

**“What is Blessing?” Jeremiah 17:5-10 / 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 / Luke 6:17-26 (2/16/25)**

When I was not a Christian, many people tried to share the Gospel with me. However, I could not find any difference between the teachings of Buddha and the Gospel they told. Those who wanted to tell me about the Gospel told me that if I believed in Christ, I would go to heaven after death and that God would give many blessings upon my life, making all my wishes come true. In Buddhism, I also learned that if I followed the teachings of Buddha well, I would be free from all life's worries, receive blessings, and go into paradise after death. As the English dictionary shows, the idea of paradise in Buddhism is also described as the Buddhist Heaven. I saw no difference between Christians and Buddhists. Christians prayed to their God for blessings, while Buddhists found blessings from Buddha. Both groups tried to reach their own heavens. I could not find any reason to believe in a Christian God, even in opposition to my family.

After becoming a Christian, I learned that I had misunderstood the Gospel. I realized that the Gospel means “God is with us.” Furthermore, the blessings described in the Bible are completely different from those found in other religions. Today, I hope to share about the blessing through today’s Scriptures.

What is the blessing? How does the Bible explain about the blessing? In

today's Jeremiah Scripture, Jeremiah talked about the cursed one and the blessed one. When he explained the cursed and the blessed, he brought examples of the trees. The interesting thing about the country of Israel is that when you go to the northern part of the Sea of Galilee, it is really green and full of life, but when you go down to the Dead Sea area, the land is barren and a desert.

When the Bible talks about streams, there are two types of streams that can be thought of. One is the intermittent stream that only appears briefly when it rains in the desert. When traveling through the desert areas of Israel, you can see small, immature trees growing along traces of water that appear to have flowed. When the intermittent stream is formed by rain in the desert and wilderness, the trees and plants take root around the intermittent stream, but when the rain stops, the water is cut off, so you can see trees that are unable to grow or have dried out.

The other type of stream is the perennial Stream, such as the Jordan River. Perennial streams are full of water all year round. The trees and plants that take root around the perennial streams have strong roots, and they are very tall and big because they can get water during the year.

The difference between the cursed and the blessed that Jeremiah talked

about is not just that life consists of good and bad things, or that everything goes smoothly, or that there are many problems in life. The blessed are those who have life like the trees near the perennial stream. The blessed are the people who live in the presence of God, who is the eternal life. The cursed are those who do not have God within them. The cursed are the people who do not have life. So, we can say that blessing is the presence of God.

Last week, I said that my life was worse than hell before I knew Jesus, and then my life became like Heaven after I believed in Christ. I can confidently say that my life is happy as a Christian, but I will not say that my life was always joyful after I became a Christian. I had many sufferings after I became a Christian, such as struggles with family, relationships with old friends, and even in the church ministry. Those sufferings were fine for me because I was sure that I had those sufferings for God. However, when I could not feel God's presence in my life and when I had a feeling of disconnection from God after I became a Christian, the pain was truly unbearable.

When God called me to become a pastor for the church ministry, I had only been a Christian for a year. I could not believe that God had called me to become a pastor because, at that time, I could not even confidently confess that Jesus was

my Christ, and although I had experience and understanding of God, I was not confident that I would devote my life to God.

So, I ignored the voice and calling of God in my heart. I ignored God. But every time I prayed to God for my wishes, God strongly poured the heart of ministry on me. I started not to pray to God because I did not want to obey God. When I ignored the voice of God, I felt that I was disconnected from God. I do not know how I should explain that feeling. My life was meaningless; I did not know why I should live. It was a pain that I never had before. I was the person who did not have any life when I ignored God and was disconnected from God. Even though I was scared of my future when I decided to be a pastor, I decided to obey God's voice because my life without God was so horrible. I believed in God, who knew me better than I did. I believed that God would guide me if God called me. Of course, the journey to be a pastor was very difficult. But God was with me every time I suffered. I learned that life without God was much more painful than any suffering. God's presence in life is the blessing.

Then, who will have God's blessing? We can see the person who has the blessing in today's Luke Scripture. When we read Luke 6:17-19, we know that people followed Jesus to have some benefits. In verse 19, "and the people all tried

to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.” People followed Jesus for healing and casting out evil spirits.

While people followed Jesus for their own reasons, Jesus taught disciples about three “Blessed are you” and three “Woe to you.” Before we know about three blessed people, we need to see three “Woe” people. Jesus said, “Woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are well fed, and woe to you when everyone speaks well of you.” So, Jesus said rich, well-fed, and people who were respected by others would have woes. This was a very shocking teaching that was contrary to the beliefs of the Israelites at the time. At the time, the Israelites thought that those who were rich, well-fed, or praised and respected by everyone, such as rabbis and Pharisees, were people of good faith. This is because they thought they could become rich, full, and respected people because they received blessings from God. Being rich, well-fed, and respected was proof that they had good faith, and the people of Israel had believed that all their lives, but Jesus said that those who were rich, well-fed, and respected were woeful people.

Then, Jesus mentioned that people who were poor, hungry, and hated by others were blessed people. We may understand this to mean that the blessed are truly poor, hungry, and hated. But the poor, hungry, and hated could be relative.

For example, the poorest people I met were those I met on a mission trip to Haiti, and they were so poor that they were fortunate to have one meal a day. Compared to those people, I am rich. But compared to Bill Gates, I am poor. So, am I a poor person with blessings or a rich person with woes?

We can see more details about the blessed people in Matthew chapter 5. Today's Luke Scripture contains some of the Beatitudes that we are familiar with. The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are especially important to Methodists because Wesley thought the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount were the core teachings of Jesus. The reason Wesley considered this teaching to be the most important is because the Beatitudes do not explain each specific blessed person but because the entire content of the Beatitudes explains the journey toward the kingdom of God. I will share more details about the Beatitudes next time if I have the chance. To briefly explain the contents in connection with today's topic, the Beatitudes show the path of faith to walk with God. Therefore, the blessed people Jesus told are those who live with God. Blessing is the presence of God, and this blessing is given to those people who walk their journey of faith with God.

Then, how can we live walking with God? We can live with God in the

present day because Jesus defeated death and was resurrected. As it appears in today's 1 Corinthians Scripture, if Jesus simply died on the cross and could not overcome the power of death, then what does the person who hung on the cross 2,000 years ago have to do with us?

In the time of the Apostle Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was a big issue of argument among the Christians in the church in Corinth. There were Christians who believed in Jesus and followed him but did not agree with the resurrection of Jesus. This was understandable because quite some time had passed since the resurrection of Jesus, and most people did not see the resurrection of Jesus directly. They heard the story of Jesus' resurrection from those who had witnessed it firsthand. It would have been difficult to believe that someone had been crucified and resurrected just by hearing the story. In this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul taught about the resurrection of Jesus to those who denied the resurrection of Jesus in the Corinthian church.

Because Jesus died on the cross, was resurrected, and is with us now, all the works of faith that we do now are meaningful and real and living. If not, there would be no one as pitiful as we are. We gathered here to worship God even in this snowy weather, and we woke up early from the morning on this precious

Sunday to come out to worship God. If Jesus had just died, if Jesus were not with us now, how pitiful would all our religious lives be? However, because Jesus is with us now, all these things have become joy and life for us. Because Jesus is with us, we become blessed people.

Blessing is not a matter of good and peace in our lives. Blessing is the presence of God. That blessing is given to those who walk the journey of faith with God. Jesus is with us and guides us to live as God's people. Jesus is with us so that we can become blessed people. I hope that God blesses all who have come to this place of worship today. Through that blessing of God, I hope that we can experience, meet, and see God, who is with us in our lives. Amen.