

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
December 2, 2018

Hope by the Word
Luke 1:67-80

1:67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,
1:68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people
1:69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
1:70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
1:71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;
1:72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,
1:73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
1:74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
1:75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
1:76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
1:77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,
1:78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
1:79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."
1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

1. Hope and Prophecy

During the advent, we light four candles and wait for Christmas. The first week's candle is called "candle of prophecy," the second week's is "candle of angels," the third week's is "candle of shepherds." and the fourth week's is called "candle of Bethlehem." Each candle has a subject, "candle of prophecy" represents "hope." For, our hope comes from "prophecy," that is the Word of God.

If the light of hope is exemplified the candle, it will shine while burning the wax of God's Word. In the case of a lamp, it emits light with burning the oil of God's Word. People can not live without hope. Regardless of how precious you are, if there is no hope, even if the body is alive, the soul is dead. But in whatever adversity you are, your eyes can shin with hope though you are exposed to the dangers of life that when your lives are hanging by a thread.

I often visited patients who have only a few days' life. Some of them were disappointed with the sick, some were crushed with regret, others spoke a long time and sprinkled their anger. However, in many cases, I have spoken of the Word of God and have finished praying then have seen the hope shining in their eyes. Human words have no power to heal despair, but God's Word has that power. If a man loses hope and is still sinking in the swamp of despair, I think that is because they don't see the light of the Word of God, and there is no light in their hearts.

It is the same for individuals and societies that the Word of God gives hope. America is a country built by the people seeking freedom of faith. The United States, which began with 13 states, has pioneered the vast continent and has reached 50 states with the addition of

Hawaii and Alaska. America became a rich and strong country, but behind the development, there was the Word of God that gives hope to the people and leads and supports the society. When the United States began to be apart from God, God raised revival and poured the Word of God. When people heard the Word of God, repent, and returned to faith, America breathed back. Amos 8:11 says, “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land-- not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” The famine of the Word. It is as much as a real famine, no, it is more terrible. When the Word of God is not told as the Word of God, and it is not heard, our souls die and the society goes to desolation. Even if you pursue your immediate pleasure or the richness instead of the hope of the coming from the Word of God, your spirit will not be satisfied with such things.

Therefore, the Bible teaches us in 2 Peter 1:19. “And we have something surer, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” If you listen to the Word and have it in your heart, the light of our hope will not disappear from our hearts.

2. Hope and Salvation

Israel, the God’s nation, lost the country in 586 BC. The dynasty of David was ceased. Since then, they were dominated by the great surrounding empires like Babylon and Persia. When Christ was born, it was under the rule of the Roman Empire. In such a situation, the Jewish people have longed for God's salvation. However, opinions

differed on who the Savior was and what the salvation was like. The Sadducees managed the temple at that time and tried to see salvation in the temple ceremony. As long as the temple was kept, the Sadducees compromised with Roman governors and King Herod. The Pharisees do not like such compromise and tried to preserve the Jewish tradition and religious laws. The Pharisees believed that obeying the laws is the salvation. The zealous party tried to win Judea's independence with force.

Each of them defined their own “salvation” and picked a “Savior” of their choice. They did not properly understand the work of God's salvation and the Savior promised by God. Hope is born from the Word of God, but if we do not correctly understand the Word of God, it ends with our one-sided belief. We can not have a certain hope unless we know exactly who the “Savior” is and what “salvation” is like.

So what kind of salvation is the “salvation” of God? By the Holy Spirit, Zachariah prophesied that it is “salvation from sin,” as the words, “salvation by forgiveness of sin” exists in verse 77. The Israelites eagerly wanted to be saved from Roman rule. But if you remain trespassed, even if you are saved from Roman bondage, you will be bound again to another country. Some people wanted to be freed from poverty. Some people wanted to be freed from sick. Some people wanted to be freed from their troubles. If economic prosperity advances, poverty will be eliminated. If medical technology advances, disease will be eliminated. But as long as we are not released from sin, even though we can be temporarily released from physical sufferings and troubles, we face different kinds of suffering and

troubles. It is not a fundamental solution to our life. Without settling of sin, the Bible repeatedly tells us that there is no solution to the real problem.

In recent years, our society seems to promote you to “love yourself,” “delight yourself,” or “award yourself.” Perhaps you have been told that remorse and grieving over your sins is very bad and unhealthy; therefore, you should forgive yourself and be happy. Even Christians started to define it as “the gospel” as if it were the teaching of the Bible. But, the “forgiveness of sins” that the Bible teaches is not such a kind of relieving life-stress. Jesus, who is the only one can forgive our sins, teaches us to listen to the prestigious words, “Neither do I condemn you.” (John 8: 11) If the forgiveness of sin is just for easing our stress, the Son of God does not need to become a man into the world and died on the cross.

The Bible calls the Savior as “the one who saves His people from sin,” (Matthew 1: 21) and said that the message of salvation is “Repentance and forgiveness of sins.” (Luke 24: 47) None in the world can save a person from sin. But, only Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became a man and carried all our sins, can give us forgiveness of our sins. Only after being released from sin, we can live powerfully in this world. And even after we leave the world, we can enter into eternal blessed life. When we know this liberating Savior and receive this powerful salvation, we can have genuine hope.

3. Hope and Godliness

And, forgiveness of sin will lead us to the life of “holiness,” “righteous,” and “service” to God. In verses 74 and 75 say, “that we,

being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” The salvation of Christ is “the salvation FROM sin.” But, at the same time, it is “the salvation TO holiness, righteousness, and service for God. The Bible teaches us not only “saved FORM something,” but also “saved TO something,” or “saved FOR something.” God forgives our sins but it does not mean God allows us to live with our sins. We have two kanji characters both pronouns “yurusu.” One means “forgiveness,” and other means “permission.” “Forgiveness” and “permission” are totally different. God saves us, from death to life, from darkness to light, from flesh to spirit, from world to heaven, from sin to holiness and righteousness.

In the newest version of New Japanese Bible translated “holiness and righteous” to “godliness and righteousness.” Someone says, “Godliness means the definite attitude to God.” I think it is right. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” 1 Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 5:8 say, “Let us cast off the works of darkness.... Walk as children of light.” There is no place for the true believers where darkness and lightness exist together. There is no darkness in light, and no light in darkness. There is no ambiguous life for them. The pious life that God expects us was described by Joshua. He said, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

Of course, there is no one on the earth who commits sins and lives perfectly in every way. Even devout Christians commit sins. However, the true Christians can not sink into the sinfulness. They repent, believe in God, and seek for the righteousness. They never stop

making efforts for being pious. It is because they know that they are not perfect now but God will make them perfect later. For those who live in the hope, they purify themselves and seek for godliness. 2 Peter 3:11-14 “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”

As the people in the Old Testament were waiting for the Savior, we, God’s people of New Testament, are waiting for Christ. Jesus Christ will complete the salvation started two thousand years ago by His Second Coming. “Life of holiness and godliness” comes from this hope. “Life of holiness and godliness” is “clothing without dots or damages.” We should ware this garment as we are waiting for Christ.

We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. The hope is born from this salvation, and it is revealed by the Word. Are we holding this hope by the Word? Are we seeking for the holiness led by this hope? Are we working hard for godliness? The Bible is asking us like this. When we light the candle of prophecy, we shall answer to this call and spend this week.

(Prayer)

God, the Father of Jesus Christ, you saved us from sins to holiness and righteousness. Forgiveness of sin is not our goal, we seek for

holiness in this world and will receive glory at the time of the Second Coming of the Lord. Please lead us by this hope. Help us to bring this hope to other people. In the name is Jesus Christ, Amen.