

“Disaster and the God of the Bible-The poor and the victims are blessed”

September 6th, 2019
Kobe International Christ Church
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Theme Scripture: Isaiah Chapter 61 Verse 1

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

<Introduction>

Reality of Natural Disaster

3,000 days has passed since 3.11.¹ 4,000 people became victims of disasters even only in Ishinomaki City Miyagi Prefecture.² The population of Ishinomaki City is likely to fall down from the second to the third in Miyagi Prefecture.³ It was a leading place in the country as a city of fishery. However, a restoration from the earthquake and tsunami does not proceed. There is no job opportunity for people, and the number of shoplifting by the elderly people is increasing.⁴ They are hungry. They are poor. And they are suffering. Even at the end of 2018, 2,353 victim's houses are remained inclined.⁵ Although they moved from the temporary housing to the restoration housing, they are crying because of loneliness. There is no means for lonely deaths.⁶ For the people in the valley of restoration, an apathetic cold air is covering the whole of Japan. Human resources, who are willing to lead matter of depopulation and regional revitalization, are not enough. In other words, the gap with cities such as Tokyo is huge, and we are facing a structural crisis.

The social structure that seeks wealthy life, which is inspired by commercials of TV, the Tokyo Olympics and Osaka World Expo, does not pay any considerations for unemployment by the disaster, despair that they are forsaken by a wealth, and poverty.

(1) What the natural disaster is?

In the Old Testament, there are Hebrew words such as, רָעָה *rah*, נֶגֶף *negeph* (7times), מַכָּה *makkah* (48 times), הוֹרָה *hovah* (3 times), צָרָה *tsarah* (71 times), and מִגְפָּה *maggephah* (26 times), etc, regarding on “disaster (calamities, misfortunes, suffering). “רָעָה *rah* (evil)” appears 345 times in the Old Testaments. “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in Genesis is consisted by “טוֹב *towb* (good)” and “*rah* (evil)”. The way of God's intervene in history, “I form the light and

¹ 2019. *Ishinomaki Kahoku*. May 31.

² 2011. *Ishinomaki Hibi Shinbun*. September 11.

³ 2019. *Ishinomaki Hibi Shinbun*. January 23.

⁴ Iwamura, Y. 2015. Seasonal magazine *Shien*. No.13. November 3. 4.

⁵ 2019. *Japan Broadcasting Corporation*. January 24.

⁶ 2019. *The Asahi Shimbun*. March 11. “Lonely death in reconstruction housing is increasing rapidly. 68 people became to be isolated after moving in last year”.

2019. *Kobe Shimbun*. March 11. “A spate of lonely death in disaster-affected 3 prefectures”.

create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things”, is done by creating (Hebrew בָּרָא *bara*) “peace (שְׁלוֹם *shalom*)” and “disaster (*rah*)”. (Isaiah 45:7)

Generally, God is hardly accepted as the one who deliver “disaster”. Rather, considering Satan as the root cause of all evils that have been afflicted humans is the position of the Christian world.⁷ This theory does not deny the essential of our loving God. I would like you to be reminded that the Bible is not dualism all the time. Persian religions such as Zoroastrianism have been influenced by the history of conflict between good and evil, and the eschatology of the confrontation between God and Satan, good and evil, light and darkness has always been sweeping the world in all ages.⁸ However, the devil did not exist from the beginning like a rival who against God. It was “very good (*towb*)”. (Genesis 1:31) Everything starts with the will of God and comes back to God with its will.

(2) Jesus’s missionary work

a. The gospel to the poor

At the beginning of his public appearance in his life, he appeared with the gospel to “the poor”, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor”. (Luke 4:18) Jesus stated the word in the context of Isaiah when he read aloud it in the hall, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21) Therefore, he cleared up about what is the gospel that the evangelism by the Western Christianity after the 4th century, giving baptism and increasing the number of believers are not the core heart. Rather he showed that God became a hollow, humbled and had a poor way of living in the field of unbelievers through him.⁹

Since God is written as “who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth”, he is the one who state himself as “down (Hebrew שָׁפַל *shaphel* <to make lower, sink, drop, humble>”. (Psalm 113:6)¹⁰

