as she apparently dared to try to walking in the mud in her high-heeled shoes. I suggested she use the rubber boots that I has been carrying, but were not presently in use.

At first, she said, "No thank you." because she didn't know me. Still skeptical about her attempt to walk in the mud, I followed along with the rubber boots in hand. A little later, she realized that she couldn't walk through the muddy path without rubber boots. She couldn't even move one foot in front of the other. I approached her again, saying, "You see that this path is not good for your high-heeled shoes." "I brought these

boots for my sister, but she was not on this train. I have to go back and come back again for the next train anyway. So, you can wear these boots and give them back to me when you reach the village. It seems to me that you and I must be going in same direction." Finally, she realized that she had to take and wear the boots I was carrying and said, "Thank you." So, I did a good deed for an unknown lady on that day.

The next day was Sunday, so I went to my church. (In Korea, they work on Saturdays too. So, the next day was Sunday.) I was sitting on a seat in the choir loft at the church when my pastor introduced a young lady whose family had registered as new members a month ago. And then, the pastor asked her to come and sit with the choir. So, the lady came to sit with the choir. And then, she found me sitting in the choir also, and was shocked to see me! Of course, she had had a good impression of me. I was the only one who knew her in the church. In subsequent years, she and I became very friendly working at the church together. She was the Sun who became my wife. A moment when I helped her at a train station has been continued in a special relationship up to today. In my life, the day I met her is that special day.

On what occasion I meet someone is very important in life. Sometimes, it determines the life to follow. Today's scripture reading is a story about Zacchaeus who met Jesus. His encountering with Jesus was not by accident. Jesus and his disciples were going to Jerusalem. Jesus was heading toward the cross. As they came to Jericho, a great crowd gathered to see him.

Zacchaeus was in the crowd. The Scriptures tell us that he was "a chief tax collector and was rich," and that he was disliked and despised by the people of Jericho, for a number of reasons. For one thing, they disliked Zacchaeus because he was the chief tax collector. He was responsible for gathering the hated Roman tax on the products of Jericho, such as balsam, and the taxes upon the costly imports from Damascus and Arabia. In the day of Jesus, the tax collectors were known for their greed; and they were considered outcasts, classed with thieves and cutthroats. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, so he was greatly despised.

Also, the people of Jericho regarded Zacchaeus as a traitor. He was a fellow Jew who had betrayed his people, his nation, his faith, and his God. To them, he was a turncoat who had gotten rich at their expenses; so they resented him and rejected him. This was the setting when Jesus came to Jericho that day. Zacchaeus was also eager to see Jesus; but being a man who was not very tall, he could not see over the crowd. He ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in hopes of getting a glimpse of the great teacher.

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, Jesus sensed his loneliness; and Jesus' heart went out to him. Jesus went over to the tree and looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today"(Luke 19:5). It was a moment of amazing grace for Zacchaeus, a powerful, awesome moment that took his breath away. Why, of all the people in Jericho, Jesus had reached out to him!

From the encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus found three things which became for him a

turning point. First, he earned recognition from Jesus. Even though he was rich, he was hungry for recognition and acceptance from others. Zacchaeus was surprised by Jesus' calling him by his name, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today"(Luke 19:5). Jesus knew him already. It was amazing that Jesus knew his name, Zacchaeus. He was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see him, and that he acknowledged him, accepted him publicly, in front of all of these people.

Everybody expects recognitions from others. When we do good works for others we expect recognitions or praise for our works from others, because everybody has a need to fill his or her empty heart by another's praise. Zacchaeus knew that he was disliked and despised by others. But, Jesus had a different view of Zacchaeus. He accepted Zacchaeus as a lost of descendent of Abraham. Jesus treated him as a valued person, and welcomed him.

Notice that Jesus gave Zacchaeus no material gifts. Jesus gave him something better: love, respect, and acceptance. Zacchaeus was so thankful that his lifestyle was totally changed. Why, it even touched his pocketbook. "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will pay back four times as much"(19:8).

Do you know what the best recognition we have from Jesus is? It lies in Jesus' words of grace to us, "You are righteous", "You are no longer a sinner." That is the best recognition that we earn from Jesus Christ, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23)

Secondly, through Jesus' acceptance and grace, Zacchaeus found it within himself that he should be changed. Zacchaeus, overwhelmed by the Master's acceptance of him and by this special honor, jumped down quickly and welcomed Jesus - and Zacchaeus's whole life was changed! Zacchaeus was so grateful for this acceptance, so filled with thanksgiving, that it absolutely turned his life around. Christ does that to us! Thankfulness does that to us.

Up to that point, Zacchaeus seems to have been basically selfish, thinking only of himself. His motto was, "What's in it for me?" But then Jesus came into his life, and that special love ignited within Zacchaeus: the spark of gratitude. The way a person uses his or her possessions is a major indicator of one's spiritual condition. It can not be ignored. Rather, it should be recognized by others.

The story of the Good Samaritan implicates many meanings. Some say the story implies three kinds of persons and their philosophies of life. The robber: "Yours are mine so I take them." The priest and Levite: "Mine is mine so I should keep them." And the Good Samaritan: "Mine is yours so I share them." Another implication of the story of the Good Samaritan is that there are three kinds of people: those who we should not meet—the robber; those who are not necessarily to meet—the Levite and priest; and those who we should have to meet—a Good Samaritan.

Zacchaeus was treated as robber by the people of Jericho. Perhaps he himself recognized that he was, at best, an unnecessary person to everyone else. But, by responding to Jesus' call, he became a person of value.

Lastly, Zacchaeus found himself as one of the children of God. "Today," with its special meaning, the time of God's gracious work was manifested in him. "Today" is what's called "Chairos" time, not time used to measure out duration, but time which reveals the quality of the moment. The relationship between Jesus' call in our lives and the potential for our human response is striking. What the world values, but which is not eternal, is not valuable at all. The love that is not eternal is fake love. The life that is not eternal is the miserable life. The truth that is not eternal is not truth, but only temporal knowledge. Salvation is eternal. Today is the day that God waits for us to encounter Jesus, the day the God invites us to become a part of an eternal moment.

George Carlin said, "The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrow viewpoints, we spend more but have less, we buy more but enjoy less, we have bigger houses and smaller families, we have more conveniences but less time, we have more degrees but less good sense, more knowledge but less judgment, more experts yet more problems, more medicine but less wellness."

Remember, spend some time with the people you love, because you may not have them around forever. And remember, say a kind word to someone who looks up to you with a sense of awe, because that little person may soon grow up and leave your side. Give time to love. Give time to speak. Give time to share the precious thoughts in your minds and listen.

Make today a day of meaningfulness, not a day of wasting. Make today your first day of the rest of your life. Catch a moment, encountering with Christ, that lasts for eternity.