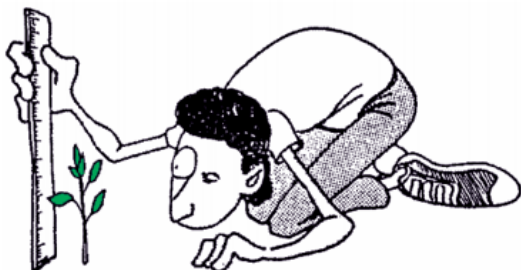


Sunday 27th December 2020 10 am

"Have you grown in Grace?"



A review of the year in the light of the "First things first" Motto Text
Sermon: **Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God.** 2 Chronicles 27:6 (20_01_05.doc)

Welcome to all

Opening Scripture Ps 145:10-13

Hymn MP 200 Great is Thy faithfulness

Scripture John 15:1-17 (page 1083)

Prayer

Notices Bible reading plan. On for midweek prayer

Lord's prayer

Reading 2 Chronicles 27:1-9 (page 460)

2 Peter 1:1-11 (page 1222)

See also 2 Peter 3:8-18 (Page 1224),

Hymn MP 503 O little town of Bethlehem

Sermon "Have you grown in Grace?"

Hymn CH 688_732 Jesus keep me near the cross
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xrmlv806bGM>

Closing Prayer:

Close -----

Welcome Pray

How has the year gone for you this year?

■ Chart 1,2 and 3 which is the best fit for you?

Which chart best illustrates your year? I don't mean the number of your grey hairs, the size of your bank balance, or the number of parking fines....

The first sermon of 2020 started with the words.....

"Did 2019 turned out the way you expected it to? There would have been happy times, and certainly sad times, and perhaps some major challenges. You can be sure 2020 will have a mix of the same."

I think we can say it did! Not least the virus which has affected all of us – and in different ways

The question this morning is how has it affected your life with the Lord?

The Christian life is all about growth - growing in Christlikeness.

Did you marshall the experiences of the year towards your growth? Did you harness your troubles and hardships to the greater good; God's work of the forming of Christ in you?

Our church motto text this year of 2020 has been from the life of King Jotham. **Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God.** 2 Ch 27:6

The operative word is **grew**, he **grew**. That is there was a change. Not just there was a change - but he changed. He was different at the end than he was at the beginning. if Jotham grew powerful that means he didn't start that way, he was weak and he became powerful.

■ BCM Interns on their return the 1st thing is to have a review.

How has it gone? What have you learned? How can we make the most of the time left.

■ So too with the BCM Toylink project, it has gone well this year with less problem bags (last one is still in the boot of the car not known here), when we return there will be a review.

What mistakes were made? What can we learn - How can we improve things for next year.

How about you? How has it gone? How have you changed this year? (And when we say grow we mean positive change.) Has your life with the Lord

improved? What lessons have been learned? Just as the Toylink project has grown has your faith grown? Has your love for Christ grown? How is your enthusiasm for studying His word and trying to apply it to your life. Are you living more in step with the Spirit and your conscience that you were in 2019?

Assess

Perhaps at this point you are thinking? “I don’t know”, “Have I changed? I think so but I’m not sure how” “And I’m not sure how much is positive?” It’s difficult to say.

Yes it is difficult to say. Maybe first we ought to stop for a moment and ask about just how can I assess it?

How can I see whether or not I have grown? - It is a joy to see it in others – but it is usually hidden from us seeing it in ourselves.

Should we assess?

Should I try to anyway? Is it right to assess?

In light of the difficulties in being objective about it, - it is notoriously hard to see ourselves clearly - should I just try harder? Or should I ask others to help?

I have just been asked to be a mentor to another Baptist Pastor. The Baptist Union have initiated a scheme called the Continued Ministerial development. The aim is to help us all continue in becoming Mature disciples of Christ, accountable, kingdom focused, servant hearted, etc.

Yes another perspective helps, someone else can see things differently. I know I have many blind spots and I wish that others would (gently) point them out. If I can’t make a cool clear assessment, - can I, will I, listen to a rebuke from another? Hopefully - by God’s grace.

