

December 31, 2017
KIBC Sunday Worship Service
Message by Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda
Title of the Message: "Give Thanks in All Circumstances"
— In the Presence of the Lord —

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:18

5:18 Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Introduction

- I give thanks to God that we have the last Sunday Worship Service in 2017 together. How was the year, 2017?
- *Four-character idioms* are now in vogue. (Japanese idioms consisted of four Chinese characters, Kanji). I saw these *five-character idioms* at the entrance of a restaurant the other day as follows:

**Already the End of the Year
Pushing Myself
Just Focus on Next Year
For Radiant and Beautiful Me
Are You Ready?**

- They are made up of five characters and five lines in Japanese. ⇒ They are 25 characters in total. I thought that these five-character idioms seemed to sum up 2017 at the end of the year. How was this year for you? We have only half a day left this year and a new year begins tomorrow.
- The Jewish wise men have learned lessons from the facts in their history (the events in the past). We can't live time in the past again. The facts in our past also teach us very precious lessons. What a waste if we don't turn our precious past events, our treasure, to our advantage!
- Our Scripture of this year is Isaiah Chapter 40, Verse 8.

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

- We have experienced the truth of God's Word, authority of God's Word and blessed lives in God's Word. Let's look back this year before God today. The Scripture given for the last message of this year is from 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Let's remember our 2017 and consider the following three points according to First Thessalonians, today's text.

Main Points

1. Faith to Speak With the Lord Honestly

- **"Give thanks in all circumstances"** refers to faith to honestly speak all things to the Lord. He knows everything and we are asked to have a relationship in which we can tell Him everything.

{Illustration} **"To See Oneself" - Rev. John Maxwell**

- **John Maxwell was a pastor. One day, he found a memo on his desk: "Good morning Pastor John Maxwell. You can understand who you are by the following 2 directions below."**

- **To recognize who you are (Self-recognition)**
- **To know with what kind of people you have relationships with Fellowship**

- **Looking at the memo, Pastor John Maxwell came to try to see himself honestly. What kind of person am I? To see oneself:**

- 1) **He has to be honest with himself. This is an important key to see ourselves. If we are not honest with ourselves, we will have conflict to be choked eventually.**

2) **Pastor John Maxwell came to realize that his self-image was mainly decided by his relationships with his friends. He found that his way of thinking and the development of his personality were greatly influenced by his friends.**

- Have we been honest with ourselves in the past year? What relationships have we established with our friends? We are asked to answer these questions at the end of this year.
- By the way, the Bible teaches that when we want to understand God, we should first give thanks to Him. As you know, we, human beings, cannot always give thanks. However, the Bible teaches, "**Give thanks in all circumstances.**" Then, what should we do, when we hardly give thanks?
- Sometimes we pray to God with tears. The important thing is to have a relationship with God and speak to Him honestly. Those who honestly tell Him everything are blessed. We don't need to carry our burdens by ourselves. The cross of Jesus Christ was already fulfilled. We must not make His death on the cross useless. The Lord Jesus takes *our yoke* together.

The Gospel of Matthew

11:28 "Come to me, all who you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

11:30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- Those who have the relationship with Jesus and have the faith to speak honestly are blessed. Have we told the Lord everything this year? We should spend some time to look at ourselves honestly. Then, we will be able to mature.

2. Faith to Accept Our Circumstances

- Now we should focus on the Word, "**Give thanks in all circumstances.**" Paul doesn't teach us to give thanks **for** everything, but he does to give thanks **in** everything.
- Japanese translation had it, "to give thanks **for** everything", but original word is **in**. So, the English and German Bible translates it as **in**.
- By the way, in English translation, it is written "In everything give thanks".

"Circumstances" ⇒ Circumstances that God allowed to occur. It means the faith that accepts the situations God has allowed. The faith to accept is very important.

- My friends, please don't misunderstand what I say. We should not blame God for our circumstances that are caused by human negligence and a lack of self-management. We should be honest with ourselves.
- But this is very difficult to follow. Because, sometimes we worry that a thing goes a quite different way from what we want or if we go on this way we may be lost and plunge into a painful situation.
- Then, in what situation does our faith to accept work? I think it works when we are put in the situation that we can't avoid. And, God is with us even in such a situation. That is the place where we meet Jesus and have a relationship with Him. And it is the moment that our faith is needed.

