

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
January 3, 2016

Press On to Know the Lord

Hosea 6:1-3

6:1 “Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

6:2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

6:3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”

We choose the Verse of the Year, and set the goal of the year. Last years verse was “Lord, teach us to pray.” taken from Luke 11:1. This year’s is “Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.” taken from Hosea 6:3.

We chose a new verse. It does not mean to forget the last year’s verse. Since we have to ask the Lord to teach us to pray for the life time, let’s keep the last year’s verse in our mind. Please don’t exchange the last year’s verse with the new year’s verse, but put the new year’s verse on the last year’s verse. Let’s do like to build second story on the first story. Don’t destroy the first story and build it again. Let’s build up God’s grace and our goal of this year on the last year’s. Then we can grow spiritually as individuals and as a church.

1. Society That Don’t Seek the Lord

You see the quotation marks before and end of today’s reading. This was quoted from a prayer of the priests in the temple. Prophet Hosea appealed the people of Israel to press on to know the LORD by

quoting the words of a prayer. Why did he need to appeal it? Because the people seek other than to know the LORD.

After King Solomon, the kingdom was split into Northern and Southern kingdom. It happened in 930 B.C. Hosea was a prophet of Northern kingdom. He prophesied in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash according Hosea 1:1. Jeroboam the son of Joash was called as “Jeroboam II” by historians. He ruled over the kingdom from 786 to 745 B.C. He expanded the territory, stimulated the economy and trade. Some decades ago, archaeologist dug up Samaria, the capital of Northern kingdom. They found parts of magnificent buildings and many imported valuable things such as ivory in the days of Jeroboam II.

The economy became flourish, but moral was corrupted and injustice spread over the society. A few of rich people occupied the great part of profits, and poor people became poorer. So called “disparate society” was born. The king prepared to invade another country to expand his territory. And moreover, the people stopped to seek God.

It is said that people do wrong and fight each other because of poverty. If country becomes strong in economy and the people become rich, the world becomes peace and the people becomes happy. It may be true partially. But it’s not the perfect truth. When the country or individual becomes rich, they will fight to others to get more territory, resources, and wealth. When people seek wealth and forget God, moral will corrupt, society will loose righteousness and justice, and the world will be disturbed. Now, we have such society that has forgotten God now and here.

2. Generation Who Don't Seek the Lord

One of the important roles of prophets is to indicate what people have lost for. In that manner, so did Hosea, the prophet. What have they lost? It's the knowledge of God. Putting it simply, people of Israel didn't know God. In Hosea 6:6, it says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Surely, people offered the burned sacrifice for worship; in Israel, animals were valuable properties of people because their main occupation was pastoralism. Only one calf, or one baby sheep was incredibly expensive. Even in Japan, they would cost several hundred thousand dollars in total for one calf or baby sheep. I think, it was very hard to bring baby animals up in ancient Israel; even so, people offered them to God. Nevertheless, they neither had any loyalty nor desire for the loving relationship with God. God ordained them to offer a sacrifice for thanksgiving, repenting or devotion, but the people of Israel didn't understand the meaning of it or why God ordered sacrifice, even though they kept it as a matter of form. So, they were much less likely to consider what they have done and repent their behavior. Likewise, the merchants kept the Sabbath, the day of rest, but thought, "I wish the day of rest would be gone as soon as possible, then I will be going to un-righteously earn some money again." (See Amos 8:5-6)

I thought about the people in present era, thinking back about the people in the Bible, this Christmas season. People celebrate Christmas with great *éclat*, but how many of them, including Christians, truly celebrate it as CHRIST-mas, the celebration for Christ? While singing Christmas carols, are they truly accepting Jesus in their heart? While

singing “Come and adore Him,” are they truly dropping their knees in front of the manger where Jesus sleeps? I don’t know how many of them truly and passionately desire the relationship with God, like the wise men of East traveled the long distance for worshiping Jesus. While Christmas season, people hear Jesus’ name many times. People hear the stories of the Bible too. And they remember love, joy and peace that expresses the Biblical value. It’s the happy thing. However, I’m very sad if Christmas is only for drinking, eating, singing, dancing and enjoying. I’m very sorry for God who gave His one and only Son to us. Christmas is the time for remembering the love of God, giving His Son to us. It’s the day the Son of God is born in our hearts.

It’s the same as the era of Hosea, if we have the celebration without meanings. Nowadays, the form of Christmas or Easter might be broken down, in addition to losing meanings. To the people of Israel, Hosea said, “Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.” If Hosea were alive in present time, he would predict the same thing; moreover, the Bible, the unchanging Word of God, now tells us, “Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.” We have to listen to it and take back what we have lost for.

3. Believers Who Don’t Seek the Lord

Don’t you feel strange that the Bible tells Israelite to know the Lord? Israelites were chosen by God when other tribes made idles out of stones and wood and worship them. Israelites were chosen to know the Lord, the only living God. Israelites knew that God was the Creator who supported his creatures and guide them. They knew that God was merciful and He loved the people, forgave their sins and

invited them into the fellowship with Him. They also knew that God would listen to their prayers and give reward to those who believe in Him. However, in the era where Hosea prophesied, what the Israelites knew was a mere knowledge. They did not know God personally or did not experience God. They should have known God, but there was no God in them.

When we say we know someone, it does not mean we know that person if we only know their CV or personal data. Even if we see them on TV every day or every week but if we don't interact them personally with conversation, it does not mean we "know" that person. Likewise, to know God does not mean we pile up our knowledge on Him. Of course we do need to have knowledge about God. The more the better. However, "to know God" should be more personal. To know God is to know that God loves us, and we accept and respond to His love and trust in Him. Even if you are so faithful in observing all the ceremonies but without faith and trust that the Lord is protecting and guiding our lives, then, you are just following a format. Even if you give numerous and expensive offerings but without humble attitude asking for forgiveness, then you cannot appreciate his blessings. Unless you listen and pray in response to His words and you interact with Him through his words and prayers, then it does not mean you have met the Lord.

Nominal believers were not interested in knowing the Lord. But true believers sought to know Him. Psalm 42:1-2 says, "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God?" (NAB) Many English translations miss the word

“face”, but the original language has it. The “face” refers to God’s personality. God is of course not an object or energy or theory. His is a person with “face”. People express their emotions with facial expressions. God is also equipped with emotions and He expresses them to us. To “see the face of God” means that we have the living personal relationship with God. Psalm 27:8 says “You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”” To seek relationship with God who says “seek my face” does actually mean to seek to know God.

To know God is not only allowed for special and specific people. That is not something ordinary believers cannot reach. Those who seek will get to know God because God Himself said to seek his face. Hosea 2:19-20 says, “And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.” What Lord says “betroth you to me” means engagement or promise to get married. This has been fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus Christ become a bride of Christ who truly loves Him, not as a stranger. Don’t hesitate and let’s respond to His love now. Then, you begin to know Lord.

In this new year, let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. Let’s make a primary goal for this year to know God not only during worship services, but in the following fellowships, volunteer services, and all the meetings. If we forget this, then church gatherings will end in just enjoying “eating” and “chatting” and activities will end in mere activities for activities. To avoid this, let’s remember the annual verse “Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.” When you read

Bible and pray, let's seek to know the Lord.

(Prayer)

Dear Father God, thank you for your words at the beginning of the new year. Please help each one of us to act in accordance with the words. Help us encourage each other toward the goal of “let us know God”. Help us share the joy of knowing the Lord with those who seek to know you. We pray in the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.