

■ The 123rd Sharing of the Word

● First Reading: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13

In the latter half of the 7th century BCE, during the early reign of King Josiah of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, idolatry, injustice, and moral corruption were widespread. Against this background, after proclaiming the judgment of the Lord, the prophet speaks of hope and restoration for “the remnant.” Immediately following the judgment of the “Day of the Lord,” a “place of refuge” is revealed. Even when God’s judgment cannot be avoided, the attitude of sincerely seeking God and striving to follow His will is expressed in the command “Seek the Lord,” while the practice of justice and righteousness is described as “carrying out the judgment of the Lord.”

Those who are socially weak and spiritually humble are called “those who have endured suffering.” The command to “continue seeking” humility and righteous conduct is expressed as “seek works of grace (justice).” Those who strive to live in righteousness are protected by God and “kept safe,” so even on the day of the Lord’s wrath, they are granted protection and hope.

After judgment, the people who were socially excluded, afflicted, and humiliated do not boast, but endure suffering and humble themselves. Through this humility, they are saved by God and become those who are “left as a remnant.” They do not rely on their own abilities, but depend solely on the Lord, making “the name of the Lord” their refuge. The people whom God preserves “do no wrong,” are honest, do not justify themselves, and “do not speak lies.” A way of life in which words and faith are inconsistent is denied, expressed as “no deceitful tongue is found,” and they live with integrity.

Like sheep resting in peace (Psalm 23:2-6), they are “fed and given rest.” There is “peace and security,” and “no one to make them afraid,” so they become people who live in true rest.

● Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Paul’s letter has two main purposes: to correct factionalism within the church and human pride, and to clarify the true nature of salvation.

God’s call to salvation occurs “when you were called.” In worldly terms, those skilled in navigating life are considered “the wise,” those who carve out their own path are “the powerful,” and those from distinguished lineages and honorable families are “the well-born.” Paul declares that God’s salvation does not depend on these “worldly standards.”

To bring people to a state where they do not boast is described as “shaming” them. Those who are not valued by the world and are looked down upon are called “the foolish of the world,” and the powerless are “the weak of the world.” In the Kingdom of God, worldly values are overturned, and those considered “something” are reduced to nothing. Those treated as if they scarcely exist are called “things that are nothing,” and those at the bottom of society, deprived of dignity, are “the low and despised.” It is precisely upon these people that God shines the light of salvation and causes it to radiate.

To “boast” means to rely on one’s own ability and feel no need for God, yet “no one may boast before God.” Through baptism, believers are “united with” Jesus. The completion of God’s saving plan through the cross of Jesus is “the wisdom of God.” The restoration of relationship with God is “righteousness,” being set apart as God’s own is “holiness,” and liberation from sin and death through a price paid is “redemption.” All of these are gifts received through being “united with Christ.”

Those who rejoice in God’s works and boast in His grace “boast in the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:22-23; 2 Corinthians 10:17). “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). God’s salvation shines most brightly in human weakness. As it is written, “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8). The Lord’s ways differ from human ways, and in the Kingdom of God, there is a great reversal.

● Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

In the Sermon on the Mount, spoken by Jesus, known as the “Eight Beatitudes,” the word “blessed” is repeated, presenting eight teachings through which people are blessed by God. Jesus teaches on a mountain, just as Moses did on Mount Sinai. To “sit down” is the formal posture of a rabbi (teacher) when delivering authoritative instruction. Anyone among the crowd may hear this teaching, yet it is a teaching that requires “proper readiness” and “resolve.”  
[The Sermon]

① Those who are spiritually humble and cannot live without God are “the poor in spirit,” and theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. ②Those who grieve in repentance over sin and injustice are “those who mourn,” and they will be comforted by God. ③Those who entrust themselves to the Lord, exercise self-control, and are able to take upon themselves the yoke of Jesus (Matthew 11:29) are “the meek.” They will inherit the land (the promise) (Psalm 37:11; Revelation 21:1) and live eternal life in the Kingdom of God. ④Those who long for the realization of God’s righteousness are “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” and their desire for truth and God will be satisfied. ⑤Those who show compassion toward others are “the merciful,” and they will receive mercy from God. ⑥Those who are sincere before God are “the pure in heart,” and they will enjoy deep communion with God. ⑦Those who lead others toward reconciliation with God and with one another are “the peacemakers,” and they will be called children of God. ⑧Those who suffer for their faith are “those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” and theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Verses 10 and 11 together form a single blessing.)

The Eight Beatitudes reveal the fundamental attitudes and values of those who live in the Kingdom of God. They serve as a “preparation of the heart and a foundation.” Even if such a way of life seems disadvantageous in this world, it is called “blessed” in the Kingdom of God. May this be an opportunity to reflect upon how we live today.

SHINPUKUHAN  
[真福八端]Eight concise teachings that reveal true happiness, and GENSHEKUIJU  
[現生幸就]

Author: Akinori Kamachi    Translation: AI