

“On to Maturity”
8/24/08
Tampa

1. Introduction
 - a. “Jesus is Lord” series was very helpful for us as a congregation.
 - b. Next sermon series (for the Fall) = “On to Maturity” (from Proverbs)
 - c. This morning: an introductory lesson entitled: “On to Maturity”
2. John 3:3 = “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”
 - a. Jesus to Nicodemus (religious leader): you’ve got to start all over again.
 - b. Jesus says that no one can even see the Kingdom of God without a spiritual rebirth.
 - i. We were all born as infants into the physical world.
 - ii. Jesus says that in the same way, we must be born again, as infants, into the spiritual world.
 - iii. So, when we become Christians, we start out as “spiritual infants.”
 1. Peter elaborates on this same theme...
3. 1 Peter 2:2 = “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”
 - a. Same analogy as Jesus: we start the Christian life as “newborn babies”.
 - b. And we are to “crave pure spiritual milk”.
 - i. Deeply desire spiritual nourishment.
 1. Q: Remember your baby Christian days?...
 2. Point = That’s how baby Cs should be!
 - ii. Q: Why?
 - iii. A: “...so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”
 1. Like physical babies, new Christians are expected to grow up spiritually.
 - a. Q: If you’re more than a few years old as a Christian, have you “grown up spiritually”?
 - i. Q: Or are you still a spiritual infant?
4. Transition => this is the Hebrews writer’s concern...
 - a. Hebrews 5:11-6:3 = “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12In 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! 13Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so."

- i. Commentator William Barclay's translation of vs. 11 reveals a twofold problem: "The story which has been laid upon me to tell you about this matter is a long story, difficult to tell and difficult to grasp, for your ears have become dull."
 1. One: the Christian faith is "a long story, difficult to tell"
 - a. Examples:
 - i. the unique role of Israel in salvation history:
 1. God calls a man (Abraham)
 2. to become a nation (Israel)
 3. out of which will come the Savior (Jesus)
 4. who will save the world (all of us)
 - ii. the themes of the Bible are deep and complex:
 1. redemption
 2. sanctification
 3. glorification
 - iii. the context of Hebrews 5 itself is: "the high priesthood of Jesus in the order of Melchizedek"
 1. Q: Ever heard a sermon on that one?
 - b. Qualify:
 - i. The gospel message is simple enough for every human to understand, respond and be saved!
 - ii. But the challenges of ongoing Christian growth are enormous!
 2. Two: compounding the problem is that the Hebrew's reader's ears have become dull, making it even harder for them to grasp.
 - a. The Greek word for "dull" here is: "nothros", meaning:
 - i. slow-moving in mind
 - ii. lethargic or apathetic in understanding
 1. Word used for a numb arm when you sleep on it.
 - b. Q: Have you gone numb to spiritual growth? (Preach)
 - ii. Vs. 12 = "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." (Preach)
 - iii. Q: What is "maturity" from this passage?

- iv. A: Vs. 14 = "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."
1. It's the person who "trains himself".
 - a. (Quiet times; seeks out relationships, etc.)
 2. "By constant use"
 - a. Thinks spiritually about his daily decisions
 3. "to distinguish good from evil"
 - a. Q: What voices in my head are from God, which are from Satan, and which are from myself?
 - b. Q: Which of my opinions are from my upbringing and which are from my understanding of God's Word?
 - c. Q: When am I being lazy and when am I just taking a needed break?
 - d. Q: When is my anger sinful and when is it "righteous indignation"?
 - e. Q: What T.V. shows and movies are okay for me to watch, and which ones cause me to sin?
 - f. Q: When should I point out sin in somebody's life, and when should I let it go?
 - g. Q: How does God want me to feel and respond to the myriad of challenges that face me every single day?
 - h. This is why we've selected "the book of Proverbs" for our Fall sermon series:
 - i. "Wisdom vs. Folly"
 - ii. "Trusting in God"
 - iii. "Do You Love or Hate Discipline?"
 - iv. "Righteousness vs. Wickedness"
 - v. "The Ways of Love"
 - vi. "Humility vs. Pride"
 - vii. "Seeking Advice"
 - viii. "The Power of Words"
 - ix. "Generosity vs. Greed"
 - x. "Diligence vs. Laziness"
 - xi. "Beware of Impurity"
 - xii. "An Attitude of Gratitude"
 4. M.P. = This Fall, we're moving on to maturity! (Preach!)
 5. Transition =) let's look at a few more scriptures on maturity...
 - a. Ephesians 4 gives us another way to look at Christian maturity...
 6. Ephesians 4:11-13 = "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12to

prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

- a. Maturity = becoming more and more like Jesus.
 - i. Not:
 1. How long you've been a Christian.
 2. What your role is in the church.
 3. Or even how well you know the Bible.
 - a. (The Pharisees knew their Bibles well, but weren't at all like Jesus!)
 - ii. The key = How much like Jesus are you? (Preach)
 1. Q: What would your spouse say?
 2. Q: What would your kids say?
 3. Q: What would your best friend say?
 4. Q: What would your co-workers/students say?
 5. Q: What would God say?
 - a. Point = Maturity is becoming more and more like Jesus!
 - i. That's another way to look at our goal this Fall.
7. 2 Peter 1:3-11 = "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
8. Closing charge
- a. Phil 3:12-16 = "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect [mature], but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the

goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16Only let us live up to what we have already attained."

- b. This Fall, let's "press on" toward spiritual maturity!

Sources:

"Marks of Maturity", by Chris Tiller

NIV Bible Commentary

William Barclay, "The Letter to the Hebrews"