

## Growth of the Life of Faith

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### Mark

4:26 He was also saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seeds on the ground.  
4:27 He sleeps and gets up night and day while the seeds sprout and grow, although he doesn't know how.  
4:28 The ground produces grain by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.  
4:29 But when the grain is ripe, he immediately starts cutting with his sickle because the harvest time has come."  
[International Standard Version]

In the previous meeting, we learned about the "beginning of our life of faith." Today, I would like to discuss with you the "growth of our life of faith." Let us read the verse 26 again:

### Mark

4:26 He was also saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seeds on the ground."

This verse is about the beginning of the life of regeneration.

### Mark

4:27 He sleeps and gets up night and day while the seeds sprout and grow, although he doesn't know how.

This verse describes how the regenerated persons continue to grow throughout their lives. It is shown in the expression, "seeds sprout and grow." Birth is just the beginning of new life. Likewise, spiritual rebirth is just the first step of our life of faith.

Once the believers are reborn, they have to grow until they obtain the perfect obedience in their faith. The life that follows the will of Jesus; this is the only purpose of being regenerated for humans. In these verses, we can find three rules we need to follow for the growth of our faith.

Firstly, we need to move forward step by step. Secondly, we need to make ourselves grow. Thirdly, it is necessary to look for things that cannot be seen.

To begin with, new life has to grow gradually. In verse 28, we see the words 'first,' 'then' and 'then' again, which, I suppose, implies that spiritual growth is accomplished by following specific steps. It is still true today that it takes time for our faith to grow. This gradual growth is mentioned in many verses from the Bible:

### 2 Corinthians

3:18 As all of us reflect the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, we are becoming more like him with ever-increasing glory by the Lord's Spirit.

"With ever-increasing glory;" this expression implies that our spiritual growth continues gradually in the long term.

### 2 Peter

1:4 ...wonderful promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, seeing that you have escaped the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires.

This verse is written in present tense, which implies that our spiritual growth continues in a step-by-step manner throughout our lives. The growth of our new life takes a lot of time. Therefore, as believers, we need to learn to pray and wait for the spiritual growth of each other with patience.

New life grows little by little, step by step. And the new life grows by itself. It is written in the verse 28, "The ground produces grain by itself." Once the sower has finished sowing seeds, his job is done; he can go home and go to sleep now.

Sowers sow seeds. However, how the sowed seed grows is out of the control of the sowers. Jesus, of course, knew that the period he was allowed to work in this world was limited to three years. Still Jesus never hurried or made haste in anything he did; instead he accomplished his task in this world being filled with peace and joy.

Jesus, of course, knew that the sown seeds of the Words he spoke would absolutely bear fruit when the time came. This attitude of the Lord Jesus tells us how we should act when we feel rushed or tend to get impatient.

Jesus always wants to give us peace in our life of faith. The Word of the Lord helps us to bear everlasting fruit of the spirit, which cannot be obtained by our own effort or our own eagerness. Jesus wants us to be filled with joy as we live waiting eagerly for the time of harvest.

In our life of faith, both of the two following requirements are extremely important. Firstly, we need to serve the Lord as faithfully and enthusiastically as possible. Then, we need to be filled with peace and joy, as we continue looking to the Lord and wait patiently for the Lord to complete His work.

If we lack either of them, our life of faith cannot be regarded as healthy. Wrong zeal often deprives peace of mind from our life of faith. On the other hand, if we take an apathetic attitude, in which we expect that the Lord does all things by himself anyway, it hinders the work of the Lord.

Besides serving the Lord faithfully being filled with joy, we ought to maintain peace of mind within our soul; this well-balanced life of faith is exactly what is required of us.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote:

#### Hebrews

6:10 For God is not so unjust as to forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have ministered to the saints and continue to minister to them.

6:11 But we want each of you to continue to be diligent to the very end, in order to give full assurance to your hope.

6:12 Then, instead of being lazy, you will imitate those who are inheriting the promises through faith and patience.

The right zeal is accompanied with peace of soul that is given by faith. Both of these two aspects are required if we want to lead others to the Lord. I especially want the sisters whose husbands have not accepted the salvation yet, brothers and sisters whose family members have not been saved yet understand this fact.

The life of regeneration grows little by little. Furthermore, it does not grow by human power, but by itself through the power of the Lord. There are three rules that govern the growth of our faith. The first rule is that, as we have just seen, it grows one step at a time.

Secondly, it has to grow by itself. Thirdly, we need to look for things that cannot be seen during that growth. It will absolutely bear fruit one day. It is promised in verse 28. If the good seed falls on the good soil, it will undoubtedly produce a crop when the time comes.

Likewise, this new life will absolutely come to bear fruit someday. However, it is important to wait patiently until it does. This is an extremely severe testing of our lives

of faith. Newly born believers can be compared to newborn babies. Peter wrote:

#### 1 Peter

2:2 Like newborn babies, thirst for the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow in your salvation.

Peter is saying that after being reborn, we are not expected to remain in the state of new babies who need to be taken care of by others forever. But, we need to grow and become complete adults. Paul used an expression, "mature adulthood."

#### Ephesians

4:13 ...until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah.

In order for this to be realized, we need to maintain our patience. Paul truly fought through prayers for the growth of his fellow believers.

#### Romans

1:11 For I am longing to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.

This was a desperate prayer of Paul and his desire. Paul also wrote in his letter to people in Corinth:

#### 2 Corinthians

2:4 I wrote to you out of great sorrow and anguish of heart—along with many tears—not to make you sad but to let you know how much love I have for you.

