

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:1-3

5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

5:2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

1. Where Is the Happiness?

We pray for our happiness. We think how to be happy and do our best to stay happy.

Today, many people think that earning money and accumulating fortune are the happiness. Needless to say, the money is important. Working, making money, and support our life is not egoistic at all. It can be said that this is the action of love because we can avoid loans and be independent from someone’s help. In the scripture, Ephesians 4:28 says, “Let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

However, it is wrong to say “I can buy happiness with money” or “Only money makes me happy”. Even if people have a property more than enough and live in a house with security guard, they are always scared by something and don’t have peace in their life. Some people are having gorgeous meals everyday; however, they can not taste them, taste like eating sands. We can not fulfill our inside such as peace and hope by outside materials.

Once you make fortune, you are going to want social status, honor, and authority. You need those things in order to accomplish something. I know a Japanese American congressman who used to be a teacher. He hoped that children should be able to receive better education; however, he realized his limitation as a teacher since he did not have “power” in order to change the reality. Therefore, he decided to become a politician.

In our society, we need someone who leads us, and they receive our attention. However, if they want to receive our attention because of their selfish ambition for social status and authority, they can not make them and us happy. The more you go to the higher social status, the more you feel anxiety because you always worry “When I fall down from here...”. I have heard that many business people have spent nerve-fraying days in their companies because of winning their competition and maintaining their popularity in their companies. As you know, several people who can not endure this kind of life and use drugs and destroyed themselves.

It is mentioned in Luke 12:15, Lord Jesus said “For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Many people wish “if I have more money, social status, skill, or health, I can be more happier.” In other words, they think they are happier if they have something. However, Lord Jesus teaches us that the possessions can not makes us happy. Lord Jesus said “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. He said having nothing is the happiness. Lord Jesus does not tell us to get something to be happier, but he teaches us to be a blessed people and stay blessed. Lord Jesus mentions a variety of blessed people but the first is “the poor in spirit”.

2. Who Are the Poor in Spirit?

So, who are “the poor in spirit” like the Bible describes? Here, it doesn’t carry the connotation of economical situation. Those who followed Jesus were often very rich as Luke 8:3 says, “Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.” For other examples, Joseph from Arimathea, a council member of Judah, buried Jesus in his own grave, and Nicodemus, another council member, brought numerous balms to apply the skins of dead body. Both Joseph and Nicodemus was rich and they could do these things for Jesus. Moreover, Barnabas, who was appointed the important role of the first century Church, was surely rich and gave his property to Church. Paul also had enough wealth. Those all were rich, but their eyes were on God regardless of how much they have, and they trusted in God rather than their wealth or status.

In the Bible, “poor” sometimes means the ones who know their weakness or lack, and trust in God because of it. For example, Psalm 40:17, following, “As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!” This is the prayer of David. He was the king, and owed uncountable wealth. He had both authority and power. The reason why he said “I am poor and needy” was that he recognized his lack of inside when he was suffered from his enemies. King needs wisdom, courage, and determination; and the king of Israel, the people of God, needs to trust God more than anything. When David faced to his difficulties, he acknowledged his lack of such strength. He, however, called God for his help and delivery, in addition to crying out. “The

poor in spirit” implies those who know their lack and weakness but still trust in God because of it.

People do not seek God because they don't know their lack or need. Paul said to the ones proud of themselves and disrespected others; “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!” (1 Corinthians 4:7-8) It is true that all we have are all we receive. If you maintain, “this is my property, I earned and bought them,” your health, abilities and even your opportunities to work, are not from your efforts; they are from God.

Well, your life is totally the gift from God, at the first place. People have the responsibilities to honestly live the given life and be righteous as much as possible. Even if you have great talent for your studying or work, people are unfortunately not able to live honestly. Famous athletes or people with status are often defeated by temptations, and commit the serious crimes or broke their families by unethical activities. We may also make same mistake if we forgot your motivation to improve.

When I first read Matthew chapters 5 to 7, I understood the verses were true. I also noticed that I wouldn't have kept the teachings at all, and I didn't have the abilities for it. I was overwhelmed by Jesus' holiness, because He taught this and also protected the verses throughout His life. I wanted to be close to Jesus, but I felt I was too dirty to communicate with Jesus, the totally righteous and pure God. However, I read Matthew 8, when Jesus stretched out his hand to a

leprous person, touched him and said, “Be clean,” I understood that Jesus also accepts me and stretches His hand to me, to forgive and purify me. At the time, I have known that “the poor in spirit” are the ones know their weakness and need and still trust in God. Then, I was led to faith in Christ.

3. What Is the Happiness From God?

Then, what is the happiness given to the poor in spirit?

Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” This not a sentence of definition or statement like “One plus one equals two.” and “The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees.” As it says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit!” This is an exclamatory sentence. This was a soulful cry to the people who were coming to the Lord. The word, “blessed”, is translated into “*saiwai*” in Japanese. However, it’s not accurate. “*Saiwai*” could mean “happiness,” “Happiness” came from “happen.” “Happiness” is based on the happenings around us. It sounds that favor happenings make us feel good. A Japanese dictionary defines that “*saiwai*” is a good fortune. “Fortune” depends on the happenings take place around us. If someone has bad fortune, the person never become happy. Happiness depends on the happenings is not stable.

But, “blessed” is different from “happiness.” The word, “blessed,” means the spiritual fullness which comes from God. It does not depend on the happenings around us. Many poor and low people in social status followed Jesus. Some had illness, and others had problems in their life. In the Jewish society, such people were regarded as the people who were far from God’s blessing. The scribes

and Pharisees accused them saying, “This crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” (John 7:49)

James 2:5 says, “God had chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him.” “The poor” in the verse means the Christians who are in need, but Christians who are the poor in spirit can inherit the Kingdom of God. Those who know that they are poor and needy in spirit will be filled with good things in heaven. Not only in heaven, but also on earth they experience the fullness of heaven. They can have foretaste of heaven by faith.

David prayed, “I am poor and needy.” And, he also praise go saying, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1) Those who are poor in spirit can experience this blessing. When Jesus tells us, “You are blessed,” his word is true. Even you think that you are fortune and you don’t feel the need God’s blessing, you definitely need it. Without God’s blessing you cannot be “happy” even you are in good fortune. Be humble and ask true “happiness” from God. And, if you are suffering from various problems and think yourself unfortunate, you can be a “happy” person by the blessing brought by Jesus.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) The One who was called “The Lord” by David in Psalm 23:1, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus loved each of us and gave his life for us. This Jesus blesses you. You can be “blessed” when you receive his blessing by being “poor in spirit.”

(Prayer)

Dear Father, you made us know that we are poor and needy by your words. You invited us to the faith and trust in Christ. Now, we answer your invitation of love. Give us your blessing and make us live in the blessing. In Jesus' name.