**Grow!**

**Sermon – May 19, 2019**

Dear beloved, in the last few months, we studied the seven letters sent by our Lord Jesus Christ to seven congregations in Asia Minor. In these letters, the Lord introduced Himself and explained who He is. He praised the congregations for what they did very well. He also rebuked them for their shortcomings, and explained to them in which ways they should correct their behaviours to stay connected to Him and to survive the difficulties. They were advised what they have to do to grow in faith, in numbers, and to get stronger as congregations. At the end of every letter, the Lord assures His people about the glory they will receive after finishing their race victoriously.

1. **The Lord introduced Himself and explained who He is for us.**

* These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.
* Who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again;
* Who has the sharp, double-edged sword.
* These are the words of Him who is holy and true
* These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

1. **Christ praised the congregations for what they did very well.**

* I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people.
* You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary.
* I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!
* I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to My name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city.
* I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.
* I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

1. **Christ rebuked the members of those congregations for their shortcomings.**

* I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.
* You tolerate those who hold false teachings.
* You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.
* You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
* You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet, who by her teaching, misleads my servants into sexual immorality. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

1. **The Lord Jesus Christ explained to them how they should correct their behaviours to stay connected to Him and to survive the difficulties.**

* Consider how far you have fallen!
* Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against you with the sword of my mouth.
* I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich; the gold here means FAITH.

1. **They were advised what they have to do to grow in faith, in numbers and to get stronger as congregations.**

* Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
* Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die. Remember what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.
* Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.
* I am coming soon. Hold on to your faith, so that no one will take your crown.

1. **At the end of every letter, the Lord assures His people about the glory they will receive after finishing their race victoriously.**

* Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.
* To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
* The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.
* To the one who is victorious, I will give a white stone with a new name written on it.
* Those who have not soiled their clothes will walk with Me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.
* The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will acknowledge that name before My Father and His angels.
* Since you have kept My command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.
* For the one who is victorious, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. I will write on them the name of my God, … and I will also write on them my new name.
* Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.
* To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on His throne.

All seven letters conclude with a significant sentence which has a similar meaning: **Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

As you remember, I shared with you a questionnaire, which contained the letter and some questions, and I asked you kindly to think about those questions and to bring them back to me to see what our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit said to you about our congregation.

I shared with this congregation about 600 questionnaires, and I got back quite a few. I hope that maybe you were one of those who handed in at least one of the questionnaires. There was one common request: we would like to continue to grow in faith and to get stronger as a congregation.

We all know the importance of growing. When we plant a seed or a flower, we are eager to see the plant growing. We admire how they grow every day and rejoice seeing the changes.

In 2 Peter 3:18, we are commanded to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” This growth is spiritual growth, growing in faith.

Dear beloved, we all are here, worshipping and praying, and listening to our God’s message, because we all want to belong to Him, to our loving and everlasting Heavenly Father. We are here because we acknowledged that our Saviour is our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the moment when we received Christ as our Saviour, we decided to belong to God’s family and were “born again” spiritually.

I was 19 when I made a clear decision to offer my whole being to Jesus Christ, who loved me so much that He gave up even His life for me to be my Redeemer. I already knew a lot about the Bible. I was examined from my Biblical knowledge, and I got an A+. I knew the Bible and God’s requirements with my head, but those did not touch my heart as much before.

When both my brain and my heart, my knowledge, and my feelings were touched and connected to my Lord Jesus, I decided to offer Him my whole being and to serve Him for the rest of my life. I already noticed that the Holy Spirit started to touch my feelings differently and I had a clearer understanding about my sin, my mistakes, and it was clear what kind of changes I had to make in my own life to be a good servant of our Lord.

In those days, weeks and months, I felt like a new born baby. Then day by day, I got stronger in my faith and commitment, and I was able to understand God’s requirements as hard foods. I was able to understand that our God is the God of love, but He is the God of Ten Commandments, and He requires obedience from me. A newborn baby requires nourishing milk for growth and good development, but as the baby grows, his diet has to change to grow healthily.

I don’t know if you are still a newborn Christian and you feel still spiritually like a baby, or would you say that you are a maturing Christian, enjoying solid food? In 1 Peter 2:2-3 we read: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” In the Bible, milk is the symbol of what is basic to the Christian life, to a newborn Christian.

As a baby grows, its diet changes to also include solid foods. With this in mind, please listen how the writer of Hebrews admonishes us: “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” Hebrews 5:12-14. Paul saw the same problem with the Corinthian believers; they had not grown in their faith, and he could only give them “milk” because they were not ready for solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

A baby Christian will only grow as much as he purposefully reads and obeys and applies the Word of God to his life. Your spiritual growth up to you.

I met Christians in and around the churches, who many years ago decided to follow Christ and worship Him, but they look still like babies. They did not want to embrace the deeper truths of the Word of God. They were happy to see the surface of the Bible but had a hard time to go deeper into God’s truth and His requirements.

I am asking you kindly and gently, and also with love and being responsible for you as your minister: are you one of those Christians who accepted Christ saved many years ago, but spiritually you are still a baby? Can you understand the deeper truths of the Word of God and are you obeying His requirements with a humble heart?

The truths taught in the Bible are rich food for Christians. Peter wrote that God had given us everything we need for life through our growing. As we heard in 2 Peter 1:3-11, Peter lists character qualities that we have to add to our faith for maturity to take place and to have a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Next Sunday we will have a Renewal and Revitalization Sunday workshop and I am asking you kindly to come and join us prayerfully so we might grow together in Christ. Amen