Jesus began his ministry to flow Isaiah’s “preach Gospel (Hebrew בָּשַׂר *basar*)” to the “suffering people (Hebrew עֲנָוִים *anav* <the poor>”. It appears 25 times in the Old Testaments” at first.¹¹

b. “Justice” and “Order”

All ages and places, it is also recorded in other documents beside the Bible that non-Christian religious people, other organizations and the ancient Orient people also had been supported “the poor people”.¹²

⁷ Lindsey, H. 1975. *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth*. Word of Life. (Translated by Koutaro Matsushiro)

⁸ Boyce, M. 1983. *Zoroastrians*. Chikuma Shobo. (Translated by Yamamoto Yumiko) This book says, “So it was out of a Judaism enriched by five centuries of contact with Zoroastrianism that Christianity arose in the Parthian period”.(141)

⁹ Kuribayashi, T. 1991. *Theology of the Crown of thorns*. Shinkyō Publishing. 359.

¹⁰ Sakon, K. 1980. *Hikukini kudarū kami*. Jordan-sha. 40-44.

Honda, T. 2009. *Kamagasaki fukuin*. Iwanami Shoten. 132-133. “The verb *shaphel*’ comes out. The form of the participle in its inflected form, ‘*hamshphili*’ I revealed that God’s perspective is at a low point.”

¹¹ 2017. *Sankei Shimbun*. January 23. In article of “Discover of the Jewish church where Jesus preached”, it reports that lecturer Takahiko Yamano, who is a leading researcher of synagogue in Japan and give lectures at the Central Theological College, said “Jesus drew a line between big cities. He visited small villages and gave his looks at especially the poorest people”.

¹² Yamada, T. 1994. *Ainuno sekaikan*. Kodansha-Metier. 89.

“Protecting from disasters and pandemics, and nurturing and raising children are emphasized as good acts.”

However, God in the Bible is a little bit different. The relationship between “justice” and “order” is different. Since Constantine the Great [280-337] declared Christianity as a state religion, it has spread through from the Mediterranean coast.¹³ Constantine maintained the longest lasting empire in the world history by its “order”. He took importance in “human rules = the order”, as “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules”. (Mark 7:6-7) Should we live in an orderly manner without making trouble to others? It is not the justice that you will be forgiven even doing immorality, injustice act or discrimination behind the scenes.¹⁴ God demands each person to do “justice”.

c. Politic and Order

Over a thousand years ago, more before Roman Empire, Israel had been threatened by its neighboring countries, so they despaired a strong king, leader and the one of ruler. (1 Samuel 8:20) As a result, their order was restored in Israel. In the course of time, since limited rulers started to cling onto keeping own power, the powerless “the weak and the needy” became neglected and stayed drowning. (Psalm 72:13, 82:4)¹⁵ A structure that takes importance on “the order” rather than “justice” has been considered as good.¹⁶ However, God in the Bible is not on the side of “oorder” but the one who stands on the side of the weak and the needy with “justice”. God desired “equity” and “justice toward an orderly society, which inequity, inequality and discrimination do not cease to exist. (Psalm 99:4)¹⁷

(3) Biblical thinking that is not dualism

a. God who brings disaster

It is necessary to be careful that the Bible is not a dualism, in order not to make a quick conclusion. Let’s try not to think simply that God always combines with either “good” or “evil”, “chaos” or “order”, “peace” or “disaster”.¹⁸ Sometimes God uses “the wicked”. (Proverbs 16:4) In some cases, he evaluates “order” than chaos. (1 Corinthians 14:33) Moreover, God is also a god who brings “disaster (*rah*)”.¹⁹ The earth was shaken by extraordinary natural phenomena. The structure that respects “order” was shaken. The temple was a symbol of “order” in the first century A.D.

It is recorded that “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split”. (Matthew 27:51)

b. God’s Predestination

¹³ Iwamura, Y. 2001. *Megusuri*. No.34. 1, 9.

