

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 3, 2017

Does the Word of God Dwell in You?

Colossians 3:16

3:16 Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

“Let the Word of God dwell in you richly.” This is the verse of the year taken from Colossians 3:16. Most churches display the verse, or the goal of the year in the worship hall or print in the weekly bulletin. But, in many cases, the verse or the goal just remains a decoration without any follow-up. We don’t want to make our verse and goal just a decoration. We want to see that all of us follow the verse and the church will be led by the verse. I have already spoken about the verse on January 8. However, I’ll speak about it again. Let us keep the verse in our mind and put it into practice in the remaining months of this year.

1. Establishment of the Word

“Let the Word of God dwell in you richly.” In this verse, the Word “dwell” means that someone lives with other person in the same house. It can be expressed by a phrase, “under the same roof.” It suggests the close relationship as a family living together. In the Bible, this word is used to describe that God is with people and the Holy Spirit dwells in the believers.

However, not the Holy Spirit, but sin had been dwelling in us until we believed in Jesus Christ. A phrase, “sin that dwells within me”, is repeated in Romans 7:17-20. The verses describe that sin dwells inside of souls, and stay as a part of human nature. We cannot expel the dwelling sin by our own power. Therefore, Apostle Paul, the writer of this letter, cried, saying, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” But this cry turns into the shout of victory soon in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will dwell and stay in the believers in Jesus Christ. And, the Word of God will dwell in those who the Holy Spirit dwells.

the Word, “to dwell”, has some synonymous words such as “to root” and “to establish.” Colossians 2:6-7 reads, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Here, faith in Jesus Christ is compared to a plant. Like a plant takes root into the soil and grows, and bears fruit for the harvest, our faith also should take root and establish. And, for faith takes root and establishes, the Word of God should take root into the soul of the believers.

When I was serving a church in California, a new park was opened near the church. It used to be a private land, but the surviving family of the owner donated the land to the city. The old building was took down and the land was converted to a park. Since I was commuting on the road before the place, I could observe that the land was becoming a park. After the park was open, lawn seeds were planted, and keep out signs were put at the lawn area. The sign said, “Keep Out ‘Till Lawn Establishes.” the Word, “to establish” of the sign meant “to take

root into soil, and grow strong.”

We need to protect lawn while it is growing strong enough for steps of people. Like that we have to protect our Christian faith until it will establish. Since faith comes from the Word, we have to let the Word dwell and take root into our soul. When we plant trees, we expect that it will grow, bloom, and bear fruit. But no plants bloom flower in the next day, and bear fruit in a few days after they were planted. First of all, they need to take root into soil. The root of plants is under the ground and invisible. But if the root does not go deep, the plant cannot grow higher. If the root does not go far, the plant cannot reach the branches wider. What we do “letting Word dwell in us” is an invisible action of faith like plants take root deeply and widely underground. Our faith cannot grow and bear fruit without letting the Word take root into our soul. This is the step we should not skip or neglect.

2. Rejection and Superficial Acceptance of the Word

Then, what should we do to let the Word of God dwell in us? Jesus taught it by using “Parable of the sower.” “Parable of the sower” is as you know a story about a farmer who sowed his seeds in the soil. Among them, some fell along the path, in rocky places or among thorns and never bore fruit, but those fell into a cultivated field rooted and grew to bear plenty of fruits. From this parable, we understand that to let the Word of God dwell in us means to cultivate our heart to receive the Word and grow a life of the Word within us. To do that, we have to be careful with things not appropriate for the Word and avoid them. Things to avoid for dwelling of the Word in us are expressed as “path”, “rocky place” and “thorn” .

First, Jesus talked about “path” in Matthew 13:19 “When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.” “Path” refers to an attitude not listening to God’s word. Believers read the Bible every day and study Bible every week at church and listen to the sermon. However, even if you read the Word of God with your eyes and hear it with your ears, you sometimes do not listen to it with your heart. There are two Japanese Kanji characters for “listen”. You should use one Kanji which contains a character of heart for listening to the Word of God. You cannot just listen to the Word of God, but you have to pay attention and listen to it carefully.

