

## **The Secret Of The Church's Growth.**

### **The Church's Growth Is Assured By Its**

### **Faithful Continuance On The Foundation Of The Gospel.**

Text: Eph 2:19-22

Suggested Hymns:

122, 131, 124, 294, 130

1) The Gospel Is The Never-Failing Power Of God  
Unto Salvation

2) The Gospel Also Unites People's Hearts In True  
Unity

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 2:19-22, <sup>19</sup> *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* <sup>20</sup> *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,* <sup>21</sup> *in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,* <sup>22</sup> *in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the second chapter of the Book of Daniel we read of a most remarkable occurrence. Mighty Nebuchadnezzar receives from God a mysterious dream. Before his astonished eyes there stands a massive image of terrifying form and brilliant brightness. Its head is of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its abdomen and thighs of brass, its legs of iron, and its feet are partly of iron and partly of clay.

While Nebuchadnezzar is gazing in puzzled wonder, a huge stone crushes the stately image into pieces like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. A strong wind carries the debris away, so that no place is found for it, while the stone itself becomes a huge mountain which fills the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar wakes with a fright, but the dream is gone. Try as he will, he cannot recall it. Hurriedly he summons his wise men and magicians that they

might reconstruct it for him. But all in vain. Finally God-fearing Daniel appears and with the help of God relates and interprets the dream.

This is his interpretation. The various parts of the image represent successive world kingdoms, beginning with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and reaching down to the days of the Roman empire. The stone which fell from heaven and crushed the image is none other than Christ, through whom *in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*<sup>1</sup>

Of this glorious and indestructible kingdom I am speaking to you this morning, for it is none other than the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Holy Christian Church, whose birth we are observing today.

It was on this day of Pentecost, twenty centuries ago, that the God of heaven, through His Holy Spirit, founded the Church of which Jesus Christ is the Head and which shall never be destroyed but shall stand forever.

What is the secret of its enduring strength and victorious growth? I answer, Not only the fact that the exalted Christ is its Head and protects it against all the assaults of its enemies, but also the fact that it was built with the utmost care, that it was founded upon the impregnable foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone.

So today let us realise that the Church's growth is assured by its faithful continuance on the foundation of the Gospel. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Gospel Is The Never-Failing Power Of God Unto Salvation**

A few weeks before His seemingly dishonourable death Jesus gave to His disciples a most reassuring promise. Having heard from the lips of Simon Peter a glorious confession of His deity, Jesus exclaimed, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”*<sup>18</sup> *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*

That this promise is certain and sure became evident not only on Pentecost, when the Christ-sent Spirit of God blessed the fervent testimony of the apostles and granted them in one day the astonishing harvest of three thousand blood-

bought souls, but also in Ephesus, that stronghold of heathen corruption and superstition in which the Apostle Paul had succeeded in founding a flourishing Christian congregation.

Ephesus was famous in literature, in art, in culture, so much so that she was called "*the Light of Asia.*" In the opinion of some, however, her principal glory was the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. The image worshiped in that temple was said to have fallen from heaven, and was a figure of a very ugly woman.

All Ephesus, yes, all Asia, worshiped at her shrine, silver replicas were made by skilled craftsmen and brought them large profits. Corrupt practices of the vilest sort, especially sins against the Sixth Commandment, were part and parcel of this heathen worship.

Various philosophic systems were in vogue, and religious deceivers were plentiful. Gross spiritual darkness covered "*the Light of Asia.*" To this appalling corruption and degradation the apostle has reference when he writes earlier in this chapter, <sup>1</sup> *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.*<sup>2</sup> And again in Ephesians 2:12, <sup>12</sup> *that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

But now a wonderful transformation had taken place. The Light of Heaven had fallen on that benighted city and had dispelled much of the darkness which hung like a pall over its deluded inhabitants. Within the space of only three years the great crusader for Christ had been successful in gathering a sizeable and flourishing congregation, composed chiefly of converts from heathenism.

St. Paul could now write with happy exultation, <sup>19</sup> *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

The Lord of lords and King of kings had begun the erection of His temple, that glorious sanctuary of God, the holy Christian Church, more beautiful and magnificent by far than the Temple of Solomon or Herod, with the Spirit of God Himself dwelling within it. It is a temple that would grow and endure until its final completion at the return of Christ for Judgment.

