

Col.13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

13:4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

13:5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

13:6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

13:10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

November 2, 2025 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Sermon Title: "The Greatest of These"

[From Today's Sermon]

It has been 140 years since Missionary Lambuth came to Shobara. Ten years later, church members baptized by the missionary were born, the church grew, and expanded northward into areas like Kisha, Abiki, and Tojo. As we celebrate Shobara Church's 130th anniversary, we want to fix our eyes firmly on what remains unchanged forever. What endures forever is love.

Even if we had "the power to prophesy, and all knowledge and understanding, and faith to move mountains," could we say our lives and the church's future were secure?

Yet, "prophecy will cease, tongues will be silenced, and knowledge will pass away." "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Even if I speak with the tongues of angels, even if I possess prophetic powers, even if I have

great faith or perform acts of sacrifice, these are incomplete. They are like viewing a face in an old, dim mirror. Like an adult who has cast off the childish thinking of childhood, we can come to know the perfect. That is God's love. Let us fix our eyes on the God who loves us.

Good morning, everyone.

The mornings and evenings have grown decidedly colder, but I hope you have been keeping well. These days, the occasional autumn blue skies and warm sunshine feel truly precious. Please, please take good care of yourselves.

Today marks the 130th anniversary of the founding of Shobara Church.

«The Church's 130 Years: The Journey of Mission»

◆ (Prehistory) 1885: Missionary J.W. Lambuth

Served as a teacher at the newly opened Shobara English School

◆ 1887: Missionary Lambuth temporarily went to Kobe, but returned to Shobara and began missionary work

◆ 1893: Rev. T.W. Gulick went to Miyoshi Town

and began evangelism. Work was handed over to Rev. H. Lindstrom and his wife

◆ Inspired by roadside evangelism, Mr. Katsuzo Kajiware visited Miss Barnes, the missionary, in Miyoshi and came to believe in Christ

◆ 1896: Mr. Katsuzo Kajiware was baptized. (The first fruit of the church)

◆ Meetings began in a rented house owned by Mr. Genten Watanabe in Ebisucho, Shobara Town.

◆ Alongside Miss Burns, Mr. Gisaku Horie held Bible study meetings. He later became the first pastor of Hiroshima Church.

◆ 1912: Missionary Miss Francis moves from Hiroshima to Shobara for evangelism. Missionary Miss Wylie joins her in ministry. Her brother, Mr. Francis, assists. Using Shobara as a base, they walked throughout northern Hiroshima Prefecture—Yosha, Tojo, Aburugi, etc.—to evangelize.

◆ 1940: Pastor Shizuka Matsuyama arrives in Shobara.

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◆ 1957: Dedication service for Shobara Church sanctuary.

◆ 1961: Missionary S. Dick assisted in evangelism in Shobara.

Looking roughly at the succession of missionary teachers and pastors from the founding

period, this is the general flow. It makes one reflect on how the mission work in Shobara and the northern part of the prefecture has been sustained for so long through the prayers and service of truly many people.

Today's scripture contained these words:

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

We too live supported by these things that endure forever. We live supported by the greatest of these. For this very reason, missionaries undertook long, long sea voyages during the Meiji era to come and preach in distant, undeveloped lands. Because of that spirit, because of that love and passion, we are here today. Here stands God's unchanging church. Today, at this turning point in our history, we pause briefly to seek teaching from the Word about what endures forever, what remains forever, and above all, what is the greatest among these eternal things.

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

What catches the eye in these verses is the repeated phrase “I am,” meaning “I.”

It is wonderful to speak the words of people and the words of angels. It is amazing.

To have the power to prophesy, to understand every mystery and all knowledge—truly amazing. The power to prophesy. This is described as “a gift from God for proclaiming His message, a heavenly talent.” The word ‘prophecy’ also appears in verse 8. As a pastor, when I see phrases like “a gift from God for proclaiming His message, a heavenly talent,” it's what you might call a drool-worthy, coveted gift.

On top of that, being well-versed in all mysteries and all knowledge makes it nothing short of the ultimate. “The words of men” refers to speaking in tongues, and on top of that, mastering even the words of angels, excelling in knowledge, excelling in speech, excelling in mysteries... It feels utterly invincible. And on top of that, having “faith strong enough to move mountains”

– indeed, Jesus Himself said that if you believe without doubting, you can move mountains.

Mark 11:22 Jesus answered and said to him, "Have faith in God.