Jesus said, “When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it...” The Word “understand” does not contain the meaning used in Buddhism. It is wonderful to comprehend the meaning of the Word immediately, but no one can understand it all at once. Even if you don’t understand all of the Word of God but if you accept it as the Word that God is talking to you, you can “understand” it.

“Path” is flattened by many people and animals. Likewise, our heart has been already hardened by our own philosophy or experiences, as well as various information and teachings of the world. If we judge the Word of God with our hardened heart, our prejudice and selfish opinion, then the Word of God would never be rooted and dwelt.

Second, Jesus talked about “rocky place” in Matthew 13:20-21 “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the

Word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away.” “Rocky place” is different from “path” in that a person already accepts the Word of God. But it is only superficially and the Word of God cannot be rooted because of a hard stone surface.

Most of the people are delighted to hear the Word in the Bible. In the Bible, it contains everything that can respond to people’s need. It is also interesting as literature, history, and wisdom of life. The book “BUSHIDO” introduced during the evening service last week was written in English by Inazo Nitobe, who was a Christian. The latest translation was completed by Ryuichiro Misaki, who was an instructor of the corporate training and published by PHP Institute, which mainly deals with business related books. The Bible and Christian writers’ books are used in cooperate workshops and people are enthusiastically learning them. Even if the Word of God is heard through these occasions, people can encounter some sorts of truth. They may be moved and motivated by the Word and start taking some actions. However, the true listening of the Word of God is much more than that. It means we have to let God break hard rocks in our heart, become humble in front of God, ask for forgiveness, and invite Jesus Christ into our heart and life as our lord. When we hear the Word of God in that manner, it can be rooted within ourselves and dwelt in our heart.

3. Obstacles of the Word

The seeds of the Word did not shoot out sprouts on the roadside. On

the rocky soil, they did shoot out sprouts, but did not spread their roots. Then, they died. In the third place, among “thorn”, they could spread their roots; however, they couldn’t grow up because the thorn was too strong. Jesus said about the “thorn,” saying, “As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22) In Luke 8:14, “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” He added “pleasure” to “cares of the world” and “deceitfulness of riches”.

It is making sense that “Deceitfulness of riches” and “Pleasure” would separate us from following the Word of God. However, “deceitfulness of riches” and “pleasure” are not only things which separate us from the Word of God. “Care of the world” is a huge enemy. Many of us may say, “I do not have a property so that I am not tempted. I am not addicted to alcohol or sex, then I’m okay.” It might be true but there are no people who do not have any concern, fear, anxiety, and complain for our daily life or work. As long as you live in this world, it is impossible to live without those feelings. We have so many psychological pressures in our daily life. The Word of God tells us that we shall give the anxiety over to God’s care; but when we forget to trust in God, the Word of God will be choked in the “thorn,” that is “care of the world.” Even if they are recommended or accepted in our society, sometimes they occupy our mind, and take time to listen, learn, memorize, meditate, and carry out the word of God from us. If this is so, they would be “thorn” even though they are good or

not necessarily bad.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” This verse does not mean that it is enough the seeds shoot out sprouts a little and survive somehow. In Colossian 3:16, it says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”. The power and grace that God gives us are not small and weak. They are always big and enriched.

As long as we seek for the rich grace, we do not need to give up even though we found “hard path way,” “rocky soil,” or “thorn” in us. There are many verses of the promise in the Scripture.

Psalm 104:30 When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

Ezekiel 36:26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Psalm 126:6 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

All of these are prophecies of salvation given by Jesus Christ. When we believe in the promise of God’s grace, repent, ask, and pray to God, we will be able to see the power and grace of God that a beaten path will be softened and rocks and thorn will be removed. Even though we can not let the word of God dwell in the past months, let us now come back to the verse of the year. Let the Word of God dwell in us richly, let us be filled with it, and let us live for our own goal.

(Prayer)

Dear Father in heaven, we want to have your Word dwell in us richly. Please help us avoid sins, prejudice, disobedience, and unbelief that separate us from the Word. Do not let us be satisfied the exiting state, and let us seek the richness of your grace. In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.