

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
October 30, 2016

Witnessing, Calling, and Blessing

1 Peter 3:8-12

3:8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

3:9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

3:10 For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit;

3:11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

1. Witnessing Through Interpersonal Relationship

From this January, we started to learn 1 Peter, and we are the end of first half. We would like to end the Epistle of Peter in this year. If God's will, we would like to learn the rest next year.

Peter started the teaching about interpersonal relationships from 2:13 and ended at verse 3:12. At the concluding part of the teachings, let us review the teachings on interpersonal relationship in 1 Peter.

This letter was written for Christians who were suffering from anti-Christians at that time. For those people, they have a responsibility to verbally explain what they believe. However, at the same time, they

need to show their faith through their manner, activity, and life. What they are saying and what they are doing should be the same; otherwise, they do not have persuasiveness anymore.

For example, a person who is not responsible of what he/she says and do not keep the promise, says “God is true. Faith is great”. You do not think “that’s true”. “Faith” used in the Bible has meaning of “truth” as well. “Faith” means “to answer sincerely to the truth of God”. Therefore, being sincere to believers, other people, and God is essential and fundamental. Also, someone who is always complaining say, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. You might say, “That is good concept, but it is impossible to actually do that”.

You can find a phrase, “adorn the doctrine of God” in Titus 2:10. This phrase says when Christians follow the words of God joyfully, the greatness of the Word of God will be revealed more. God reveals his teachings in the scripture clearly, and uses Christians’ behavior to show before everyone’s eyes and ears. Peter spent a lot of pages to talk about interpersonal relationships. It is because we should adorn the teaching of God. Most people focus on the interpersonal relationships not others, but for their benefits. But, Christians try to witness God’s grace by having right relationship with others.

2. Interpersonal Relationship Based On Calling

So, in this letter Paul wrote about four types of interpersonal relationships. At the beginning, in 2:13-17, written about between Christians as citizens and authorities of politics. Next, in 2:17-29, between Christians as slaves or servants and their masters. Third one

was between husbands and wives as it says in 3:1-7. Finally, fourth relationship is in 3:8-12. Here, it speaks about the relationship among the believers, and beyond in the society. Now, all of these verses teach every lesson on interpersonal relationships based on “God’s calling.”

In Japanese, “calling” is an ambiguous term. It definitely has the respectful connotation, but the use of this word is very various; for example, when you ask someone what to eat or drink, or what to wear, even express someone who got older, or you may explain, “He has a cold” with this term. In conclusion, it is the polite form of conjugation to express that you have received something.

Calling, however, originally means that authorized individual “calls” someone to offer a mission. In legislature or court, people are officially “called” there to give a statement or testify something.

In the Bible, “calling,” means that God calls someone near to Him and gives a mission.” Paul describe himself as “called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 1:1) And then, God’s servants were all called and appointed to the mission as well as Paul. This is not only apostles and prophets. All of Christians were called, and appointed to their mission. “Saved” is “Called.” “Salvation” is to be saved from sins and death, but “calling” is to proceed to justice and light. God’s salvation is not only “saving from,” but “saving to.”

Thus, the Bible teaches Christians, as citizens, should communicate with the political and public administrative authorities based on 1 Peter 2:9, saying, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his

marvelous light.” Saved and sealed as “God’s people,” so Christians should live new as the people of God, not simply the citizens or residences of the country or city. Saved from darkness into the light, Christians should share the light with others who still in the darkness, because they need the salvation from God inside of you. Not simply enjoying the light by yourself, you need to deliver the good news. For Christians, heaven is their home; but while being on the earth, this planet is where to answer God’s calling and achieve the mission.

Continuing to the teaching for servants is based on 2:21, saying, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” All Christians are called to follow in His steps of Jesus Christ.

I speak about the relationship between husband and wife, based on 1 Peter 3:7. It says, “...Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life...” Here this phrase, “the grace of life” is not only the heirs in blessings, but also the spiritual life. Christians are called to live in the resurrected life of Christ.

The Bible teaches “God’s calling” very important. “Christian life” or “Church life” is the life to answer His calling. For Christians, Sunday worship is the time to recognize His calling again and to answer Him. People appointed for special mission sometimes have a sending off ceremony, and Sunday worship is also the sending off ceremony for Christians to speak about the love of God and deliver the light. I dearly hope that you know the calling of God, and take a step of answering the call for the week at every Sunday worship service.

3. Interpersonal Relationship Sharing Blessing

Today's portion begins with "Finally", but the letter continues. Some of you may felt strange and thought what it meant. The word "finally" means the final part of the teaching on interpersonal relationships. Therefore, today's scripture reading is actually about conclusion of the teaching on interpersonal relationship in the first letter of Peter.

Chapter 3:8 teaches about the interpersonal relationship among believers. It says, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." This is not so difficult to do if the relationship among believers is built on the foundation of Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. As family cares each other, family in Christ can also care each other and pray for each other.

However, when the personal relationship expands into the world, it is not always easy to build a good relationship to others. There are some people who hold evil feeling toward Christians and speak ill about them. But even in that situation, Christians share blessings with them as 3:9 says, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."

It does not mean Christians should be patient and endure all the time even if they are insulted or humiliated. We should defeat evil with love. This is a strong and active way of living, changing curse to blessing. It is natural for humans to feel strong for revenge when they are hurt, speak back when others speak ill about them, and by doing so, we also commit sins. But those who believe in God have received the power to defeat their own sins and other's sins. With the power far

above that of humans, they are able to defeat evil with blessings. That is because they have received His calling to share the blessings from God with others as well as to inherit blessings themselves.

Abraham received the word from God, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” Genesis 12:2 and he was called into the promised land from his hometown. “you will be a blessing” is a calling for Abraham. For Christians, Abraham is a father of faith and Christians are also called to share the blessings with other people.

Saints in the Old Testament and Christians in the New Testament lived in the grace that is “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” When Lot departed from Abraham, he let his nephew Lot to choose the land that he thought would be the best. Isaac, the son of Abraham, gave up his well for the natives in the Promised Land without fighting them. David was repeatedly chased by Saul, but he never harmed Saul.

However, a person who completely followed the teaching that “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” was only Jesus Christ. In the Bible, the cross is a tree of “curse”. When Jesus was crucified, he received each and every humiliation and he was cursed. But the words He spoke on the cross were blessings for people. Jesus did not repay evil for evil, but instead, he changed a tree of curse into a tree of blessing by giving blessings to people.

Christians are called to follow Christ. To follow Christ does not mean only endure sufferings but also to give blessings to others in that

situation. Stephen and all the Martyrs followed Christ and prayed for those who were trying to kill them, as it is written in Acts 7:60 “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” Those who followed the footsteps of Christ and shared blessings with others inherited big blessings from the Heaven.

God is calling each one of us into this blessing. We not only receive this blessing in Heaven but also witness the fruit of it on earth. I have seen three-generations of people, grand parents, parents and children, attend the worship service in many churches. It is a wonderful fruit of blessing that faith is passed onto children and grandchildren as the Bible says, “ for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” If you remember this word when you begin to build a personal relationship with others, you will receive a blessing for sure.

(Prayer)

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you that you call us to blessing. Please help us and guide us to answer your calling so that we can live in the blessing. In Lord Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.