

## **Special Needs Ministries**

*Introduction by Audrey Folkenberg, Special Needs Director, Chinese Union:*

*Dear Pastors and Elders and Church Workers, as you share this sermon, please keep in mind that 27 of the 35 recorded miracles of Jesus involved him touching the lives of people with special needs. He cared about ALL people – especially the weak and feeble and those in need. I believe that it was Jesus' tender heart and caring spirit that attracted people - the rich, the poor, the well, the sick, the powerful, the weak, the good, those struggling spiritually, etc.*

*As we live and commit to following God's call for each of us, to do the work of sharing Christ in China so that people will know Jesus and have the peace and joy on earth and have the hope of eternal life that only He can give, how can we move forward without focusing on that which Jesus focused – those in need. In the Old and New Testament we are admonished to care for those with special needs – the sick, the blind, the deaf, the orphans. We must focus on ministering like Jesus did in order to accomplish what He has asked us to do, to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. We must follow His example.*

*I believe we will see God do greater and greater things for His Kingdom in China as we focus on spreading God's Kingdom as Jesus did when He was here on earth.*

## **GOD'S ALL-INCLUSIVE KINGDOM**

**A sermon written by Samuel Telamuque, Director of Special Needs Ministries, IAD,  
adapted by Audrey Folkenberg for use in the Chinese Union Mission**

What is God's thinking toward people with disabilities?

It is necessary to study the scriptures to assess some of the theological underpinnings that make individuals with disabilities special to God and His church. We can anticipate that a greater understanding in this area will clarify our thinking and modify our attitudes toward persons with disabilities. We believe that an understanding of what the Bible says about those with disabilities will inform and inspire our ministry toward persons who live with these conditions.

We were created in the image of God. We bear God's image in our inner spirit rather than in our physical body. This means we were created by God to express or reflect His righteousness, holiness, and love in our lives. These attributes of God's image are distinct from physical abilities or appearances (Genesis 1:26-27). We cannot confuse God's image, meaning His attributes, with our physical abilities or appearances.

The Psalmist declares, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; ... My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; ..." (Psalm 139:14-16). God made our physical bodies. He knows everything about us.

Jeremiah says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart ... Jeremiah 1:5. God has personal and intimate knowledge of us. He is our Creator.

God sees every individual as fearfully and wonderfully made. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at His image--love, righteousness, and holiness--within us. A theology of special

needs ministry challenges us to look beyond human disabilities. We are admonished to appreciate that people **with** and **without** disabilities have been made in the image of God.

The entrance of sin into the world marred the image of God in us. In Romans 5:12 Paul argues that “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.” Today every human being suffers the consequences of Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience. Paul argues further that the whole creation groans, and we also groan, because of Adam and Eve’s sin (Romans 8:22-23).

Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. In Romans 5:19, Paul says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will be made righteous.” Jesus is the only righteous One who can restore the Father’s image in us. He is the only perfect High Priest.

In the Old Testament, the officiating high priest could not be a person with a disability, because the high priest was a representative of Jesus. In Leviticus 21:17-23, we read:

“Say to Aaron: ‘For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the LORD. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them

holy.’”

Some people have used these verses to speculate that God does not value persons with disabilities in leadership. **This is an erroneous and dangerous interpretation of the verses.** The instructions in these verses were confined to the Aaronic priesthood. This was because the high priest was a representative of Jesus—the sinless and perfect High Priest (Hebrews 7:24-27). The focus of these verses is the righteousness and compassion of God toward people with disabilities.

In spite of the restriction, God’s instructions still made provision for priests with disabilities. “He may eat the most holy food of His God yet ... he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar...” (Leviticus 21:22-23).

The death of Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for our sins. There are no more restrictions to people who are able or disabled. We can all come before the throne of grace to receive His righteousness and compassion in our hour of greatest need.

God imparts ability. He knows about disability because He, at least, allows it. For instance, Moses claimed to be “slow of speech and tongue,” but his disability was not a problem to God. It is He who gave the man his mouth. It is He who gives abilities. It is He who gives strength to the weak. Human disabilities are never a problem to God. In response to human disabilities, God declares “... My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness...” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God has always revealed His compassion and power to human beings. Before sin entered into the human race, God revealed His compassion and power to Adam and Eve by making them in His image and likeness. God’s compassion and power were further revealed in the creation of a perfect world with an abundance of food for Adam and Eve to enjoy.

However, the entrance of sin brought with it suffering, pain, grief, and death. While God is not responsible for human suffering, the compassion and power of God are made more manifest in the midst of your human suffering and disabilities. This is why Jesus includes people with disabilities in His Kingdom. In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus reveals the inclusiveness of His Kingdom:

“Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will **be repaid**. However, when you give a banquet, **invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed**. Although they **cannot repay you**, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’”

Jesus teaches an important truth in these verses. People with disabilities are essential to the wholeness of His Kingdom. His kingdom is all-inclusive. In this inclusive Kingdom, His compassion and power are made more manifest in people with disabilities. Therefore, people without disabilities, as well as people with disabilities, are led to ascribe praise to God. In this way, the wholeness of His Kingdom is preserved. The weak give strength to the strong. Conversely, the strong gives a helping hand to the weak. The scripture commands us to “Carry each other’s burdens ...” (Galatians 6:2).

In an article entitled *Ministry to People with Disabilities: A Biblical Perspective*, the author stated that “... the church must protect the helpless, vulnerable, disenfranchised, including people with disabilities. They are people created in God’s image, possessing dignity, values and purpose (p.4).”

God made us in His image so that we may be constant recipients of His compassion and grace. In our weakness, His compassion and power are made more manifest in the world. He invites us to partner with Him to restore His image in fallen humanity and to

give assurance to people with disabilities. “...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness ...” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We call on every member to give urgent attention to people with special needs in his or her community. God allows individuals with special needs to be included in His Kingdom, to draw out our sympathy and awaken our compassion. Also, it is in our weakness that God’s compassion and power are made more manifest in the world.

I conclude this sermon with this question: How would your life be different in the next few months if you would give greater attention to people with special needs within and outside the church?