

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
October 8, 2017

In the Grace of God

1 Peter 5:12-14

5:12 By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

5:13 She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.

5:14 Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

1. Born-again As a Staring Line

We've been learning from the 1 Peter in these Sundays, and we reach the last part. Each word of these verses has important meaning, but I'd like to speak from the phrase, "Stand firm in the grace of God." instead of covering all sentences of today's reading.

"The grace of God" — this is the grace of the salvation. The grace of the salvation is so rich. It contains repentance, forgiveness, holiness, healing, protection and support in trials, inheritance of heaven, and so on. There are many graces of the salvation, but I want to talk about the grace of born-again, today. Because our salvation starts from born-again like our life begins from the birth. We value born-again. Our hymnal's title is "Shinsei Sambika" that means born-again hymnal. This hymnal was edited according to the belief that any hymns, gospel songs, and praise songs should be sung by born-again

people as their testimonies. We emphasize born-again because many people that have exchanged faith in Christ for another kind of belief system that has not started from born-again.

Many years ago, faith that is the living relationship with God was exchanged for just to join in a religion or the membership of the church. In recent years, knowing and worshiping God and living according the will of God have been replaced with participation in activities and events or charity works of the church. But if it does not start from born-again, it never leads you to heaven. At first we cannot recognize the difference between what starts from born-again and what does not starts from it. Sometimes non-born-again people are more active in church activities and look happier than born-again people. However the difference will be recognized soon. It will be obvious when we stand before God at the last time of our life.

The goal of Christian is heaven. And the start line is born-again. Therefore we need to check ourselves seriously, asking, "Have I started from born-again?" or "Am I standing at the right start-line?" We cannot reach the right goal without standing the right start line. Peter wrote, "Stand firm in the grace of God." and the word, "stand firm" means "stand," "stop," and "stand still." Then the meanings meanings such as "be confirmed," "be established," "stand firm," and "hold one's ground" derived from the word. To say nothing of importunateness of walking and living in the grace of God, Christians need to stand firm in the grace for waling justly and living with strength. Then, Peter encouraged Christians to stand firm in the grace of born-again, the start line of the believers, and to walk by faith.

2. Born-again As the Work of God

Our Lord Jesus himself taught about born-again, saying, “Truly, truly. I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3. Instead of “Truly, truly, I say to you”, originally it said “Amen, amen, I say to you.” The word “Amen” means “truth.” This does not mean just “true thing.” This is the word that true God is telling very important truth for our lives wholeheartedly. Therefore we shouldn’t hear these words without paying attention, but listen to the word seriously.

Many people wish and try hard, saying, “I want to do over my life like born again”, “I want to change myself to an ideal image.” But, reality does not work this way. Soon you give up your determination, come to nothing, your nature and personality you do not like come back, and you think of what God is not happy with you. Even you are doubtful that the word “Born again” would ever happen.

Then our Lord Jesus says, “Amen, amen, truly, truly I say to you” one more time, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5) “Born of water and the Spirit” reminds us of Genesis 1:1-2. It says “In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The earth is as long as we know a only planet with abundant water, and waters nurse lives. When scientists look for lives on another planets, they check if there are waters as a clue. Because water is essential for lives. The Bible also put water and lives together. But, the Bible teaches us the work of “the Spirit of God”, beside scientists say. The word of “hovering” over

which is used in “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” means that parent birds sit over eggs, and protect chicks with their feather. This tells us, “the Spirit of God”, “Holly Spirit” in the New Testament, created lives on the earth using waters as medium.

Like this, the Holly Spirit remakes human beings anew and makes them re-born. Therefore, “Born again” can be said “re-creation.”. 2Corinthians 5:17 said “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passes away; behold, the new has come.” And Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

“Born again” is also expressed as “resurrection.” 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, “Blesses be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” The one who died in sin was given a life again, resurrected, and lives the new life. This is an astonishing matter. Human power never can do this. Only the Almighty God can resurrect Jesus Christ from the dead. And, with Jesus Christ, God resurrected us who believe in Jesus Christ. This is the blessing of “Born again”.

We become God’s children by this “born-again”. God loves us so much calling us “my children”, and we become to love God so much calling Him “Father”. Not only this. As children inherit parents’ assets, the God makes us God’ children who inherit “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading assets kept in heaven for us.” What is “an

inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading”? That is surely beyond our imagination. Fanny Crosby sang this in “Blessed Assurance.” (Hymn #544)

Blessed assurance; Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Surely God’s children are the “Heirs of salvation.” Not only we inherit things kept in heaven, but also we are allowed to foretaste them on earth. Though, “born again”, ”re-creation”, “resurrection” are beyond our knowledge, the grace of “Born again” not only keeps pouring God’s love over us , also promise the eternity.

Science can solve the result of creation and phenomenon of life. But “born-again” cannot be judged by science. “Conversion” happened along with “born-again” could be explained some psychologically, but not wholly. In the Bible, “wind” and “the Spirit” are expressed as the same word, therefore, our Lord Jesus compare the work of the Spirit with the wind, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8) “Born-again” is the work of the Holy Spirit and it is mystery.

3. Born-again and Our Faith

However, the Scripture says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12) “He” indicates Jesus Christ. The Scripture says that the

people who believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, will re-born and become the children of God. In 1 Peter 1:8-9, “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” The salvation is given as a result of faith in Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 1:23, “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” In Roman 10:17, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” According to these verses, if you hear the Word of God and believe it, it will lead you to “born-again”.

When we are born in this world, we could not have choices of time, countries, and parents. “I was born” as you can see, this is the passive. However, when we re-born in heaven, our will and wish works. God gives us “born-again” when we hear the word of God and receive the baptism. The Holy Spirit will work for us during this process. If you have not received baptism, you can start to seek for “born-again” by starting to walk on the way to baptism.

If you have already received baptism, you shall remember that baptism is a sign of new-born. We shall remember why God chose us and what God expects for us. We also shall remember our mission and duty as “witnesses” and priests. By making sure the meaning of baptism, you can be true worshipers in the Spirit and the truth, whom God seeks, and be witnesses who share the grace of salvation with people.

“Born-again” is the important doctrine of the Bible. However, we

shall not leave it as just “one of the teachings.” “Born-again” must be our “experience” as believers in Jesus Christ. According to 1 Peter 5:12, “By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.” In this letter, Peter did “preach,” “teach,” and “exhort,” but also “testify” the grace. If the grace of God is just preached, it does not have meaning by itself. It will have meaning for you when it becomes an experienced of faith. Let us seek and pray that more people live by the grace of God while we are standing firm in the grace and testifying it.

(Prayer)

Dear God Father, You make those who believe in Jesus Christ “born-again” people and children of God by the Holy Spirit. Your love is filled in the grace of “born-again.” We find the power by which we live. Please teach us the privileges, duties, and responsibilities, and the greatness of the grace, and make us share the grace with people. In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.