

“Growing in Faith”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, August 6th, 2017

Please be seated. It's good to see everyone this morning. You may be seated.

It's great to be out here this morning, and I know that our brother, Parrish—Parrish and Andy, for those of you that don't know, they're our fellowship leaders up here, but Parrish is in Baltimore, I believe, this week-end. Malcolm doesn't know. He's not here, let's just put it like that. Family reunion somewhere in Maryland, I believe.

So, we covered the book of First Thessalonians last month; that was our theme of the month. And, this month, we're going through the book of Second Thessalonians. Our theme verse for this month is found in the book of Second Thessalonians, chapter one, verse 5:

2 Thessalonians 1:5 *Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:*

Part 1 – Lord, Increase our Faith

I think we've all heard the analogy that, of what it takes to be more physically healthy in life, eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, work out regularly, and so on and so forth. The message today is not about physically getting healthier or exercising; but I will say that there is nothing wrong with that, I think it's important. We're in church so it obviously makes sense that what we're going to address spiritual matters, and that's going to be one of my goals. Not just because I'm saying it, or because the Bible teaches it, but how often are we actually thinking about growing stronger in God? How high on our priority list is growing in the faith? I would have to say that, as I was preparing this, I have to admit that, as I was thinking about it, that I probably don't think about it as much as I should, and that's not to make any excuse, because God's not looking for any excuses. But I think sometimes we get caught up in the routines of daily living, routines of life. And, sometimes, things seem to be a little monotonous or whatever the case might be, but, getting back to the analogy as far as working out and taking care of ourselves, it should be just as important, and, I would venture to say, even more important. God isn't looking for my excuses and God isn't looking for anyone else's, for that matter. He's looking for us to grow stronger in Him. We don't want to become stagnant, and we don't want to become lukewarm, and we've got to challenge ourselves, and that's not always easy. Because, sometimes, we might be able to just say I don't want to take it this far, I only want to grow this much, I only want to lift this much, or I only want to do this much without stretching the boundaries, without stretching the defenses, as they say, without stretching our own expectations, or what we might think of our own limitations. I ask if you would turn with me to the book of Luke 17, one through five. It's a common passage. I think a lot of us here have probably read this before, or heard about it, seen it, heard somebody teach it or preach it.

Luke 17:1-5 *Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him...*

And, I would say, don't forget what we just read. But that's not the gist of what passage I want to make reference to. Verse 5:

Luke 17:5 ...*And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

Would you bow your heads in a word of prayer with me?

God, we prayed this morning, we sang. We dismissed the children, God, to class, and shared announcements, God, and caught up with the day to day business, Lord God, and talked about the coming visit. Lord God. Right now, we just want to come to you, Lord God, and ask God for an anointing on this service, God. We ask that you would anoint all of our ears, God anoint all of us, Lord, God, that we take Your Word seriously that we would hear what You would have for us and gain a greater understanding, God, and take Your Word seriously God. We don't want to grow stagnant, God, we don't want to become redundant, we don't want to be lukewarm, Lord God. We just ask that You would inspire us, that You would give us an understanding, that You would give us that anointing that is needed God to continue to allow us to grow. We just want to ask these things in Your name, Jesus, amen.

I would venture to say that for the sake of trying to grow stronger in God and to increase our faith, it's really not going to matter what the circumstances around us are. We should always be looking to grow stronger, and I don't think that requires a lengthy explanation as to why, it's just something that, as we see the need, as we see the importance, as we see that that's what's going to save our souls. In a world that, we look around, and it just does seem to be more sin? The Bible talks about, and we've made reference to this before, that because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. We see the signs around this, but how many signs do we really need? How much more violence? Or how much more dissatisfaction, or how many more conflicts, or how many more terrorist attacks do we need to get our attention? Have you ever felt lean in your soul? It's not a comfortable place. I would actually say it's downright unsettling. And, I would say that it should shake us to the very core of our being.

I am going to ask Jennifer Fuentes if she could come up. She's going to read from a passage in the Book of Psalms, chapter six, verses ten through fifteen. Sin has a way of weakening us that actually will just take the very breath right out of us. And I say that from experience. Some might say, "So what are you saying?" Nothing more than all have sin and fallen short of the glory of God. But guess what, I'm still here. Thank God that we're all still here. Go ahead, Jennifer.

