When I was a little kid growing up in Hong Kong, Chinese New Year is the most exciting holiday of the year. What kid doesn’t like Chinese New Year, right? Well, to be politically correct, it really should be called Lunar New Year, because it’s not just Chinese who celebrates it. It truly has become a global phenomenon.

 I remember not only do we get a whole week off from school and we get the red-envelopes with the lucky money inside, we also get to eat lots and lots of yummy food, especially the food that my grandma made.

It’s my favorite holiday because it involves ALL of our senses...the smell and the taste of the food, the sound of the firecrackers, the festive music, the drum beats, all the color of the lion and dragon dances.

 The Lunar New Year is a time to reconnect with your friends and relatives and to catch up on one another’s lives. The week-long celebration was filled with lots of joy and happiness, full of optimism, well-wishes, and blessing all around.

 The celebration is full of **Joy, Happiness, Optimism, and Blessings.** But our common sense tells us that there are two sides of every coin and we cannot only look at things from the “POSITIVE” angle and not think about the “NEGATIVE” things in life. Just how do we define blessings, from a secular/cultural point of view and from a religious point of view?

 If you remember, last year I share with the kids the Chinese character for “Blessing” - bears great theological significance? It carries the root of “god” on one side and the word “one”, “mouth” and “field or land” on the other. Symbolically, it can be interpreted that it is “G”od who grants us the Oneness or unity of the family. It is God who feeds us by giving us the land and field in which we can grow the food in.

 For us Christians, we would like to interpret this as the God of all creation who fulfills the promises of the future and provides all the blessings that we cherish in our lives.

 **To be blessed does not necessarily mean being happy.** I’d like to distinct the two as **“Happiness is a short-term, momentary kind of thing, whereas Blessedness is a long-term fulfillment and yearning of being content”.** How many of you have seen the movie, *Pursuit of Happyness?* This movie came out a few years ago and it was inspired by a true story in the 80’s. The main character Chris Gardner (played by Will Smith) struggled to keep his life in order while trying to juggle his roles as a father, a husband and an aspired stock-broker. He had high hope and aspiration of someday, and somehow that he would become a successful stockbroker. All he needed was the big “break” and a little bit of luck.

 Well, unfortunately due to series of personal misfortunes and setbacks, his wife decided to leave him and his 7-year old son Christopher. She selfishly went off and pursued her own dream of happiness elsewhere, perhaps with another man. Chris was left with a son, with no job, no home, and no money. Despite the loss of his job, his wife and eventually his apartment, Chris was able to hold on to the only thing that he’s got left – his 7 year old Christopher.

 During his course of pursuit of happiness, Chris was hopelessly disappointed that he did not find the happiness of what this world has to offer. His earthly success did not measure up to the rest of the world’s expectation of him. The world thought of him as the biggest loser and he even had thoughts about committing suicide. But what Chris ultimately did find, however, was more than happiness. He found **True Joy** and **Blessings** through his son whom he cherished and loved dearly.

 **God’s blessings come from all spectrums and perspectives in life....both “positive” and “negative”, and in variety of sizes**. They come in unexpected places, times and circumstances. **God’s blessings become real to us when our faith is being challenged and our hope restored**.

 **Our God is truly a sovereign God who knows all things and can do all things**. God embraces us in God’s blessings everyday of our lives. Through our weaknesses and shortcomings, we would come to depend on God’s strength and hope even more.

 In the Gospel lesson that we read earlier (and some of us had this as a sneak preview in our Bible Study time downstairs last week), we learned that through this familiar text also known as the Beatitude, Jesus taught us how we should live our lives if we want to follow him faithfully as his disciples.