How was all this accomplished? Every building that is to endure must be built upon a solid foundation, or else, when the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow, it will collapse. The Church which Christ founded was not built on the shifting sands of human wisdom or popular fancy but upon the solid rock of His eternal Word.

When men build, they are often guided by their own whims or by the popular demands of public opinion. Christ's Church was founded on an impregnable rock, on the immovable foundation of the apostles and prophets, in which He Himself is the chief Corner-stone.

Study the public ministry of Christ, and you will find that He never offered Himself to His hearers as a political leader to restore the kingdom to Israel nor as a new Lawgiver to cure the world's social evils nor as a mere pattern of perfection for people to follow, but rather as the Great Deliverer from sin, of whose coming all the prophets had spoken.

From the first day of Jesus' ministry to the last He cried out to a perishing world, ***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."***<sup>3</sup> Always, and without fail, it was His purpose to bring men to a penitent realisation of their great guilt and to accept Him as the Heaven-sent Liberator from sin.

In like manner when Peter delivered that masterful Pentecost sermon, he did not cater to the itching ears of the curious crowd but preached Law and Gospel with a directness which pricked them in their hearts and brought three thousand of them to their knees before the risen Christ.

And when Paul came to Ephesus, he did not modify his message to gain the good will of those blind idol-worshippers but preached Christ Crucified with such power that the business of the shrine-selling silversmiths fell off heavily. Great numbers of people discarded their idolatry and obeyed the Gospel call, among

them were many sorcerers, who willingly burned their manuals of the black art and began the study of God's Book of everlasting life.

The eternal Word of God, the glorious Gospel of Jesus which endures forever, that is the impregnable rock on which the Church of Jesus Christ was founded. That Word is never preached in vain.

Against it all the assaults of the powers of darkness must shatter and come to naught. In fact, it is the only means by which the Church can grow and endure. And it is well that we always keep this in mind. Many voices are raised in our day that the Church cannot hope to survive unless it accommodates itself to the insistent demands of modern trends.

And we know full well that the latter days shall be evil, that Satan shall be loosed a little season and gather his forces to do battle against the Church. Do we not already sense the growing godlessness and hostility from without and much denial of, and indifference to, the Word within the ranks of those who profess the Christian faith? Are not those who have forsaken the foundation of the apostles and prophets making faster progress than those who are still standing solidly on the ancient Corner-stone? Must we yield?

Fear not! The growth of the Church is assured as long as we continue to build the walls of Zion on the same foundation and on the same Corner-stone as the great Master Builder and His co-workers. We must never be blinded by outward appearances. When we think of the Church's growth, we are prone to have a vision of large congregations with magnificent buildings and elaborate equipment and an efficient organisation.

Consequently we are often filled with dismay or envy at the successes gained by those who reject the chief Corner-stone and build on popular foundations. In foolish blindness we are even tempted to copy their methods and use extraneous means to lure people into church, wishfully imagining that we are thereby promoting the Church's growth.

But the temple of God is not built in that manner. It is built, and it grows, only through the faithful preaching of the Word. Not the name, not outward membership in a church, but faith in the Gospel brings the sinner into union with Christ and fits him as a living stone into the temple of God. That Gospel cannot fail.

We read in Jeremiah 23:29, <sup>29</sup> *“Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? And in Hebrews 4:12, <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to salvation to every one who believes. Its appeal is not merely national but universal in scope. What the Law demands every honest conscience must acknowledge as just. And what the Gospel offers and conveys fills the need of every sin-stricken heart. On Pentecost, Jews from every nation under heaven were drawn to the Cross, and in Ephesus Gentiles of various nationalities were brought around. And since then millions of blood-bought souls from every nation under heaven have been joined as living stones into the glorious sanctuary of the Church.

The enemies of the Cross may kill or scatter a congregation, yet they cannot destroy the Church. Like the rain and snow which come down from heaven, so the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall not *return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it,* says God in Isaiah 55:11.

## **2. The Gospel Also Unites People’s Hearts In True Unity**

But there is another reason why the Church’s growth is assured by faithful continuance on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, namely, because the Gospel unites people’s hearts in true unity.

