

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
April 10, 2016

Growth by the Word

1 Peter 2:1-2

2:1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Do you do Memory Verse? It is to memorize the Bible verse and recite it. Usually we memorize a few verses but sometime it extends to a whole paragraph or chapter. There is even a Memory Verse competition in US. This morning, we would like to memorize 1 Peter 2:2.

One of the tips of memorizing the Bible verse is to understand the structure of the verse. It is helpful to look at the subject, verb, object, and how these words are connected. The main verb of this verse is “long for” in the imperative mode; form of command or request. There is no subject. But you have to understand that it is God who commands it and it is us who observe it. We don’t want to just memorize the whole thing but we want to understand what, how and why “to long for” and memorize the verse.

1. Spiritual Food

What we should long for is spiritual milk. Babies receive oxygen and nutrition from their mothers in the wombs but once they are born, they start getting oxygen and drinking milk with their mouth. If babies don’t drink milk, that is worrisome. They may not only grow but may

die. For babies, milk is what supports their life.

For born-again Christians, milk is God's word. "Spiritual milk" is "logikos gala" in the original language, and "logikos" means logical and principally in addition to spiritual. The ultimate logic or principal for our life and the world is God's word. God's word is the word of principal and truth as well as the word of love and comfort. Therefore, we can translate "logikos gala" to "milk of the word". It may be easier to understand this word. In English, King James and New King James, and in Japanese, New Japanese Translation translate it to "milk of the word". As Lord Jesus said in Mathew 4:4 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God", our spiritual food is God's word.

God's word is spiritual food not only because it gives us comfort, encouragement and wisdom of life. If it were only for that reason, you don't need to use the Bible. You can quote words of wisdom from various books. There are many books of famous quotations. If you take a look at a handy planner for businesspersons, you can see a word of wisdom on every page that motivates their business. These words can certainly stimulate and encourage the person, but they cannot provide the ultimate truth. Furthermore, these words do not teach God, who is the source of life, created human and make them alive. But the Bible is the Word of God, who gives us a spiritual life, support it, and nurture it.

The Bible is called "God's word" not only because it describes God but also God himself talks to us through the Bible. We are made alive and nurtured by God's action of speaking to us. God said, "Let there be light" and created this world through his mighty word. His word

contains His power and life. When we believe and listen to it, it makes us new and changes our lives. Those who had been entertaining only themselves and seeking for a short-term pleasure have been changed to start seeking for the meaning of life and purpose of living. Those who had felt empty in their life have started tackling their own agenda. Those who had been desperate have been given a strong step forward. We hear so many testimonies around us and all over the world. I am sure all of you are strengthened and made alive through God's word. Let's share the testimonies to each other and long for God's word, which is our food of life.

2. Spiritual Growth

Next, let us learn about the purpose of "longing for" the Word of God. It is the spiritual growth of us as written as "that by it you may grow up into salvation." For the growth of people who were born by the the Word of God. According to 1 Peter 1:23, you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. We believe in Jesus Christ, born again, and saved. However, that is not the goal. New born is not a goal, it is a beginning. The growth starts from there and aims for the completion.

We feel happy for a birth of baby and celebrate for it. But to be born safely is not the goal. A baby has to live way longer than he/she was in his/her mother's womb. The mother begins a duty called "nursing" right after giving a birth. Giving a birth is not the goal, it is the beginning. It is the same for all Christians, "To be born again" is not the goal, it is the beginning. If your baby does not grow up at all, how you feel about that? Likewise, God, our spiritual Parent, desires

our spiritual growth. God gives us His words because he wants His children to become like Jesus, His begotten Son.

For the spiritual growth of Christians, God prepared the spiritual food in His church. We gather in the worship service and hear the same God's Word together and grow up together. At your home, you prepare the well balanced meals because of the growth of your children. Your children don't like some food you prepare. But it was prepared for your children's health. If your children eat only their favorite foods, they can not grow up properly. Your children grow up in the warm environment but with discipline. Likewise, the children of God gather at the same place and time, share the spiritual food.

Studying the Bible together at church gives you the directions for your personal Bible study. It helps you to understand the Bible deeply when you read and study the Bible by yourself.

Christians, who experienced “born again” and received the baptism, you just left the beginning of the salvation. You are heading to the goal of “becoming like Christ”. Let us long for the Word of God and pray for our spiritual growth.

3. Spiritual Hunger

Then, how shall Christian people long for the Word of God, “to grow spiritually?” You may long for them “like newborn infants.”

However, it doesn't mean you can remain like a baby forever and ever. In Hebrews 5:12, says, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food...” Babies are only able to drink milk at first, and later they can eat weaning food, and

tough things after all. Likewise, Christian people also have to be able to eat solid foods, not just drinking milk. That is, they have to deepen their understanding about the Bible after learning basic principles.

In present generation, lots of philosophies and thoughts rejecting God and the absolute truth. When you study at university, you may especially encounter those contrary concepts. If you have already learned the Bible doctrines systematically and understood enough, you may not get confused and stay clear of incorrect direction. I truly hope everyone, not only young people but also all generation, would learn the Bible doctrines systematically.

“Like newborn infants,” as written here, both young and elderly Christian people should long for the Word of God like the babies having large appetite. Infants, the babies until first month after birth, cannot drink much at one time, so that they need to drink milk many times a day. “Like newborn infants,” therefore many times a day, we should long for the Word of God. In Psalm 119:164, says, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.” Seven times means “continuously,” or “many times.” Like that Psalm, we shall open the Bible many times a day, longing for His words.

My wife made a poetry after listening to a preacher;

How good it is,
the preaching of the person
who loves God and people,
loves Gospel,
and clutch the Bible as the absolute truth...
it makes my heart alive!

My own heart was also made alive listening to His message. We had a fellowship with the preacher for 30 years until he passed away in 2012. He was the person who recommended us Dallas for studying abroad. I was truly encouraged when we met again on November, 1906. The reason why we felt our hearts alive was hardly that from human relationship, but his preaching delivers God's Word exactly as in the Bible.

As an Old Testament prophets told in Amos 8:11, "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land-- not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD," our present time is the days of poverty of God's words. In recent churches, people prioritize other events than God's Word, and people barely experience to feel alive through His Word. Lots of leading pastors all over the world maintain that same opinion and concern about it. At the time we met the pastor, our friend, we also had hunger for God's words. That's why we were very touched while listening to his message, and we determined again to long for the pure Word of God in the days of poverty.

Could we memorize this verse? This week, we should memorize it day by day, and I hope the more we memorize this, the more grown your hearts for longing His words, and let us be the ones who open the Bible and gather in the church ever more. beginning. The growth starts

(Prayer)

Dear Father, You not only give us new life as "born again Christian," but also feed and nourish us by the Bread of the Word. "Growing up

into salvation” is Your promise as well as our goal. If we put Your words in first priority, and are nourished by Your words, then we will surely grow up and be completed of salvation. We believe this and long for Your words. May Your words make us alive and nourish us, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.