So a mentor can offer advice, and a mentor gives important accountability, a mentor can keep an eye out and grab the wheel and keep the car on the road when the pastor is drifting, asleep to a problem or driving like a mad man!

Can I respond humbly to being praised - that is harder.

We all have a tendency to pride

There is a Christian sister who often shows me photos she has just taken – and guess who is in most of them herself. What do I say that isn’t going to make her prouder?

2a

Even if a person appears humble can I say to someone “you have grown in this area you are more gracious with your words than you were before” without provoking pride? We should always commend one another but the listener - and the speaker need to be careful.

In 2 Sam 24 King David took a census, the counting of the troops in Israel, he wanted to know how many troops he had, in other words how strong he was.

David had like Jotham grown strong, but would he like Jotham’s father become proud?

This was a test, would he boast in the Lord or would he do a stock take and puff up his mind and heart with how powerful he had become? God was angry. Hear what one commentator says: “The sin in holding a census, it is generally held, was one of arrogance; it was God's prerogative to multiply the nation and to number it”.

This displeased God and David was punished for it.

 For that reason, for our own good, the Lord usually shields us from seeing our own growth.

So when it comes to self-assessment, taking stock, how often should we take our spiritual temperature? It’s not something we do every day, we are not naval gazers - we have our eyes fixed on things above “stayed on Jesus”

Let the Lord be the one to convict - and let him be the one to commend - For example Jesus says of the church in Thyatira **I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first**. Re 2:19

Yes there is nothing static about the Christian life it is all about growing, we are told to grow in Grace, grow in knowledge

Hear what Peter says to the Christians: “**make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For 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. But if anyone does not have them, he is short-sighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.**” 2Pe 1:5-9

2b

Did you notice it is all: **add, add, add, add, add** - possess these qualities in **increasing measure**. So for: add, add, add read grow, grow, grow

✚ **Christ gives his Spirit to his people - that we might grow to be like him.**

God promises that he works out all things for our good. Let us trust him to provide the tools as we are chipped and chiseled into Christlikeness.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, Ro 8:29 If God is your father then his desire it that you become like his son Jesus Christ who is your brother, so **that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

So much is outside of my control, no problem, with my natural foolishness that is a good thing! Many things are outside of my control but nothing is outside of His control. Praise God, *Lord you drive!* You are good and all you do is good and I as your child can rest in the sure knowledge that you will work out your good purposes in me.

✚ **“Lord help me to respond well, help me to make the most of every, every circumstance that you bring to me.”**

Any father or mother, or parent’s greatest desire is to see their children grow up. They know the simple truth that to constantly refuse to take difficult steps means they will not grow; they will always remain an infant.

May we never see change without growth. The great Joy is to see them take responsibility, become rounded, become the man or woman God made them to be.

Gospel

I must stop for a moment and make the most crassly simple point you have heard for a long time – and I say it so you will remember – you cannot grow until you are born! x2 You must be born before you can grow!

The cross is where you become Born into God’s family and then and only then can you grow to Godliness. Wondering why there is no progress? Wondering why others are seeking to be Godly and growing but not you?

Then stop, are you trying to be something you can never be without Christ? Then stop, repent of that self-righteousness and seek mercy and grace from Christ, turn you heart towards him and seek him - and you will be found by Him. Then, then, you will grow in the new person he has made you to be.

As a Christian you will see God using circumstances for your good

What has God brought to you this year? What has happened? What have you been through? What influences have you been under?

There have been the restrictions in terms of what we can do, where we can go, and who we can see. At the same time with more obvious needs there is the prompt to go and help.

Ah but I can’t? There’s the test: to find a way to - or to just leave it because I can’t. Maybe in practical terms we cannot do what we want to do – but what of the desire to? - is it a test of my desire, my motivation, do I really want to?