Psalm 106:10-15 *And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

Thank you. This is a timeless passage. It talks about the history, how that Israel had come through, out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and into the Wilderness of Sin. But it makes reference to how, at first, they were gleeful. They were excited, they were happy, they were thankful. But the key verse says they soon forgot His works, and they waited not for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness. And that part where it says, and God gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul. We can't live like that and think that we're going to be strong in our soul. And this translates to any time, any generation, any point in history. that's not just back then, that's not just thousands of years ago. We all have a soul. And yet we need to be strong in our souls. And this is a powerful example of what happens when we do the exact opposite of what we want to do to increase our faith.

But I would say that if you find yourself forgetting what God has done for your life, ask God to bring things into your remembrance. Ask God to bring those milestones to these different victories along the way, and He, and maybe even those different setbacks, those things that build our character. But I don't like setbacks, or losses, or defeat or whatever way you want to put it any more than anybody else. It's a matter of how we rise up again. A righteous man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked shall fall into mischief. And that's Scripture. But sometimes we grow impatient in our desire to seek and to make things happen. Sometimes we look around and wonder what's going on, and sometimes I do the same. It's not as though—we're all susceptible to the same kind of, trying to see that the ministry does well, that the ministry prospers, that we see growth, like Andy had talked about. Sometimes it pains my heart, it pains our heart when we don't see it as much as we'd like to, or as much as we think we should. We have the truth of God. What else do we want? What else do we are we expecting and who else are we looking to turn to? And then the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life starts to infiltrate. And I know it's not popular preaching or teaching. It's not even something I really want to talk about. I'd rather just sing more songs. But I have to say that we're going to be tested over and over. It's not a matter of it's just going to happen occasionally, or it's just going to happen on a rare occasion, or just once. It's going to happen again and again and again. Not to a breaking point; we're going to talk about breaking points a little bit later. I've got a little clip out of a film that I want to show, just a brief one, a little bit later on. But I'll say this, I know that life in general can tire us all out. How many ever felt that way? Just the things that we come across and whether it's taxes, or whether its work situation, or whether it's conflict in a workplace, or in family, or whatever the case, or relationships. Or we don't get the things that we want when we think we should get them. Or we look around and we see others that might have things that we think, "Well, I deserve that. I deserve to have that, too." And if we don't get it, we get impatient or we get angry. But I've seen it a million times, and I know we all have, too: And, yet, God is going to honor that request when we ask him to increase our faith. I'm gonna ask you to turn with me to second Thessalonians chapter one verses one through five. We're going to be going over the book of Second Thessalonians chapter one today.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

So there is going to be suffering, but it's not always just that. And, I think, sometimes, people on the outside looking in, if they're thinking or assuming that that's the way it's going to be, that's a false assumption because there is a balance. The Bible also talks about peace, which passes all understanding. Or about God doing exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think, and I believe that. I believe that; I've seen examples of that. But I know that we've all seen on the other end of the scale. And I would say just naturally, we're all going to want to live where it's easiest. Where it's most comfortable. Where we don't have to challenge ourselves because, God knows, we get enough challenges along life's way as it is. But I would still say we need to challenge ourselves. So, what's it going to take to increase our faith? It's no mystery. Walk in the spirit and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh, pray without ceasing, study to show ourselves approved unto God. Seek the fellowship and, like Andy had shared about, seek the different opportunities that come along. And those aren't the only things, but there's structured events and things that even come up spontaneously. Getting together with somebody that's not necessarily written down on the calendar, those are the kind of things that we're

talking about. Visiting the shut-ins. These are the kind of things that are going to put oil in our lamp. It's not complicated, it's not that difficult. But, it's obvious there's a lot more people that don't want to do it than do. The fields are white to harvest, but the laborers are few. But we're not going to let, and we can't let the course of this world, which will lead to the destruction of our soul, prevent us from living soberly, godly, and righteously in this present world.

Part 2 – Revenge

Getting even; sweet revenge! Nothing quite like that, right? I mean, that is, if we weren't Christians, there'd be nothing like that. That's not a trick statement by the way.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 *Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;*

But, I'm just tired of waiting to see justice prevail. That's all I really want is to see justice prevail.

