Supreme Blessedness

11/01/2020

Y. Joe Kim

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:1-12).

1. Are We Happy?

What would you say if someone asked you whether you are happy this morning? What would you say if someone asked you whether you want to be happier? I am sure most people would say that they want to be happy or happier. But do they or do we know how to be happy or happier? If we talk about happiness during these difficult days, people might say that we are not living in the reality of the moment.

2. The Sermon on the Mount

Today's scripture talks about happiness. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says in verse 3, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit***." Some other Bible translates it, "***happy are the poor in spirit***." Jesus talks about happiness or blessedness.

Matthew 5-7 is called "the Sermon on the Mount" because Jesus gives this message on a hillside near Capernaum. This is also called "beatitude," which means "blessedness" in Latin language. These three chapters of Matthew's gospel are a collection of Jesus's teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven. Why does Jesus proclaim this message to his followers for the first time? It is because Jesus is concerned about the happiness of the people in his day.

Who are the audience? Is Jesus talking to his twelve disciples or are the crowds included? Matthew 5:1 says, "***When Jesus saw the crowds,***

he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him." This verse seems to tell us that Jesus was teaching his disciples. However, Matthew 7:28 says, "***Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching***." Jesus' teaching is not only for his disciples but also for the crowds. This implies that the sermon on the mount is not only for the followers of Jesus but also every human being.

Why were the crowds astounded? It was because his teaching was quite different from the teaching of other rabbis and religious leaders. No one would think of "blessedness" when it came to those whom Jesus listed as "blessed." People in the first century and people in the 21st century would never image people in the list of Jesus as "blessed." No one would suppose that those who are poor in spirit, mourn, and persecuted are blessed. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus challenges his followers to change their perspective and understanding of happiness.

It is very interesting to notice that the sermon on the Mount is proclaimed in Aramaic, a spoken language at the time of Jesus. In English Bible, we find the verb, "are." However, in the original language Bible, there is no verb. Each sentence is an exclamation. The verse 3 would read like "O the blessedness of the poor in spirit." The blessedness in this verse is not the blessedness of the future, but the blessedness here and now. Certainly, the fullness and consummation of being blessed will happen in the presence of God in the future, but Jesus stresses that it is a present reality to be enjoyed right now.

When we talk about happiness, we think that we should have something to be happy. In other words, we assume that our happiness is dependent upon something like having more money, power, or fame. We tend to think that without these, we can't be happy.

However, Jesus says to his disciples in John 16:22, "***but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy***." In the sermon on the mount, Jesus talks about that kind of untouchable and unchangeable joy and happiness. This is a permanent joy that nothing and no one can take away.

3. The Poor in Spirit

This morning I do not have time to talk about eight beatitudes in the sermon on the mount. I just want to talk about verse 3, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

What does "the poor in spirit" mean? "Poor" means that a man has nothing at all and is in absolute poverty. Jesus says, blessed is the one

who is completely poverty-stricken. Why is the man in absolute poverty blessed? It is because he has no earthly resources, but he has only the Lord. So he put his whole trust in the Lord.

That would be the cases of many God's people in the Bible. King David is one of them. In Psalm 34:6 David says, "***This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of trouble***." In Psalm 68:10 he also says, "***your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy***." David admits that he is completely dependent upon the Lord.

So "***Blessed are the poor in spirit***" means, "blessed is the man or woman who has realized his or her helplessness and who has put in his or her whole trust in God." They are those who believe that they are completely dependent upon God's grace.

4. Conclusion

Last week a lot of things happened in the world. The cases of the Covid-19 increased. In the U.S there were almost 100,000 cases a day. Hurricane Zeta left over 2.1 million people without power and 6 people dead. The earthquake in Turkey and Greece killed at least 27 people. We notice that bad things happen every day.

In two days, in the U.S., there will be an election. Those who win will be happy. But those who lose will be disappointed. What about their supporters? Their responses would be the same as those of the candidates. People worry about what is going to happen in the U.S. after the election is over.

When will we be happy or enjoy our lives? When will we be able to say, "***I shall not want and my cup runneth over***"?

5. Application

Can we be happy regardless of our circumstances? Think about the situation of the Israelites when Jesus proclaimed the sermon on the mount. They were under the control of the Roman government. Their lives were like their ancestors in Egypt a long time ago. They were like slaves and did not have freedom. They had to pay a heavy tax to the Roman government.

They were hungry, persecuted, and in sorrow without freedom. To these people, Jesus announces that they are blessed. Why does Jesus say that they are blessed? It is because by the coming of Jesus the people learned that God cared for them and God was in charge and in control. As long as they trust in the Lord and welcome the coming of the Messiah, the

people would be happy, and they would be able to rejoice in the Lord in any circumstances.

Let me show you a video clip that I recorded in CA. It was the day when Christine and I were about to leave my son's house for Sagamore Beach. At the last minute, I wanted to enjoy our time with our grandson. When I held Caleb, he began to scream and shout. I did not know why, but he was so happy. Was he happy because Christine and I were leaving? I do not think so. Yet I think that he wanted to tell us that he was happy when we were with him.

People say that Jesus came into the world to forgive our sin, to save us, and to give us eternal life. Yes, that is true. However, I would like to emphasize that Jesus came to this world to make us happy not only days in the future but also right now. Jesus announces in the whole world through the sermon on the Mount that we are blessed because we are living in the kingdom of heaven. We have supreme blessedness because we are living in God's grace.

Some people think that we would be happy when the virus disappears in the world. If that is what we expect, we would never be happy. Why? It is because there will be other issues that take away our happiness. As babies are happy as long as they are with their parents and grandparents, we can be happy no matter what because the Lord is with us and he cares for us. Amen.