

"Those who have breath in their nostrils."

They say that there is such a thing in the education of the Jews, where a father stands in front of his three or four year old child that is sitting on a somewhat high table. The father spreads his arms and says "Jump down." The child jumps towards his father. But at that moment, the father retracts his arms and his child falls to the ground. The child isn't injured because it is not a very high table, but the child will be shocked. The father tells his child while smiling, "Don't trust anyone who breathes through nostrils, but trust in God instead." We may feel sorry for the child, but that has been a serious thought born from the ethnic group that has been deprived of their wealth and country for more than two thousand years.

And the word that the father used, "Don't trust anyone who breathes through nostrils" is taken from Isaiah 2:22 in the Bible as follows: **"Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem?"**

We are human beings. We have various definitions about this human being. **"Humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils"** mentioned here is the definition of a human being from the side of God who created us. Yes, for God we are the ones who breathe through our nostrils.

The meaning of this word dates back to when a man was created. In Genesis 2:7, it is written; **"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."** This means that we are all alive now by the breath of life from God, and our lives are all in the hands of God. When someone dies, we Japanese say "draws a breath" or "goes back to soil", but these are truly right expressions. We are those who lose our lives just by covering our small nostrils and mouths for several minutes.

Human beings have accomplished a lot in the past, but we can accomplish things as long as we are breathing through our nostrils, and we cannot go beyond that limit. We will never be able to go beyond that limit in the future. In that sense, we are truly a fleeting existence.

I have a lot of people who I trust. They always respond to my trust. You may

have such people who you trust. They are reliable people for us, but I think we must recognize in our hearts that they are also not perfect. We forget things without malicious intension, do something bad unconsciously, become emotional depending on mood and situation of the day, or state a falsehood or lie for self-protection. This is a human being who breathes through nostrils.

I am not suggesting here that you should never trust a human being at all. But, I would like to recognize that even though a person is trustworthy, as long as he or she is a human being, the person might not be able to respond to our trust. So, let's take a close look at today's theme: "the one who breathes through nostrils".

Last week, I talked about Eli, the high priest, and his two sons who robbed the offerings at the temple and had relationships with the women serving the temple. Because of the incidents, the spiritual leadership of Israel was shifted from Eli to Samuel who was greatly respected by the people. However, the sons of Samuel also had similar problems and they could not succeed Samuel as the spiritual leaders. Therefore, the people asked Samuel to choose a king for them.

The event at that time is recorded in I Samuel 8:5 as follows: **They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."** So, Samuel told their wishes to God. In response, God said in I Samuel 8:7 as follows: **"Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."** Samuel reconfirmed the people by asking, "Do you really think it is okay?". And he prophesized to the people what will happen to Israel after the king is established in advance as follows:

He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female

servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." (I Samuel 8:11-18)

Samuel talked to the people about what happens when the king rules over the people of Israel that have never had a king before. The king will first place an army around him, and will bring the people into his military service to run in front of his chariots. That is, for the king, you have to sacrifice your lives. And your daughters must work in front of the king and you will have to give the king fixed tributes. This would mean dictatorship to deprive people of their liberties, and to impose heavy taxes against the people's wills. And at the end, you will become like slaves of the king. Then, even though the people ask the Lord for relief, the Lord will not answer them.

As I mentioned earlier, the people of Israel were doing what seemed to be right in their own eyes at that time. When the king who breathes through his nostrils is established, the king will do whatever seems to be right for his own eyes, just like other people who are human beings. From the beginning, it is predictable that the king will do whatever he wishes to do.

Against Samuel's warning, the people of Israel, who breathe through their nostrils, answered him in I Samuel 8:19-22 as follows: **But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."**

Yes, the decision of the people means that instead of relying on God who is omnipotent, they expressed the desire to depend on the king who breathes through his nostrils in the future. Thus, Samuel poured oil upon the 30 year old man named Saul. "Pouring oil" was a ceremony that was instructed directly by God at the time of appointing a king or a priest. Then, Saul became the first king of Israel.

About this Saul, the Bible writes in I Samuel 9:2 as follows: **"Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel,**

and he was a head taller than anyone else." As it is written, Saul was young, tall and prominent, and among the men in Israel there was no one more handsome than he. Yes, his appearance caught the hearts of the people. The book titled "Appearance is 90%" was once a best seller in Japan. Eve ate the fruit as written in Genesis 3:6: **"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."** Ever since Eve ate the fruit, no progress has been made in human history, and Israel welcomed the king for the first time in its history.

However, even though Saul had charisma and a good appearance, that alone could not qualify him to be a king. What is further necessary was his achievement for the monarchy. And the time for his trial came soon. Yes, Saul faced war with the Ammonites soon after he was on the throne. And the battle ended with victory for Israel. With this victory, the people officially welcomed him as their king (I Samuel chapter 11). Yes, the people accepted Saul for his achievement, watching the good work in his war debut. At that time, the people of Israel must have thought that their decision was right and the country was secure.

