

January 8, 2017

KIBC Sunday Worship Service (The New Year Worship Service)

Messenger: Pastor Teichiro Kuroda

Title of the Message: "Today, If You Hear His Voice"

—Do not Harden Your Hearts—

Text: Hebrews 3:7~11

3:7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice,

3:8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness,

3:9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did.

3:10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, "Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.

3:11 So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest.

Introduction

- Let's give special thanks to God for His grace and for the New Year worship service. How did you spend the first new week of 2017?
- By the way, we think of life as a journey. There are various kinds of journeys, such as the latest popular journey in Japan to visit places of historic interest and scenic beauty or like an adventure journey to go on a hard and steep way. However, if we go on a journey that our forerunners already have made, we feel it safe and easier to go.
- But, if we take a journey to an unknown world, everything may be strange to us. We may fail on the way or we have bitter experiences. How about you? What journey of life are you taking?
- In this sense, we can also think our Christian life as a kind of a journey. The Bible compares the journey of the Israelites, the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, to our Christian life so that we learn the precious lessons from it.
- Let's study our journey of life, our Christian life, from the following two points at the beginning of the New Year.

Main Points

1 . Learning Lessons from History

1) The Israelites who Left Egypt

- We can learn lessons from the experiences of the past. God chose the one race, the Israelites, as a type to show a relationship between God and human beings. The journey of the Israelites teaches us precious lessons.
- The Israelites were slaves for 400 years in Egypt. They were chained and had a painful life. It is easy to talk but we can't realize how they spent a hard time under slavery for 400 years. Their life and death depended on their king's decision . The slaves had no rights or freedom.
- Therefore, the Israelites desperately desired (prayed) for freedom from slavery. Pharaoh, the king at that time, was so perverse that he refused them to go. Then,

the God of Israel heard their prayer and sent ten plagues to Pharaoh. God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt.

- The Israelites, who left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and became free. They overwhelmed with joy. They were rescued from slavery of 400 years. We easily imagine how they greatly rejoiced.
- We also understand their great joy from the latest historical event in Europe. The Berlin Wall was broken down on November 9, 1989. German people who rejoiced climbed on the 6~7m high wall and began to break it with a hammers. One nation was separated with a wall into two parts. The East part became socialist and people there had no freedom or human rights for 28 years.
- This was also happened in 6 countries in the former East European countries. As I worked for the ministry in the communist countries, the picture of the people who were ecstatically rejoicing was clearly burnt into my brain. I went to Romania after three weeks of their revolution. Adults and children were all excited and rejoiced for getting freedom and human rights. They were thoroughly delighted with freedom from bondage.
- By way, the Israelites were also filled with great joy because they were delivered from Egypt. God led them to Canaan the Promised Land. However, the road to the Canaan was through the wilderness. It was a hard and painful road. Even though God really promised to lead them if they trusted in the Word of God and follow Him, they forgot God's deeds of salvation and began to complain.

2) Response of the Israelites in Trial

- My friends, let's study the point of today's text. After three days the Israelites left Egypt they came to Massah (testing). There were only a few palm trees (dates) and a little water there. The water was too bitter to drink. They began to grumble against Moses their leader.
- The Israelites went further on to Rephidim. (Exodus 17:1) There was no water for the people to drink. They were thirsty for water. Water is the most important thing for life. It must be natural that they grumbled for a water shortage. However, they should have trusted in God who delivered them from Egypt even though they had a shortage. Their attitude to respond to God was a problem.
- The Israelites said to Moses their leader, "We could have a better life in Egypt. We had water to drink and food there." This grumbling can be heard in the Eastern European countries today. Recently, terrorists frequently attack in Western Europe. They say that the Cold War era is better than today. Even in Iraq they say that the days of Saddam Hussein, a dictator, was better than today.

The Israelites also said that the days of slavery in Egypt were better than a life in wilderness. They resented Moses and tried to kill him with a stone. We understand how they severely attacked him.

- We also have trials in our life. However, the attitude to respond to them is important. When the Israelites had troubles they forgot the goodness of God. Therefore, God was angry at their unfaithfulness and said that they should never enter the Promised Land. This is the event that is called the water of Meribah (quarreling).

- What was their problem? ⇒ The Israelites
 - ① Forgot to give thanks to God.
 - ② Kept on asking for what they wanted.
- God's anger burnt against them so the unfaithful generation must have to die in the wilderness. We learn a lesson that those who harden their hearts can not receive His grace.
- Moses also could not enter Canaan, the Promised Land, because of this. The Israelites could have entered the Promised Land in a few months but they wandered around in a desert for 40 years.

2. Lessons for Us

- Let's look Hebrews, Chapter 3.

3:7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice,
3:8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing
in the wilderness,
3:9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I
did.
3:10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, "Their hearts are always
going astray, and they have not known my ways.
3:11 So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter
my rest.

1) The period of God's training

- The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 95. The epistle was sent to the Jews. The Psalm records God's anger towards the unfaithfulness of the Israelites. David, the writer, looking back on his ancestor's failures in the wilderness, he gave his people warning not to repeat the same. Even though they experienced miracles of God they grumbled about water in the wilderness.
- Grumbling means to keep repeating a mumble in the heart. He who repeats it has no thanks or peace in his heart but is filled with only complaints. Grumbling is a dangerous sign. Do we have grumbles in our heart? Even if we have any kind of trouble, we should not forget the presence of God. Grumbling and giving thanks can not abide in our heart together.
- The writer of Psalm 103 praises the Lord as below—

103:2 Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

We are easy to forget. We always remember what we have done for other people, but we easily forget what we have owed. When we become passive, our motivation comes to decrease and we easily forget what we owe. A Christian life should not be passive one but positively give thanks and praise to God.