11:23 I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

And again, it is written, 'If I give away all my possessions, and if I surrender my body to be burned'... This person seems perfect in ability, knowledge, faith, and deeds, yet Scripture declares that without love, it is worthless. What does this mean? How severe! Why must such a wonderful believer, such a wonderful minister, who has strived for perfection to that extent, be reproved?

Therefore, "I may I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned..." The word "I" in these verses is what troubles me.

In verse 3, the phrase "even if I give my body to be burned" uses a Greek word that could also be interpreted as "to offer one's body for the sake of pride or boasting." Dying for one's own pride seems pointless, yet there may be an aesthetic akin to the Japanese concept of seppuku (ritual suicide) implied here. In any case, I believe what is described here is the seemingly perfect yet fundamentally flawed state of humanity reaching its highest level—or rather, the impossible made possible, the ultimate limit attainable by humans. Yet even so, it declares that without love, it is utterly meaningless. So then, what is this love?

13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

13:5 It does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil.

13:6 It does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.

13:7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

If such love is behind it, then even if you speak with the tongues of men and of angels, even if you have the power to prophesy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and even if you have a faith that can move mountains, and give away all your possessions, and even if you surrender your body to be burned, it is nothing, but it would not be considered as nothing, as worthless, as utterly useless. It is somewhat surprising that one could perform such virtuous deeds without love. It is astonishing that these great works of men, things considered tremendously valuable, are described as “like a clanging cymbal, as worthless, as utterly useless.”

The following words spoken by Jesus come to mind:

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

7:22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’

7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

7:24 Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

7:25 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

7:26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

7:27 When the rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, it fell—and great was its fall.”

7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

7:29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Like the chief priests, priests, and scribes who treated Jesus with insolence and never opened their hearts to him, like Saul on the road to Damascus, they harbored not a shred of doubt about their own righteousness. The Bible tells us that this very thought—“I am righteous,” “I understand and speak so well, I can explain God's message so skillfully, I am knowledgeable in all things, I have strong faith, I am an amazingly noble, self-sacrificing being”—contains a fundamental error.

They see but do not perceive; they hear but do not understand.

Matthew 13:10 Then the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

13:11 He replied, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to you, but not to them.

13:12 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

13:13 This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

13:14 And so this prophecy by Isaiah is fulfilled in them: 'You will keep on hearing but never understand; you will keep on seeing but never perceive.

13:15 For this people's heart has grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, so that they might not see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

The scribes seem to know so much yet know nothing. The disciples, though uneducated, know. What is the difference?

13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

13:5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

13:6 It does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.

13:7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never ends. But prophecies will cease, tongues will be silenced, and knowledge will pass away.

13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

We came to understand everything because we met Jesus. Before that, we believed that if we tried hard enough, we would be recognized as righteous. We believed we could become perfect, so we devoted ourselves to keeping the law and offering sacrifices. With the mindset that any shortcoming would mean we wouldn't be saved, humanity desperately tried not to stray from the path. "Be kind and compassionate; do not envy one another; do not boast; do not be proud; do not behave rudely; do not seek your own interests; do not be quick-tempered; do not keep a record of wrongs; do not rejoice in injustice but rejoice in the truth. Bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things." This was the way of life they aimed for. Their teachers were the chief priests and the teachers of the law, but their righteousness was only

outward, and their hypocrisy was obvious. Alas, human actions have their limits. Leaders weren't inherently wicked hypocrites from the start. They surely knew, learned, and disciplined themselves. But there is no end to it. Humans cannot possibly keep and perform all the countless statutes. So why did God impose such unkeepable statutes upon His people? God's laws are beyond human capacity to fulfill. Therefore, we might think God is heartless, unreasonable, and deceitful. But we have no right to dictate how God should establish His laws. God can decide anything according to His own will.

Our inability to keep them is solely due to our own weakness and inadequacy. The law exists not so that we can blame or complain to God that the rules are too difficult, but so that we can humble ourselves, fall down, admit our fault, and acknowledge that we are hopelessly inadequate beings. We cannot rage, "How cowardly! How unfair! How petty! Setting rules we know we can't follow from the start, just to make us say 'sorry' for failing!" We should wait to speak until we see how God deals with us in our failure.

13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

13:5 It does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.

13:6 It does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.

13:7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never fails.

This is not some difficult, irritating rule from God to condemn us as second-rate, unqualified, substandard rejects if we fail to live up to it. This is God's love for us, who are weak and unable to keep God's rules.