 The word “Beatitude” is derived from the Latin word for “blessing”. Jesus share these spiritual “blessings” in the context of a “prep-rally” talk, reminding many of His disciples whom He had chosen personally. Perhaps some of these disciples were feeling a bit “self-righteous” and “self-worthy” as they became local celebrity in town almost instantly overnight. Many of these were fishermen, they’re not used to seeing a big crowd. All of a sudden, they found themselves in the midst of this big commotion. Everybody wanted to catch a glimpse of who this Jesus is. But Jesus reminded these disciples that **all the glory and honor that they received belong to God and not to themselves.**

 The Beatitude suggests to us that when we are called to follow Christ faithfully, we are committed to live an unconventional, or perhaps even radical life. This is part of the Cost of Discipleship. Our lives may be flipped upside down and inside out. **Our blessedness is defined not by what we already have in life or what our desire to have more of, but rather by what we don’t really need and what we are willing to share with others.** It’s about our **core-value** or our **perspective** and **outlook** in life.

 We consider ourselves blessed when we find ourselves to be at peace in the midst of a chaotic world. We are blessed when we open our hearts to others and show mercy upon those who cry out for it. When all things put aside, we thank God for what we have….as in many of the wedding vows – in sickeness and in health, in plenty and in want. We count our blessings for what we cherished the most in life. And we remain hopeful for what God has already installed for us in the coming future. Simplicity is indeed a bliss!

 ***“Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who hate and persecute you. Woe to those who are rich, those who are full, those who laugh, and those who speak well of you.”***

 **Counting God’s blessing has its ABC’s – that is…. “Always Be Content”.** All of these “Blessedness” in the Beatitude may seem paradoxical and contrary to the social norms of its time. Our culture today often dictates us to think that we should never be satisfied or be content with what we have in life. We have a tendency to compare ourselves with others and there’s a NEED to go one step above and beyond. We’ve turned to our material goods to measure our personal success, gratification and self-worthiness. But does “more” or “bigger” doesn’t necessarily mean better?

 As Christians, part of being embraced in God’s blessing is to be content with what God has already given to us. God will pour out God’s blessings and our cups overflow, just as what we read earlier when God promised to Abrahams that *his descendants will be numerous like the stars in the sky and like sands along the seashore.[[1]](#footnote-1)* Abram was one of the wealthiest men with plenty of livestocks and servants and longevity. On service, he seemed to be a pretty “blessed” man, right? But he had no children! God chose Abram because of his righteousness before God and established a covenant with him and all of his descendants, including you and me, ***“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing [to others].”[[2]](#footnote-2)***

 God’s blessing to us is an eternal sign of God’s covenant and promise and we live our earthly life of contentment and blessedness. As the Apostle Paul reminded us through his letter to the Philippians that “*I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 Through our weaknesses and shortcomings, we come to realize the strength of God of how we may depend upon God’s blessings even more and not our own.

 But in spite of that, God does not want us to be content with whatever there is out there – a world that’s overshadowed by hatred, violence, social injustice and all the other ism’s of our days. God sent Jesus to “mourn” and to redeem the world – a world that has distanced ourselves from God through our human sinful nature. When we “mourn” alongside with those who are experiencing the grievances of society, we are indeed comforted by the Holy Spirit to see the light of hope. No one shall go to bed hungry, both physically and spiritually, until everyone is fed. When we seek “peace” through a world of hatred and violence, it is then, and only then, we shall see one another a brother and sister, and as children of God.

 **Through Abraham, all of God’s children have received the inheritance from God and have become heirs according to God’s promises**. Not only are we able to count all of God’s blessing but we are also called to be blessings to others as well.

 So, **count our blessings** when we take our next step on our feet, take in a lung-full of air, smell the food that’s being cooked in the kitchen, children running around and screaming at each other and making the room a mess, or turning on the TV to watch and listen to some football game tonight? We can truly see and hear the beauty of God’s creation all around us and we are truly blessed indeed.

 As we celebrate the joy, happiness, and blessings during the New Year, let us take time to remember who we are as beneficiaries of God’s promises and blessings as we ***“act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God”.***

 May we continue to keep our eyes and ears opened, keep our minds aware of those around us who are in needs and **think of ways in which we may be a blessing to others, as we remember God’s blessings in our lives**. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Genesis 22:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Genesis 12:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Philippians 4:11-13* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)