2 Peter 3:9-12 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

But we want to get revenge on anybody that's ever done us wrong. We want to get revenge on anybody who's ever wronged our country or our ethnic group or someone in our family. We want to get revenge on ex-employers, on ex-spouses. We want to get revenge on people we don't even know, but we've heard about on the news: murderers, rapists, armed robbers, pedophiles. We see these images, we read these articles, we read about things on the internet, or somebody tells us about them and it enrages us. It brings in that raw emotion. Even sports teams. Even sports teams. I mean, some of us can relate to that a little bit. Our team gets beat, we want to kill that team the next go around, I know that's a little more on the comical side of things. But, I want to share something personal. I know that a lot of us have been alive long enough to remember 9/11, to remember the incidents of 9/11 and the aftermath. And probably seen different movies. See the images, seen the stories, seen the things in the newspapers showed the images of the plane hitting the Pentagon and just the carnage that followed. And, I remember, probably a couple of weeks after that happened, there was also a time where anonymous letters filled with anthrax, which is a poisonous chemical which, whenever the receiver would open it, it would kill them, basically, based on the inhalation of the fumes. And it just seemed to be as though things were getting really out of control really quickly. Does anybody remember that time probably about a month afterwards, that—? Also, around that time there was a bounty placed on the head of Osama Bin Laden. Does anybody remember the amount? 25 million, that's right. It was the largest bounty ever placed on anybody in the history of this country. And that man became the face of evil for a long time. There was a war started in Afghanistan. And I'm not here to politicize or get too deep into that, but here's what I want to share is: So many times we'd see the images that that man and

I've got to share something: Our General Pastor, Pastor Paine, most of us know him, some don't, but he has shared this in times past: We can't always put a face on evil. Because if we just look at somebody and just say, "That's it, right there; that's the target." But I'm going to share something: at the time when that occurred, I had been a Christian for close to 15 years. So, fairly well along in my question life, and it's not like I had just been baptized just the week before, so... So as the wars were going on, the hunt for this man was taking place. I remember thinking, when they finally caught him, it was 2009, if I'm not mistaken, 2010, maybe, so it was a number of years. There were many others of his underlings, other parts of that group, which was Al Qaeda, which was prior to ISIS. That were captured and taken to Gitmo in Cuba. But I remember thinking when I finally heard about the news of his capture, this is what I was thinking. So now I'm talking about 20 years into the faith. My hope, and I'm just being honest with you, was that they would take Osama Bin Laden to downtown New York in Times Square and hang him, publicly, because of the pain and the tragedy that he inflicted on people in this country, thousands of people died, that's what I felt like. That's my honest-to-God belief, but I wasn't in control of that. I'm just sharing that because we're talking about vengeance is God's. But, sometimes, we think about these things we hear about these things. I mean, I asked Pete, he's gonna play a clip. I want to share something prior to him playing this. There is a statement in this clip—it's about a two and half minute clip—where it says good does not always triumph, wrongs aren't always righted, and justice does not always prevail.

(Played clip from Apocalypse Now)

I know this is from the movie; it's based on actual events. And for those that couldn't hear everything, it was an exchange between a general and a captain that takes place during the Vietnam War. And one of the things he talked about on the this mission that he was assigning him was that you're going to run into things, and things happen in this war, and things happen in in this life, that good does not always triumph, justice does not always prevail, and wrongs are not always righted in the way we think they should be in this world. We look at a biblical examples. I'm going to ask Ed Kretzer if he could come up, he's going to read in the book of Romans chapter twelve. But we look at Biblical examples of John the Baptist who was beheaded. We look at Stephen, who was stoned in the Book of Acts. We look at Joseph and Jeremiah that were imprisoned. We look at the Fox's Book of Martyrs, and you just see example, after example, and there's more modern examples. There's a book I started reading recently—Brother Alex, I had talked to him, I had talked about this to him. It was about the prison camps in the Soviet Union, the former Soviet Union. The book is called The Gulag Archipelago. An archipelago is just a series of islands. And what it represents is all the work camps that were scattered across Siberia. When I talked to Alex, he just said, I read some of it, but I just couldn't believe how much killing was there. That's his home country, that's his native land. Then I read Uncle Tom's cabin, and that's a book about slavery that was written in the 1850's. And you see about the mistreatment of the people. You see about the inhumanity of what went on. There is a book called Exodus that talks about the concentration camps in Germany, and how many people were genocided over a short period of time. Brother Ed, if you could read Romans chapter 12 verse 19 to 21, please.