{Illustration} **A Voluntary Trash-Picking on a Street**

- **There is the Higashi Korai Bridge near Kitahama Church. It was an old historical bridge that shows close contact with an ancient Korean culture. Some company employees in a company uniform, who have a dustpan and a plastic bag, come at least once a week to pick trash around the bridge. Probably they do a volunteer work before they start to work at the office. Thanks to their voluntary work, the streets are very clean after trash picking.**
- **However, they didn't come to clean for the past weeks. I saw the trash-strewn streets. Then I came to know that their trash picking was done as a part of**

Company's voluntary works. I think they were passively involved in a trash picking.

- By the way, I see another trash-picking. There is Osaka Securities Exchange beside Kitahama Church. A group of three or four men and women always comes at around 6 in the morning by car. They come throughout the year in the cold season in winter and the hot season in summer. They don't put on a uniform but in casual clothing.
- They take brooms, dustpans and plastic bags from a car and begin to pick trash. I know they kept cleaning the street for years.
- I take off my hat to their voluntary work. They may belong to a certain religious group. However, their attitude is not passive but very positive. I see two kinds of attitude. One is done with a high motivation and the other is done with a low motivation.
- The Israelites were passive. They neglected to give thanks and praise to their God. They might take the grace of God for only granted. If we don't show our thanks to God for His grace and goodness, our faith becomes passive one like them. We come to forget and not pay attention to His grace.
- By the way, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorted Jewish Christians (Messianic Jews), who came to trust in Jesus as the Messiah, by quoting the Psalm 95. The exhortation of the Epistle's author and David's Psalm can be applied to us, Christians who live today.
- What attitude must we have to listen to the voice of God? How do we follow His Voice? The Israelites were trained for 40 years after they left Egypt. It was their training period to enter the Promised Land. Like them, we also have a training period in our Christian life.
- God trains us during our journey of life. Then, what should we do? This is one of my favorite Jewish proverbs saying. "A wise man learns from the other's mistake, not from his own mistake." The Bible is a treasury of human's unsuccessful stories. According to Japanese saying, teaching materials by a negative example, we can learn a lot of precious lessons from mistakes of our ancestors. Our God gives us the period of training.
- The Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

2) Do not harden your hearts.

- The particular problem that the Israelites had was the hardness of their hearts. It refers to a perverse heart that does not surrender to God and won't listen to His Word. The New Testament records the hardness of a heart as below—
- The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 16.
16:14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.
(This is written about the event after His resurrection by defeating death.) Jesus showed Himself to His disciples and many other people. However, the Bible records that even His beloved disciples were unfaithful and perverse. There were many people who met Jesus after His resurrection. However, they were divided into two groups: those who believed and those who didn't.
- My friends, the hardness of a heart is not only the characteristics of Jesus' 12

disciples, people at that time, and people who lived in the days of Moses, but it also is our weakness. It is a weakness of human beings. The hardness of a heart is the most helpless weakness of human beings.

- The important thing is to receive what God has given, and what He has done for us, the way that God has open and so on with a simple heart and then give thanks to God and follow His Word.

103:2 Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

- The Israelites had training in the wilderness for 40 years long because of their hardness of a heart. (They learned by negative examples) . However, even though they were unfaithful, God led them to Canaan, the Promised Land, as He promised. (Look! Israel exists today)

We understand that God absolutely fulfills His promises. The Bible records many examples that God fulfilled the promises.

- God surely leads our journey of life to the Kingdom of God. The problem is to take the long way and go through lots of suffering because we have the hardness of a heart. As you know, we can live life only once.
- Then, what should we do for leading a good life? The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches as below –

3:7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,

3:8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness,

- Let’s study the important points now.

① The Holy Spirit says, **“Today, if you hear his voice.”**

God speaks to us and we can hear His Voice. Where can we hear His Voice? ⇒ at the place where we meet God.

It is the place where we worship God at church or the place we have devotion time. We can also hear His Voice when we have fellowship with the saints. Like this, God speak to us in various ways. The important point is that God speaks to us.

② We must not **“harden our hearts.”**

- When Jesus asked Peter to use his boat, he faithfully accepted His Word and followed Him. (Luke, Chapter 5)
- When Jesus said to Zacchaeus, **“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:5)**
- He immediately came down from the tree.
- When Paul, who was an evangelist, heard the voice of Jesus, he responded to His Voice and offered his life to God.

The common point of these three people is their quick response when they heard the voice of God.

- Then, how can we hear the Voice of God without closing our mind? The hardness of hearts is our weakness. The only one way to overcome it is the cross of Jesus Christ. The battle is to fight against our inward self.
- We need to frankly tell our weakness to God. It is confession by prayer. Jesus died on the cross for us to overcome our weakness of flesh and win the battle.

1 John

1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- We listen to the Word of God and then lead a life by trusting in it. We should not forget to give thanks to God and praise His name, whatever may happen in our Christian life in 2017.

We learned lessons from the attitude of the Israelites.

What voice of God did you hear this morning?

Conclusion

Title of the Message: “Today, If You Hear His Voice”

—Do not Harden Your Harts—

- We learn the precious lessons from the hardness of hearts of the Israelites, God’s chosen people. It is a battle against our self.
- How can we lead the journey of life without or problems?

1 . We should learn from the Israelites, our forerunners.
be faithful as the Scripture says,

“Today, if you hear His voice”.

We need to come close to the cross of Jesus every day.

We should

2 . We should give thanks to God and praise Him.

“Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Psalm 103:2

- The secret of a Christian life is how much we give thanks to God and praise Him in our journey of life.

* God bless you!