God of a Small Nation

1/20/2019
Y. Joe Kim
yhjoekim@gmail.com

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.
7 It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. **8** It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. **9** Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." (Deuteronomy 7:6-9)

1. The State of Israel

I want to thank Julia and Ruth for sharing about their experiences in Israel. In March, a few of our church members will be visiting Israel. I hope our experiences provide not only more knowledge about Israel but also a passion for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

The saying goes that "seeing is believing." I felt a deep sense of gratitude towards John Wesley and the Methodist Movement after seeing more of their lives during my visit in England. If you haven't had the opportunity to visit Israel, I want to encourage you to consider taking the time to go and see the places where Jesus was born, died, and was raised from the dead. I believe the experience of visiting Israel will make a big difference in our lives.

I had the opportunity to visit Israel about 30 years ago while I was a seminary student in the Midwest. I'd like to share a bit about Israel this morning. The state of Israel is a country located on the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bounded by Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan and the West Bank to the east, and Egypt and the Gaza Strip to the southwest. Israel is approximately 21,000 km square (about 8,000 square miles) in area and is roughly the size of New Jersey. In terms of size, Israel is pretty small and about 60% of its area is a desert-the Negev desert. Israel's population is about 9 million people. Roughly 75 % of them are Jews and 21% Arabs.

Although Israel is a small country, according to the Bible, it is the nation that God chose and used for God's plans. There are many nations in the world. Why has God chosen Israel? This is a question that the Israelites and the people of other nations have asked throughout time. The answer is found in today's scripture, Deuteronomy chapter 7.

2. The Reasons for God's Election

Deuteronomy consists of a series of Moses' speeches. In his first speech, Moses traces the background history of Israel in the wilderness. In his second speech, Moses repeats the ten commandments and expands on their implications.

Deuteronomy chapter 7 is part of Moses' second speech. Here Moses answers the question of why God chose Israel. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 say that "***it was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors***."

Moses explains that merit has nothing to do with the decision. The choice to choose Israel was completely up to God. God's love and faithfulness to his promises to the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made God choose Israel as his people. Verse 7 says that Israel is God's "***treasured possession***."

Moses reminds the people that Israel was a small nation compared to many other nations. Israel can be thankful for God's election, but the people can't be proud of their election. As a response to God's love and faithfulness, Israel needs to keep God's commandments.

In the Bible, we notice that God protects the helpless, the weak, the lost, and those who are in the margin. Psalm 82:3-4 say, "***Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."***

God does not want anybody to be mistreated because they are weak, poor, or powerless. God wants Israel to pay special attention to these people. The election of Israel would be an evidence that points to how much God cares about the least, the lost, and the powerless.

3. On the Basis of Gender

Last week, Christine and I were able to watch the film, "**On the Basis of Sex**." The movie focuses on the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an Associate of Supreme Court of the United States. In 1956, Ginsburg enrolls as one of nine female students in a class of 500 men at Harvard Law School. Her husband, Martin, is in his second year there. When Martin becomes ill with cancer, Ruth attends all of his classes as well as her own and helped him to complete his coursework. After she earns a law degree, no law firm offers her a job. She puts aside her aspirations for advocacy and teaches law students instead. Her husband tells her, "You'll teach the next generation how to fight for change." She tells him, "I wanted to be the one fighting for change."

Ginsburg's husband helps her find a case that will give her an opportunity. In the case, a single male Colorado caregiver is denied $296 on his tax deduction due to a tax law treating female and male caregivers differently.

Ginsburg challenges the gender discrimination and develops a constitutional theory that will persuade the panel of all male judges. Ginsburg teams up with her husband Martin to bring the groundbreaking case before the U.S. Court of Appeals and overturns a century of gender discrimination.

Wherever we go, we see discrimination based on different characteristics-age, disability, gender, marital status, nationality, politics, race, and religion. Some groups have higher status and greater privilege than others. In this unequal social system, there is often unfair treatment directed against certain individuals or social groups. The film "On the Basis of Sex" challenges gender discrimination.

What does the Bible say about discrimination? In the Old Testament, the discrimination of the Gentiles seems to be allowed. However, in the New Testament, Jesus reaches out to the minority groups, the poor, the sick, widows, outcasts, children and the Gentiles. Jesus visits a Samaritan woman and the tax collector Matthew. Jesus invites fishermen Peter, Andrew, John and Andrew and a tax collector Matthew to be his disciples. It was an unthinkable idea for a traditional Jewish rabbi.

4. A Gentile Girl is Healed

I would like to call your attention to a case when Jesus visits a Gentile town. In Matthew 15:21-28, Jesus and his disciples are in the region of Tyre and Sidon. These towns are in Gentile territory. A Canaanite woman approaches Jesus with a request. She cries out, "***Have mercy on me! Lord, Son of David. My daughter is tormented by a demon***" (Matthew 15:21). Jesus does not say a word, ignoring her request. When she continues crying out, the disciples ask Jesus to send her away. By this, the disciples were probably asking Jesus to just heal the daughter and to make the woman stop bothering them. But Jesus does not listen to their request.

Jesus says, "***I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel***" (Mat. 15:24). Since the woman is convinced that Jesus can heal her daughter, she again makes her plea, kneeling before Jesus, "**Lord, help me**." Jesus replies, "***it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs***" (15:26). She says, "***Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table***" (15:27).

The woman knew that the Jews treated Gentiles as below Jewish people. But the woman also expresses her desire that the overflow of God's blessings would be made available to righteous Gentiles.

Jesus is moved by this Gentile woman's faith. He says to her, "***Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish***" (15:28). The woman's daughter is healed instantly. Her faith is rewarded with the healing of her daughter.

What does this story tell us? When we first read the story, it seems as though Jesus is promoting the discrimination of Gentiles. There are some who believe that this is the case. But when we read close we see that Jesus has a very different intention. We see that Jesus uses the situation to teach a lesson about faith. We see that God's blessing is not just for the Jews but also for those who put their trust and their lives in God's hands and seek after God. We may not come from a Jewish background, but that does not mean that we cannot meet and put our trust in God.

5. Conclusion

Moses reminds Israel that God has chosen them because God loves them and wants to keep his promises to their ancestors. God liberated the Israelites from their slavery, not because they were good and holy, but because God loved them and was faithful to his covenant.

Jesus liberates us from sin and death not because we deserve his grace, but because God loves us. God cares for each person. Everyone is precious to the Lord. God is a God of justice and righteousness.

6. Application

Have you ever been discriminated based on any characteristics? Or have you wondered how important your lives are in your families, in your church, and in the world? People would discriminate us. Our lives can sometimes seem so fleeting. But God would never discriminate or mistreat us.

Genesis 1:27 says, "***God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them***." Each person is created in the image of God. As followers of Jesus, we are called not to look down on others because of their limitations or because of the aspects of their lives that make them different. Instead, we are called to see others as God sees them, as His treasured possession.

Next Sunday, Teen Challenge in Brockton, MA is coming to our church to share with us their testimonies and to praise the Lord. As you read in the bulletin, Teen Challenge provides young people with Christian faith and life coaching for drugs, alcohol, and other problems. I am so glad that there is a group of people who care for them with God's love. Those young people are God's treasured possession. I am happy that our congregation can support and encourage them. I hope you can invite your friends and neighbors to their presentation next Sunday. It will be a blessing to us and them.

Today's scripture reminds us how much God loves us and treats each of us as the most important person in the world. The Lord also wants us to treat others as God treats us. Amen.