

February 2, 2020

KIBC Sunday Worship Service

Message by Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda

Title of the Message: "Just Be Yourself"

—Elijah's Prayer—

Text: James 5:17, 18

5:17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

5:18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Introduction

Do you know a T.V. drama "**Mito Komon**"? He is a very familiar character for Japanese people of my age.

Komon-sama, who is Tokugawa Mitsukuni, a feudal lord of Mito Domain, roams the realm with two samurai retainers, Suke-san and Kaku-san, and they seek out injustice. The scene where they judge and punish the villains is overwhelming.

Seeing villains cleverly survive today, we are absolutely satisfied to watch when someone like Komon-sama punishes evil, especially the scene where Suke-san and Kaku-san present the intro (a samurai's pillbox) that reveals the hero's identity. It makes us feel good.

Mito Komon is a long-running movie and a T.V. program. Japanese people easily sympathize with the program. (Whether they were real persons or not.)

By the way, James focused on Abraham (Chapter 2; 21~23), Rahab (Chapter 2:25) and Job (Chapter 5:11) in his epistle, who were very familiar to Jewish people, his fellow people. They had listened to the stories of these three ancestors when they were children from their grandparents.

James picked up Elijah as the fourth character, who was also very well-known in Jewish society. James mentioned first that Elijah was "**Elijah was a human being, even as we are.**"

He recorded that Elijah was a human being like us. We are really encouraged by his word. When Elijah prayed earnestly that it should not rain, it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. And when he prayed again, the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My

friends, James regarded us as that great Elijah and said, **“Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”**

It is difficult for many people to be ordinary in our times. We try to be something special. We think that we should be outstanding, or we will not be appreciated in this world. Being ordinary seems to be something bad.

However, James who was Jesus’ brother, said, **“Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”** He didn’t say that Elijah was great or amazing or special.

What do you think about yourself? You may think that you have **nothing special** in you. I am an ordinary person too, just like you. Why should we be ordinary people? Because we come to understand blessing of people who trust in God.

Let’s consider the following two points today.

Main Points

1 . He Is A Human Being, Even as We Are.

What does it mean to be a human as we are?

1) We Have Weakness.

First of all, all human beings have weaknesses.

When Elijah prayed that it would not rain, it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. And when he prayed again, the heavens gave rain for three and a half years. He did a miraculous thing by prayer.

Therefore, we tend to understand that Elijah is the special and great person.

Yes, he is a great man in a sense. However, James didn’t think so. He firstly said, **“Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”**

Then, what kind of man was Elijah?

Firstly, he worshiped God who created heavens and the earth. He defeated prophets, who didn’t worship God the Creator but worshiped idols, and won victory, because God blessed him.

However, when Elijah was threatened by Queen Jezebel, he was extremely frightened. He fled and said as below—

1 Kings 19:4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,”

he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

When everything at church goes well, we are able to keep leading Christian life at church. People may tell you, "Great. You work very hard. You are amazing."

However, if you fail for some reason or other and are told, "You are helpless", you probably think that you don't like church and won't go to church any more. Elijah was like this.

Why did he act like this?

Let's look back ancestors of faith first. Abraham who is called the father of faith, went down to Egypt. As he was about to enter Egypt, he lied to Pharaoh about his wife. He said his wife was his sister, so that he might not be killed. It means that he mocked Pharaoh by telling a lie.

How about Moses, who received the Ten Commandment from God? He is said that he was a gentle man. However, he killed a man, so that he became ineligible to lead the Israelites to Canaan.

My friends, Elijah seemed to be above his human weakness, but he unmasked by the threats of Queen Jezebel.

As we read the Bible, we sometimes wonder why so many saints were like this. Yes, they all have weakness.

Weakness itself is not sin, however, we should be careful because it can lead to committing sin.

The important thing is to put our weakness before God. We need to be taught by light of the Holy Spirit and to pray so that we overcome it. We are not able to win a victory if we just think we are weak.

Therefore, it is not a problem that we have weakness. The problem is that we don't understand reality of our weakness and we excuse our weakness for our failure. Elijah also failed like us, however, he put his weakness before God. (He was quite different in this point.)

2) Our Strength is Limited

Paul and Barnabas were great God's tools. The Bible records that a certain event happened one day as below—

Acts 14:8 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked.

14:9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed

14:10 and called out, “Stand up on your feet!!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

14:11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!