11:2 I am jealous of you with God's own jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to the Messiah.

11:3 However, I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by its tricks, so your minds may somehow be lured away from sincere and pure devotion to the Messiah.

Paul honestly confessed:

#### 2 Corinthians

11:29 Who is weak without me being weak, too? Who is caused to stumble without me becoming indignant?

To brothers and sisters living in the Galatian area, Paul made clear what was on his mind:

#### Galatians

4:19 My children, I am suffering birth pains for you again until the Messiah is formed in you.

Paul continued to pray truthfully and never stopped struggling for the growth of his fellow believers.

#### Colossians

2:1 For I want you to know how much I struggle for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have never seen me face to face.

So far, we learned about the beginning of our life of faith and then, the growth of our life of faith. Finally, I would like to discuss briefly the outcome of our life of faith. It can be considered from three perspectives.

Firstly, going through trials. Secondly, waiting patiently. Thirdly, looking for things that cannot be seen. Needless to say, not only Paul, but many other people, including John, must have had the same feeling.

#### 1 John

3:2 Dear friends, we are now God's children, but what we will be like has not been revealed yet. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

This exactly is the outcome of our faith, and it is the purpose of our having faith. Everything will be clearly explained at the time of the harvest. There are many different kinds of believers and they are not all the same. All believers have accepted Jesus.

All believers have been recreated through the Word of the Lord and obtained eternal life. However, although all believers share this same experience, the difference arises among them according to what their faith is based upon.

That is to say, some people build their faith with gold, silver or beautiful stones, while others build it with woods, grass and straws. Believers who belong to the first group will absolutely be rewarded by God. Believers who belong to the latter group cannot receive fruit from the Lord.

It is the state of our mind that determines which group we belong to. Even if you believe in the Lord, if you belong to such believers who place a greater importance on your own interest, who place your business ahead of serving the Lord, who care about your own family more than brothers and sisters of the assembly and who spend more time in watching TV than reading the Bible, you cannot expect to be rewarded by the Lord. You never would be.

The Lord always wants to bless us. It depends on

nothing but the attitude within our minds whether the Lord will bless us, whether the Lord can use us in his work and whether the Lord will hear and answer our prayers.

If our sincere wish is for the Lord to be glorified and that we do the exact will of the Lord, the Lord will listen to our prayers and answer them. If we unwisely walk on our own way in life and pray for our own worldly desires, the Lord can neither hear such prayers nor answer them. It is because the best thing that the Lord wants from us is to be transformed into the image of himself. It again takes three things in order for us to be reformed and be transformed into the image of the Lord.

Firstly, to go through many trials. Secondly, to wait patiently. Thirdly, to look for things that cannot be seen.

Jesus gave up his own life on the cross after going through horrible ordeals and sufferings. Although Jesus died as one small seed, through his death, the Lord bore abundant fruit.

Abundant fruit refers to churches as Jesus' body. It also includes all brothers and sisters who were saved by the grace of the Lord. Throughout the 2000 years since that day, this seed has been continuing to grow. However, the time of harvest is approaching. It takes drought for the fruit to ripen. The drought will be most severe before the harvest. In our spiritual growth, drought represents the sufferings and trials we have to go through.

It is at the time of the trials that we should remember that the Second Coming of the Lord is approaching. Trials are the greatest blessing for all believers. Because it is through trials that we are given a chance to understand Jesus better. Let me read another verse. It is chapter 4, verse 17 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. This short sentence clearly explained the secret of spiritual growth to the believers of those days.

#### 2 Corinthians

4:17 This light, temporary nature of our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison.

As most people know, Paul went through so many ordeals. But, in this verse Paul called all his ordeals "light nature of our suffering." That is to say, no matter how hard the ordeals we have to go through, they are of no significance as compared with the glory to come. Now, for whom is "an everlasting weight of glory" mentioned in this verse prepared?

The answer can be found in the next verse, verse 18.

#### 2 Corinthians

4:18 ....because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal.

That is to say, this glory is prepared for us, who do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. "Things that cannot be seen" refer to the weaknesses and shortcomings of ourselves, our family members who have not been saved yet and our friends who still deny the Lord. Abraham, who is called the father of faith, was a man who went through his life looking for things that could not be seen. He was mentioned in these verses from the Epistle to the Romans. This is a truly remarkable promise of God.

#### Romans

4:17 Abraham acted in faith when he stood in the presence of God, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that don't yet exist.  
4:18 Hoping in spite of hopeless circumstances, he believed that....

What does the Lord want from us? The answer can be found in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

#### Ephesians

4:13 ....until all of us are united in the faith and in the full knowledge of God's Son, and until we attain mature adulthood and the full standard of development in the Messiah.

5:27 ....and might present the church to himself in all its glory, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but holy and without fault.

When this purpose of the Lord is accomplished, at that very moment, all believers will be raised to heaven while they are alive, leaving all ordeals and trials they have been suffering behind. Let me read these oft cited verses. We should always keep them in our mind.

#### 1 Thessalonians

4:16 With a shout of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of God's trumpet, the Lord himself will come down from heaven, and the dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first.

4:17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Being with the Lord forever; this exactly is our desire,

our joy and our hope. "Lord Jesus, please come;" this was the heartfelt desire and prayer that all believers in early churches shared. It will be a wonderful blessing if this becomes our desperate desire too.

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