¹⁴ Arendt, H. Kohn, J. 2007. *Responsibility and judgement*. Chikuma Shobo. 322. (Translated by Gen Nakayama)

¹⁵ Watanabe, H. 2001. *Tabibitono jidaini mukatsute*. Shinkyo Publishing. 197.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, W. 2018. *Peace (Understanding Biblical Themes)*. Kyobunkwan. 196. (Translated by Satoshi Otomo, Kaoru Miyazaki)

¹⁷ Hendrickx, H. 1994. *Social justice in the Bible*. Shinseisha. 31, 32. (Translated by Tetsuro Honda)

¹⁸ Iwamura, Y. 2001. *Megusuri*. No.23. 3, 5

¹⁹ Iwamura, Y. 2001. *Megusuri*. No.29. 1, 3-11.

Jesus's "will (Greek θέλημα *thelema*)" is a plan of God that has been predestinated before the creation of heaven and earth. Let's pray in harmony with "your will be done" that the most of people say in the world, for completion of accomplishment of the plan on the earth, humans and the creatures. (Matthew 6:10).²⁰

In order to complete God's purpose, unfair order, exclusivity and concept of eugenics must be destroyed.²¹ It is not enough to preach only God's word while ignoring the structure that the poor people are less-cared. The action is a prayer.²² God entrusted us with his mission to innovate in a way of "your grief will turn to joy", not by a fanatic social revolution. (John 16:20).

c. Blessed are the disaster-affected poor people in spirit

People, who are poor, sufferings and complimented by disasters, are the one that God put priority for his choosing. God save people from poverty in an inequality and injustice society, where people cannot escape from pervasive bullying, sexism²³, and non-regular employee. It is promised that "Oppressed people (*anav*) will inherit the land and will enjoy unlimited peace." (Psalm 37:11 GOD'S WORD® Translation)²⁴ The "evil people" try to keep order, the Christian world that takes importance on hierarchy and support the power side, and the leaders of religious facilities with tremendous halls, treat "the poor" as "spiritually poor" and force them to the edge of collective communities, societies and ostracized communities.²⁵ However, God set free "the sufferers" and give them peace so they can enjoy freedom.

<Conclusion>

In the temple, Jesus quotes chapter 61 verse 1 of Isaiah, and declared that the gospel belongs to "the poor". That fulfillment was concluded with the ultimate conclusion in chapter 6 of Luke. "Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh'". (Luke 6: 20-21)²⁶

Disaster affected people who are suffering, poor and weak because of natural disasters will be saved. It is because of that they are in the center of God's will.²⁷

²⁰ Haruna, S. 2018. *Kirisutokyo tetsugakujiyoron*. Kyobunkwan. 37.

He testifies that, "The purpose of the salvation is not save the individual sinners, but to save the world (der wereld), and it is to restore in organic coupling everything in the heaven and the earth under the higher only one". (weder onder één honfd te herstellen in hum organischen samenhang)

²¹ Oguma, E. 1998. *Nihonjinno rutsusagashi. Hyakusanjyunenno rekishiwotadoru*. Yosensha Mook. 16.

"The study of eugenics is based on the idea to improve more the ethnic through the medicine and nutrition. This idea of "improving the ethnic" led to the direction of 'eliminating inferior ethnics'".

²² Shinmen, M. 2019. "Shin" *Kirisutokyo nyumon (1)*. Sanyobooks. 50-51.

²³ Murata, J. 2017. *Kirisutokyo shiyakaigakuno aida*. Koyo Shobo. 155-156.

²⁴ Iwamura, Y. 1999. *Shihen 37henniokeru shikaishyahonto BHSno soui*. Asia Graduate School of Theology. 9.

²⁵ Gutiérrez, G. 1985. *A Theology of Liberation*. Iwanami Shoten. 290-291. (Translated by Nozomu Seki, Keizo Yamada)

"Ptoochos is a person who does not have what is necessary to survive or a miserable person who has no other choice but to beg."

²⁶ Sider, R. 1989. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Seibunsha International. 78-79. (Translated by Eiji Mitachi)

²⁷ Lohfink, N. 2010. *Option for the Poor*. The Kirisuto Shimibun. 74-77. (Translated by Tomohiro Oomiya)