But, the situation did not last long. Saul wanted to give his sacrifice of animals to God before the arrival of a long-time enemy, the Philistines. Saul waited for the arrival of Samuel, the priest who poured oil on him, who was supposed to perform the ritual for the sacrifice, but Samuel did not come at the promised time. Saul could not wait for Samuel, so he performed the ritual of sacrifice by himself. The Bible recorded the situation at that time in I Samuel 13:8-9 as follows:

He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

The priest was appointed by God, and no one was allowed to take over the task, so what Saul did was a big mistake to break God's command. But Saul did that. Why? Because when the people found out that Samuel would not come, they started leaving Saul. He was forsaken by the people leaving him, and crossed over a line that he should not have crossed. After that, what happened?

Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command." (I Samuel 13:10-14)

Saul once again said that "**the men were scattering**" and further said that "**the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash, I thought, Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal.**" Therefore, he said that he was forced to offer the burnt offering by himself without waiting for Samuel.

What you can see from this is that Saul did not fear God, but he feared human beings, who breathe through their nostrils. In addition, he was afraid of the Philistines attacking himself rather than attacking the people of Israel. In his mind, there was no consciousness as the king to protect the Israelites. That is why he felt uneasy about the people leaving and tried to keep their hearts together with him.

This is the beginning of Saul's reign, and Samuel later summarized the monarchy of Saul with the following words in I Samuel 14:52: "**All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.**" Even after receiving the advices from Samuel, Saul did not pay attention to God, and he continued to favor the person who seems to be reliable in his eyes, that is, "the one who breathes through nostrils".

There was another incident. When Saul was fighting against the Amalekites, Saul did not obey God's command to destroy all the Amalekites and their belongings, including cows, sheep, camels, and donkeys, and captured alive the enemy's king, Agag. And he kept the best of the sheep and the cows, the lambs and all the good things, and destroyed only the unworthy things. As the consequence, what happened is recorded in I Samuel 15:10-13 as follows:

Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal." When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions." (I Samuels 15:10-13)

Saul, who built a victory monument for himself, told a lie to Samuel who visited him, saying, **"I have carried out the Lord's instructions."** But Samuel asked, **"What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"** Saul answered, **"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."** (I Samuel 15:14-15)

Saul said that this was not what he did, but what the people did, and that he left the good things to offer to the Lord. What Saul told to Samuel was nothing but, "Showing his own power", "Stating falsehoods", "Passing responsibility to others", and "Self-justification". For this, Samuel told Saul as follows: **"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."** (I Samuel 15:22)

And Samuel declared to Saul that God rejected him from the throne, because he abandoned the word of God, so that God also abandoned him. After hearing that, Saul pleaded to Samuel as follows: **"I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord."** (I Samuel 15:24-25) Saul admitted his guilt and confessed his own feeling as **"I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them."** Yes, he was afraid of those who breathe through their nostrils, and followed their voices.

But Samuel no longer listened to Saul's words and started to leave the place. At that time, Saul again pleaded to Samuel saying, **"I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with**

me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." (I Samuel 15:30)

By expressing that "I was afraid of the people instead of fearing God", Saul seemed to have repented. But shortly after that confession, he wished to Samuel as "**Please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel.**" Yes, his interest was to keep his face before those who breathe through their nostrils from the beginning to the end. After these things, God's hand was no longer with Saul. Though he stayed on the throne for a while, he lived everyday with envy and fear for David who was to be anointed on behalf of Saul to become the king of Israel. (I Samuel 18:6-12) In the end, an evil spirit came upon him (I Samuel 19:9), and he died with his son Jonathan on the mountain of Gilboa.

The people of Israel who breathed through their nostrils asked Samuel for what they wanted; a king who breathes through his nostrils. God accepted their wishes to rely on a king, who breathes through his nostrils, rather than relying on God, and made Saul, who breathes through his nostrils, as the first king of Israel. Saul had the appearance that the people desired as a king, but he did not fear God from the beginning to the end. He feared only those who breathe through their nostrils, without relying on God. He was proud of himself, and passed his responsibility to those who breathe through their nostrils. And the monarchy got confused. Yes, the Israelites relied on Saul who breathed through his nostrils, and Saul feared the people who breathed through their nostrils. There was one thing missing in both, that was to fear God and to rely on Him.

From now on, I think that I will trust people and rely on them. Those who have given me the precious joy and hope in my life are human beings. This will not change from now on. But I do not want to forget this thing. As long as a person is a person, that person is not perfect. The person who I rely on may not be able to respond to my trust. At the same time, I may not be able to respond to the trust of a person who relies on me. We don't need to be suspicious about this at all. Even if it does not comply with our thoughts, even if it is something bad in return for our good deeds, as long as it is done by a human being who breathes through nostrils, it is likely to happen. We are led by experiencing these things over and over again to the fact that the Lord is the only one who we can trust.

The conclusion that we are led to from all the things that we looked at today is

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to not place our confidence in those who breathe through their nostrils, but to place our full trust in the Lord who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and thus made us alive. The people of Israel, the prophets and the kings all remind us of this theme repeatedly. Finally, I would like to finish this message with the words of Jeremiah as follows:

This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

By placing our full confidence in the Lord, we do not lose faith in people. By placing our full confidence in the Lord, we can deepen mutual understanding more and more. Yes, we understand that we are all human beings who breathe through our nostrils, thus allowing us to keep our relationships right with each other.

Let's pray.

Translated by Hideyuki Honda