■ I was challenged to see Manningford Hall kitchen constantly being used, manned with volunteers and providing take away meals for anyone who comes, and at the door people come, and do so daily for hot food and food parcels,

■ The elderly lunch club still runs people have to come in by taxi – and they do – and sit at different table spread out.

There’s an organization looking for kitchens and buildings than can be used? What about ours? It’s a challenge. Not only would it help - but would we not grow through that service and step of faith?

Remember on Friday we saw that it is Christ that enables me to serve – and in that service you and I are to grow. Serving is the prime means of growing

The virus has been a reminder for every one of their mortality. It has produced fear and understandably so. We have just finished a series on revelation and we saw how pestilences, natural disasters and God’s general judgments are God’s way of calling the ungodly, every sinner to repentance.

The question is will we the church speak? Will we as Christians speak? Why are we all so silent when we have the remedy. The world is desperate for a vaccine to save life. Christ is the surety for eternal life. If we know that and never tell, then when God judges them for their unbelief, he will hold you and I accountable.

✚ **This pandemic is God’s prompt to those who have never trusted Christ to do so - and for us to grasp the opportunity this affords to speak out.**

*Let us look at some other circumstances God has given to help us
'Grow in Faith'*

Family

Jotham like us had many influences on his life. One which is true for all of us is the family. Jotham's father Uzziah had a long reign of 52 years, it started well - but didn't end well!

Jotham had plenty of time to learn from his father's long reign. Uzziah died with leprosy when he became arrogant and started to take on the role of a priest. Jotham could see the pride swelling up and the anger of God against it.

We are more influenced by our parents than our children but there are lessons to be learned both ways. Jotham had a godly father who let things slip. His son who was to succeed him as King was Ahaz. We are told he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. How grievous that must have been for his father. How Jotham must have prayed and pleaded to God that His son would take heed of all that he had been told when he was growing up. Again and again the reminders of the disobedience of God's people in the wilderness must have been brought to him - and yet he hardened his heart so that the warnings fell on deaf ears.

Economic

Many have been fearful of not having enough income for food, bills etc. These are real hardships, but having empty coffers makes me pray. As I said prayer is the paupers trade. How often have you prayed for your daily bread when there's money in the bank and there's food to buy in the shops? We pray when in need - to a God who promises to supply - and is able to supply. God will never see his children left uncared for, he is able to supply.

Health

Are you struggling with your health? most are and we all will sometime. Can I use my health problems for God's Glory and not waste it.

- There is book with the provocative title: "Don't waste your cancer" by John Piper (as he went through Prostrate Cancer)

✚ A weakening body should be used to produce a stronger spirit!

What else has happened in 2020?

What have been the influences for you this last year? how have you coped?

Have you turned problems into opportunities to increase your faith.

When the wind is blowing strongly you hold on more firmly, don't let the difficulties knock you off rather like a ship wildly tossing in stormy seas – you need to hang on to that rail, - that rail like Christ's hand is safe.

✚ It's not how you start - but how you finish that is what is important.

- Take a new building project, you walking into a wonderful newly completed building little did you know or are aware of as you gaze about you of the many troubles and all sorts of hindrances along the way but the finished product.

God's people are being built up together to be a building in which God dwells

Finale

The Christian life is all about growth, did you employ the experiences of the year towards your growth.

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men. Lu

2:52 If Christ grew in wisdom and stature - how much more should we

Will you be quick to listen to Him? And recognize his hand in what he brings to you. Remain in me he says, then you can bear fruit, much fruit

✚ It is the character of the redeemed of the Lord, that they follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes, with an implicit faith and obedience. As the eyes of a servant are to the hand of his master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress, so must our eyes wait on the Lord, to what he appoints us, to take what he allots us *Matthew Henry*

Young trees, saplings need supporting, they are fragile and will quickly break when knocked. The more they grow the stronger they become. They are able to withstand the high winds and storms that come.

Not far from us is a huge oak tree. It has stood secure and firm for many, many years

In the same way The Lord calls us to be **oaks of righteousness a planting of the Lord – for the display of his splendor.**

May we all grow to be just that. Amen.