14:12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

14:13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

15 “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

Paul and Barnabas did an amazing miracle, but it was not by their own power. Therefore, they said, **“We too are only human, like you. “**

3) We Need God

The third point is that we need God. We and our forerunners are weak and limited in strength so that we need God. Therefore, we need to pray like the following point.

2 . Elijah Was A Man of Prayer.

1) The Spirit of Prayer

We studied that James mentioned, **“Elijah was a human being, even as we are.”** Then he began to teach about Elijah’s prayer.

Let’s read James’s word

5:17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

5:18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

1 Kings 18:42 records the attitude of prayer that Elijah offered to God.

In those days, people generally began to pray by standing and raising both their hands. However, it records as below —

1Kings 18:42 ... but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

When we pray to God, what posture do we take?

How humble was the posture of Elijah! He made himself small: **he put his face between his knees.**

It was not the boasting attitude of **I am that Elijah**, but he put his face between his knees. He looked like a man who had no face before God. That is that he looks like the man who erased his being.

We usually judge each other by our outer appearance and attitudes; however, the important thing is what attitude we take when we pray to before God in the secret place. God is very much pleased with the praying attitude where we are quite small before God, isn't He?

Elijah was a human being like us. The reason that Elijah is appreciated is probably that he was a man of prayer. God did not listen to Elijah's prayer because he was great, but only because he prayed, he earnestly prayed.

God listens to us if we pray to Him. The important thing is power of prayer, not greatness of human beings. The power of prayer means the power of God. James intended to teach it, he firstly mentioned **"Elijah was a human being, even as we are."**

I was taught by the German Bible that records as below—

Elia war ein Mensch von gleichen Gemuetsbewegungen (Empfindungen) wie wir.

"Elijah was a human being, who had same feelings (plural) like us."

2) We Must Pray.

The important thing that James wanted to teach here is that **we must pray.**

We face various troubles in our life. God teaches us to pray. What did Jesus say before He taught the Lord's Prayer to His disciples?

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus encourages offering prayer in secret here. In those days, religious people prayed in public (at synagogues and on the streets) to show their religious performance. On the other hand, Jesus taught a personal prayer in fellowship with God.

If we have a personal prayer request, we should pray to God the Father in Heaven. Let's pray for various needs in church to God the Father in Heaven. Let's pray to God Father in Heaven for needs in our society. As you know, the sorrowful and horrible events occur one after another in our country. Only the believers in God are able to pray. We are allowed to see God's glory by offering prayers to God who created the heavens and the earth. It is the privilege of the saints who believe in God.

Scripture encourages us,

Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

Why did James teach the Jewish people, his fellow people, how to pray? The reason is that prayer has power to change people, societies and nations. Even if we are in a hopeless situation, we should not give up our hope. Nothing impossible for God the Creator.

Illustration

I'd like to share my unforgettable experience.

Some time ago, a certain man was at his deathbed. He had no hope to recover so he entered a hospice ward. He hadn't accept God of the Bible and didn't trust in Him.

His family, who were Christians, kept praying so he believed in God. He was dying and became stupefied. He was not able to speak.

At that time, I went to see him. I don't know why but his family were not with him. Only I was there. I opened the Bible and began to read Scripture, Psalm23, slowly, close to his ears. Then, holding his hand, I said, "Let's pray."

I began to pray slowly. Something strange happened. He lightly squeezed back my hand as if he agreed to each verse of Scripture. Immediately I understood that he responded the word of the Bible.

My friends, he passed away 10 minutes later. No one was there except me. His Christian family kept praying behind and he responded just before his death. We were able to hold a Christian-style funeral for him. We learned that we should not give up praying just before death.

Offering prayer is the privilege that is given to people who believe in God. Prayers absolutely reach God.

What do you think today's message? There are some people around us who need God who can change them into entirely new people.

Let's pray to God for them with patience, love and trust in God.

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Conclusion

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—Elijah's Prayer—

We were encouraged by God today. We listened to His Voice, "Just be yourself" through Elijah's prayer. What is the secret for just an ordinary person to receive the great God's blessing.

⇒ Elijah was **a man of prayer**.

Let's trust in God who created the heavens and the earth and pray to God to become a man of prayer like Elijah. We need to come before God even though we have weakness like Elijah. It was Elijah's attitude of prayer.

1Kings 18:42 ... but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

* God bless you!