{Illustration} Prime Minister Golda Meir

- **Golda Meir (1898-1978) became the fifth Prime Minister of the State of Israel. She was born in Ukraine and after studying in America, she became a world-famous female leader. She started her political career at the age of 30 and then she was appointed Minister of Labor and Foreign Minister and finally served as Prime Minister for five years.**

- She fought against leukemia during her time as Prime Minister. She kept trusting in God. Her biography that was published after her death records her words, "Not being beautiful was the true blessing. I prayed hard. Not being beautiful forced me to develop my inner resource."
- She continued, " My weakness conduced to the interests to the State. I have had an opportunity to understand God in despair." Prime Minister Golda Meir was not discouraged by her demerits. On the contrary, she accepted her weakness and looked at things correctly.
- My friends. How could Paul and Silas accept the situation when they were imprisoned? Their faith in God perfectly worked in the unavoidable situation.
- Their attitude was the outcome of their faith to accept. The important thing is the process to that outcome. They didn't suddenly acquire faith like that, but they were prepared for faith (faith to accept). They clearly believed in Jesus as Christ (Messiah) and trusted in Him truly. They had faith that their God would be with them in any circumstances. This faith worked in their inescapable situation.
- How was our 2017? Have we had the faith to accept our circumstances? Let's ask ourselves.

3. Faith to Believe the Lord's Presence

- **"Give thanks in all circumstances"** means to thank in the past, the present and in the future, because the Lord is present in time. He is present in history. He walked with us in this year. My friends, how much did we experience the Lord's presence this year?
 - The past ⇒ How much did we experience God this year?
 - The present ⇒ Do we have faith in God, Immanuel?
 - The future ⇒What I am now is my future self. It means that my faith in the Lord's presence generates my future faith.
- My friends, the grateful heart (thoughts, will) creates a smile. Let's stand before a mirror. We realize that thoughts in our mind make expressions on our face at that time. People, vary between individuals though, alternate between hope and fear by their situations and conditions. But, God wants us to give thanks in all circumstances. Even if you can't give thanks, you walk the royal road to learn God's blessing by following the Scripture.
- Looking back this year, did we give thanks to God in all circumstances? We realize that God's will and His plan were there. The important point was how much we were faithful to His Word. Then, what should we do? We, ourselves, should be crucified with Christ.

{Illustration} Acts 16:19~34

- Paul and Silas were arrested because of preaching the Gospel. They were stripped and beaten. And they were put in the inner cell. The jailer guarded them carefully. Their feet were fastened in the stocks. However, they were giving prayer in that horrible prison. They were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.
- Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And all the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer tried to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. (At that time, it was the usual way to take the blame).
- At that very time, Paul and Silas shouted, "Don't harm yourself. We are all here!" (Acts 16:28) And they said, the famous word, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you

will be saved—you and your household." (Acts 16:31) Their word and acts were good testimony to the jailer and the other prisoners.

{Illustration} The Actual Situation in North Korea

- I was greatly inspired by the saints (Christians), who have fled from North Korea. One of them showed me his rough sketch of a concentration camp. It is a very precious material to show us their situation. (Please read a monthly news letter, The Voice of Mission for the details.) The disabled were also forced to labor.
- Those who got inhumane treatment didn't give up their trust in God. On the contrary, ① in unavoidable situations, ② they have learned faith to accept them. And, ③ the Lord was present there. The saints of the Lord had experienced the Lord' miracles.

- We can see God's work, that is why the Lord is present there. The Lord is alive and works today. God wants to glorify Himself. With what faith did we live this year? Let's go before God by looking back this year now and consider today's Scripture.

Conclusion

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"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:18

• What did we learn from the Lord in 2017?

- ① Faith to speak with the Lord honestly
- ② Faith to accept our circumstances.
- Faith to believe the Lord's presence

* God Bless You! Happy New Year!