It is God's love that continues to be poured out even on us, who are weak, weak, yet unabashedly arrogant, the most insolent of all. It is God's love that remains unchanged even toward such rebellious humans.

13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

13:5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

13:6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

13:7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never fails.

Galatians 6:14 But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through

which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

To be made new!! To die with Jesus and be brought to life with Him in the new life of resurrection!!

Even if I speak in tongues, understand the language of angels, interpret the word of God with great skill, possess all knowledge and wisdom, hold a doctorate, serve as a high priest, president, senior pastor, or any other title, even if I could move mountains or give my very life, saying, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? and in your name we cast out demons and perform many mighty works"? Truly, sadly, they miss the mark. They are like a clanging cymbal or a clattering gong—utterly worthless, completely useless."

But prophecies will cease, tongues will be silenced, and knowledge will pass away.

13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

13:10 But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

13:11 When we were children, we spoke like children, we thought like children, we reasoned like children. When we became adults, we put childish ways behind us.

The thoughts we had as children. They may have included wonderful, pure, and noble ideas, but I imagine many were also unrealistic. I believe there were all sorts of immature, childish, simplistic, and illogical ways of thinking. As we gradually mature into adults, we cast off those thoughts and blossom into realistic, sound, fulfilling ideas and principles—ones we can cling to, entrust our future to, and build upon. Would we ever want to revert to those childish, crude ideas from our early years, those principles and philosophies we wove together through hardship, failure, and our own many experiences? They were partial, lacking a broad perspective, and could hardly be called whole or complete. Therefore, as we grow into adulthood, we progressively resolve and move beyond the ideas we once held.

And that is precisely what is required of us now.

I spoke the words of men and of angels. Yet it was without love, partial and incomplete. It was like a clanging cymbal or a clattering gong.

Even if I possessed the power to prophesy, understood all mysteries and all knowledge, and had faith to move mountains, yet without love, it was partial and incomplete. Then I would be

nothing.

And if I give away all my possessions, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but have no love, I gain nothing. But now I have become mature; I have learned to know the perfect.

13:10 When the perfect comes, the partial is done away.

13:11 When we were children, we spoke like children, we thought like children, we reasoned like children. When we became adults, we put childish ways behind us.

13:12 For now we see only a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13:13 And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

We cannot view a mirror made 2000 years ago as the same mirror we hold today. I imagine the mirrors of old—whether stone, metal, or polished glossy surfaces—could only vaguely reflect shapes, never conveying clear forms. Though we speak of “a mirror as clear as still water,” surely nothing delivered such vivid, colored images to us as the water's surface.

In the same way, I believe the events in the kingdom involve transforming our dim, hazy, ambiguous understanding—our partial, rudimentary grasp—into a clear, direct vision of God, face to face, without any intermediary. a childish understanding, a partial understanding. But in the Kingdom, I believe what happens is that we come face to face with God, seeing clearly, directly, without anything in between. When we think of Jesus, if we understand love, if we understand God's love, won't our thoughts and actions naturally mature? The words, teachings, mysteries, faith, and deeds filled with God's love—revealed by God through Jesus—are precisely what constitute mature and wonderful things. There exists no room for thoughts like, “I worked so hard,” or “I did so many good deeds,” or “I am so knowledgeable.” Instead, there is only a world where we say, “God, thank you for noticing me, so insignificant.” We desire to cherish what naturally springs forth from this deep-seated emotion and gratitude born of God's love.

Hebrews 5:12 By this time you ought to be teachers, yet you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.

5:13 For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Love is from God; everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

4:9 God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this way, God's love was revealed to us.

4:10 Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Herein lies love.

4:11 Beloved, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

4:12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.

13:13 And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

This is something that endures forever. It is never-ending, never perishing. Through God's love in Jesus, we can always have hope. Because it is this God, we can continue to believe forever. This love of God is the most valuable, the greatest thing, enduring forever, never ceasing. Therefore, we too desire to first set this love of God in our hearts, and to think and act in all things accordingly.

◇Prayer: **Heavenly Father, we thank You for today's worship. We thank You for Your grace that keeps us not in what is imperfect, partial, vague, changeable, uncertain, or childish, but in what endures forever, holding us fast in perfect knowledge and in Your love. Please lead all those who suffer into Your salvation and peace. Bless our families and our community. Use us. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.**