Nothing is so disastrous to the life and growth of an organisation as disharmony, jealousy, and hatred among its members. Of the many evils, for instance, which existed in the congregation at Corinth none caused St. Paul such deep concern as did the loveless party spirit which had crept into the church and set brother against brother.

In Ephesus, as in the then world generally, it was race hatred which presented a formidable barrier to the establishment and growth of the Church. Not only were those people dead in trespasses and sins before God, but there was no fellowship between Jew and Gentile. The self-righteous Jew looked down upon the Gentile with profound contempt and scorn, and the Gentile reciprocated in kind, hating the Jew for his arrogance and separatistic spirit. Even when a

Gentile became a proselyte and sought admission into the Jewish Church, he was never treated as an equal but always as vastly inferior. Must not the apostle fear that his efforts would be in vain, that this deep-seated race hatred would prove insurmountable?

Not at all. As far as the church at Ephesus was concerned, this enmity was completely destroyed. Those who had been far off were made close through the blood of Christ. By shedding His blood and thus atoning for the sins of Jews and Gentiles, Christ had made peace between them. He had broken down the middle wall of partition which had separated them. He had made both of them to be one new man in Himself, granting to both access by one Spirit to the Father. In His kingdom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither man nor woman, neither bond nor free; all are one before God through faith in His redeeming blood.

Note the beautiful imagery which the apostle uses to illustrate this happy change. *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints.* Their former status as aliens and tolerated outsiders was now a thing of the past. In Christ's kingdom all subjects are full-fledged citizens, in His Church, all believers are saints, just as clean, just and spotless by faith as was Abraham or any other illustrious name in the Church.

Our text says, "*And members of the household of God.*" These Gentile Christians in Ephesus were more than citizens in the Kingdom. They now belonged to the family of God, Christ being the Head and all believers, the members, sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Christ as well as among themselves, of equal standing and equal privilege, having the same access to the heart of God through the Spirit of adoption.

Our text continues, "*Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*" As living stones, selected from many quarries, none greater nor more precious than the other, they had been placed side by side in common faith and brotherly unity to become part of the glorious sanctuary of God, a beautiful temple that would endure and grow until its final completion at the dawn of eternity.

And as long as the Church continues faithfully on the foundation of the Gospel, any external differences will be wiped out and people of all nationalities,

regardless of blood, soil, or language, will be drawn together in the brotherhood of a common faith and love.

The Church must grow. Our text says, “*grows into a holy temple in the Lord,*” this pronouncement of the inspired-penman cannot be voided. There will be inward growth. Wherever the Gospel is preached, wherever the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief Corner-stone, is laid and maintained, faith will be strengthened and knowledge will increase, living stones will be held securely in the rising wall of God’s sanctuary.

There will be growth also in godliness. These stones in the wall of Zion may not be spotless, they may be spattered and stained with the blemishes of sin, but the Spirit of God, operating through the Word, will daily sanctify and cleanse them with the blood of the Lamb. Through the regenerating power of the Gospel He will wash them thoroughly from their iniquity and inspire them to walk worthy of the Lord pleasing to all.

There will likewise be outward growth. Sometimes indeed we become very depressed and would willingly complain with the prophet Isaiah, “*Who has believed our report?*”<sup>4</sup> The hearts of people are after all like that four-fold soil in the parable, of which the good soil is the rarest. Yet the work, the growth, will go on, if not in one place, then in another. As workers employed by the Master Builder we continue to lay the foundation as of old, build with proper care, and our work will not be in vain.

Either the gracious Lord of the Church will bless our labours in the field in which we are working, or He will direct us to another field to build the walls of Zion. Growth will come and will continue, until the capstone has been fitted, until the last of the elect has been gathered in, until the Church Militant has been transformed into the Church Triumphant.

May we, then, as we remember the first Pentecost of the Church rejoice with all saints and sing forth the praises of God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His great mercy in fitting us also as living stones into His holy sanctuary!

Let us also pray, asking God to grant that we may never fall from the impregnable foundation of His Word, that He would continue to cleanse us daily



from all the spots and stains of sin which still defile us, and that He would make of us willing instruments of His mercy to gather other stones for His holy temple.

May this continue until the days of building are ended and the great Master Builder will present the completed structure to His heavenly Father for His everlasting habitation. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2:44

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:15

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:1