Romans 12:19-21 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Thank you. So, praying for my enemies and treating them well is definitely not what I had in mind, and I would have to say, probably, the rest of us, too. It seems like the exact opposite of what a

righteous God would expect from us. Especially since we're His children, and, if they're our enemies than they're His enemies. Are we considering anybody that we've ever done wrong, but we look at that equation. Because I thought at times of those that I've done wrong, really, especially before I became a Christian, but, I mean, I would say I've said the wrong thing or done the wrong thing, and, I'm not talking about something that's going to land me in prison, or anything that's going to end up in court. But, even we talked about early on in the book of Luke, where, like, the disciples and the apostles actually asked about, "Lord increase our faith." That first part of it, He talked about offenses will come. They're going to come, they're going to happen, but for those who have done us wrong, are we utilizing the power of God to deal with it and wait for God to exact his revenge? Not being vengeful doesn't mean we don't protect ourselves, or we just become people's doormats, or we're looking for—we're looking to be offended. If you're looking to be offended you're in the wrong business. And I'm not thinking that anybody here is, but it's possible. I know there's people out there that are always just chomping at the bit, just ready to try to express that, how much they feel like they've been done wrong in some way shape or form, whether it was not getting a certain job, or not getting into a certain college, or not getting a relationship with somebody that they like and they feel like, "Well, I was bypassed or whatever the case might be where, it just seems to be an unfairness and an injustice that has occurred, but I'll tell you this much: The next statement here. It is going to be one of the most important points in this part, two, and I'd suggest keeping it in mind going forward. Thinking about revenge is one thing, but plotting it is an entirely different thing altogether. And I want to say that again. Just thinking about what I personally wanted to do to Osama Bin Laden, and I'm sure, probably a lot of us do—felt that way—probably a lot of people across America, especially—I didn't lose any friends or family, I didn't know anybody that died in those attacks, at all. They had lists and I remember going through, and thinking, "Well, maybe there's somebody that I knew, that may have been from my hometown, or somebody I came across at some point in life, not one, not one person. And yet if I felt that way, how do I think those that lost probably more than one or many acquaintances, or friends, loved ones, and so on and so forth. Probably were beside themselves with anger and rage. We're talking about revenge. But, I just want to say it one last time before we go on to the next and last point, thinking about revenge is one thing, but plotting it is something else altogether, and we can't lose sight of that fact that it's God that exacts revenge on our behalf, and it's not our position.

Part 2 ½ – Power from on High

This is kind of a shorter point, but I figured I'd call it 2 and a half, Power from on High. God's power is available to us 24/7. We don't have to wait for a prayer meeting, although to attend it is a good idea. We don't have to wait for a fellowship gathering, but it's a good idea, or a church service, that's a good idea. It's important to build up a pattern of good works. It's important to not just show our face. Because ultimately it's God we are trying to please. But, I mean, how much of an effort are we making to get to these different functions? How much of an effort are we making, and not just get to go to functions where it's a little more public? But get to functions, or get to things where nobody else knows about it whatsoever. Nobody else has any idea whether you did it. It was just from the heart. It was something that you chalk it up to jewels in heaven, that's all I can say. What other way is there to look at it? But the title of the sermon today is Growing In Faith. And I hope you take away today is a desire to grow stronger in God. We're going to look at our last verse today. It's from Second Thessalonians; it's the very last part of that same chapter, versus 10 to 12.

2 Thessalonians 1:10-12 *When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray*

always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That power from God is going to allow us to be the ones who, probably, pay out the most compliments to people, that go the extra mile, that sometimes pick up after somebody else, that forgive with no strings attached, that turn the other cheek. And that power of God gives us strength to face another day to continue to fight the good fight of faith, to endure to the end, to see this thing through, to not grow weary in well doing, to not look back and say, "Oh well, the world's got something so much more to offer." We live in the world, I get it, we all get it. And I'm not against enjoying times. I'm not against spending time with family and friends, or going out to a good restaurant, or taking a road trip, or whatever hobbies you have. But we have to make sure that our top priority is growing in God. And again, it's going to take challenges; it's going to be challenging. It's not a piece of cake. That's not looking for it to be just oh, I was laying on the couch and I metamorphosed, and that's how it's going to happen. That's not how it's going to happen. I'm not against laying on the couch, but not all the time, not all the time. But the power of God is going to be key to increasing our faith. Giving us the ability to wait for God's revenge, and it is a matter of waiting for God's revenge. It's being able to get through this world without a wrinkle, spot, blemish, or any such thing.

I thank you for your time and God bless.