

Through the Water (Exodus 14:27-30)

Now, the rampant coronavirus pandemic is raging all over the world. I remember sometime in January I heard the news about new type pneumonia found in China. Various countries rescued their own people with their emergency flights. “Wow, that’s a serious matter,” I thought, but I was still optimistic and was thinking it would end soon. Even in February, I never imagined it would become such a serious pandemic on this large scale.

In life, there are crises we can predict. But even when we can see the storm coming, sometimes we cannot predict how serious the trouble will end up being. Unfortunately, this is reality.

We cannot avoid a storm from coming to us. Also, we cannot change the strength of the storm. What we can do is to build a strong life which can stand the storm.

For example, when a building collapses, do we call an interior designer and check the setup and material of the carpets and curtains? No, we don’t. We must check the foundation of the building, how it was designed and built.

Why do some Christians’ lives collapse? Being a pastor for over 20 years, what I’ve seen is that usually the reason is not because they lack understanding of the details of the Bible, but because their foundation of faith is not solid. Why are some Christians not growing, although they have been Christians for a long time? Why are they always worried, filled with anxiety, and are thinking negatively? Why do some Christians fall into the same kind of sin again and again? Or, always need help? Or, they can’t stand strong in faith, but easy to compromise? Often the reason is because they don’t have a solid foundation. And because their foundation is weak, they cannot build on it.

“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:26-27)

What does it mean to build a house on sand? That is, not to put the Word we heard into practice. If we are building a house on sand, no matter how much time we spend building it, we cannot have a solid foundation. It is easier to build

a house on sand than on the rock. But, you cannot have a solid foundation on sand. On sand, it is easy to lose balance and collapse.

On the other hand, to build a house on the rock is to put the Word we heard into practice. We can't build up our faith instantly. Just as our physical body is built up by food we eat every day and exercise, our faith is also built up by our daily spiritual food, and spiritual exercise.

We're in the series of "The Tree of Life," studying the Pentateuch.

Life and water, they cannot be separated from each other. Water is an essential element to sustain our life and at the same time, it is also an agent to remove evil.

Incidents related to water are very characteristic in the Torah, especially in the first two books, Genesis and Exodus. They are all very dramatic and many people know about them. Today, we will study the theme, "Through the Water."

1. The Flood and Noah's Ark

The first one is the flood and Noah's Ark. It's recorded in Genesis chapters 6 through 9.

The number of people gradually increased and they spread over the earth. But their hearts were inclined to evil and they wandered off the path of the Lord. God saw that the earth was filled with violence, lies, and evil because of humans. And He decided to destroy both humans and the earth.

At that time, there was a man named Noah. He found favor in the eyes of the Lord. God said to him, "All people became corrupted. The earth is filled with evil because of them. So I am going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark. And enter the ark with your family." And God showed him how to make the ark.

Noah built the ark just as God instructed him. And he entered the ark with his family. Also, pairs of every kind of animal and of every kind of bird came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah.

God shut the door of the ark. And the rain started to fall on the earth, and it continued for forty days and forty nights. The water covered the earth and became a mighty flood. The waters rose greatly on the earth, and even covered all the high mountains.

The Bible says, “Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in it died” (Gen 7:22).

Only those who were in the ark, that is eight family members of Noah were saved through the water. They were redeemed from evil.

1 Peter 3:20-21

who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Through this incident of water, we can learn about “water baptism.”

Taking water baptism is the act of obedience to the Word of God. It witnesses that we have repented, or that we have changed our direction of life.

We were saved by the grace of God through our faith in Him. Receiving water baptism is the proclamation of what has been happening inside of you. Our physical eyes cannot see the changes inside of you from outside: In our physical eyes, we cannot see that we are forgiven, the blood of Jesus took away our sin, we have been reconciled with Jesus, Christ lives in us, or we’re children of God, and so on. When we receive water baptism, this action proclaims publicly “I’m following Jesus, I’m living with the Word.”

About water baptism, we can see some specific examples in the New Testament. For example, in Acts chapter 8, we see that Philip baptized an Ethiopian eunuch. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, they both went down into the water (Acts 8:38-39). And Jesus was also baptized. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water (Matt 3:16 NASB). In other words, he was in the water when he was baptized. They give us clear picture of the word "baptize."

The English word "baptize" is a transliteration (substitution of letters of one language for those of another) of the Greek word "baptizo." Baptizo means to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet) and comes from the root word "bapto", meaning to cover wholly with a fluid, as in "dip."

In this flood in Noah’s time, water destroyed evil. One of the meanings of water baptism is Death: Our old man, or old sinful nature was crucified.

(1) Death: Our old man (old sinful nature) was crucified

God is merciful and will forgive us always. Therefore, we continue to sin and continue to ask for forgiveness from God. Is this Christian life? What does the Bible say?

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Christians are people who died to sin, rather than who live in sin.

Romans 6:3, 6-7

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

To die with Christ and to live with him. We receive these by faith, we apply these by faith. The act of receiving water baptism shows our faith that we died with Christ and will live with him just as the Bible says.

2. The Red Sea and the Egyptian Army

In Exodus 14, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and were released from the Egyptian Army.

Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God led them to be set free from the control of Egypt. The Egyptian Army chased them down from behind. And before them was the Red Sea. There was no way to advance nor return. They were in a real pinch.

God worked a miracle by dividing the waters, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground.

The Egyptian Army chased them down. After Israelites finished crossing the Red Sea, the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The water covered all the Egyptians, not even one of them survived.

There was no power to bind them any longer. Now Israelites were completely set free from the control of Egypt. They became free men. Here, we can see that the power which bound people sank into the water, and people were set free.

(2) Burial with Christ

Romans 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Water baptism symbolizes Burial. Because our old-self was buried with Jesus, so now we are free from the power of sin and live a new life with him.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

It doesn't say that Jesus is one part of my life. Jesus is my life. Then, what shall we do to our old-self who died with Christ? It should be buried. Don't keep it with you.

Imagine this, the Israelites were led out of slavery in Egypt by Moses. They started their journey in the wilderness, heading toward the Promised Land. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, regretted that he let the Israelites go, and he sent his army to chase them down. Throughout their whole journey, the Israelites are chased down from behind by the Egyptian army. Is this what it's going to be like to be freed? Is this God's salvation?

What about us? We were saved through faith in Jesus. Our sins were forgiven. However, sadly there are quite a few people who have faith in Christ, but keep their old-self with them. What do I mean by saying this?

By birth, all humans are sinners. All mankind deserve eternal separation from God's presence. They may be gentle and may behave well. They may have good moral standards and high education. But, sinners are still sinners.

One day, a man heard about the good news of Jesus, and believed in him. For a while, he was doing well. But, later he found himself backslide and sin like before. And he asked for God's forgiveness. But the result was the same as before and he repeated the same thing again and again. His old self was dead, but he kept is with him. Because of that, it was disturbing him continuously.

Our old-self died with Christ. And it should be buried properly.

Romans 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

I'm not saying that our sinful nature will be automatically removed and our old self will be buried by just receiving Water Baptism. We must understand that if you don't have faith in Christ, his cross and resurrection, receiving water baptism is nothing but just going underwater. We repent and turn back to God, and make Jesus Lord of our lives. We must have faith that on the cross our old-self died and were buried with Christ. Now we live a new life. Christ lives in me. "The righteous will live by faith (Rom 1:17)." Because we live by this faith, we receive water baptism, proclaiming Jesus' Lordship in our lives, "Jesus, you are my life."

The action of taking water baptism bears witnesses to and declares that you have this faith. According to James 2:22, your faith and your actions work together, and your faith is made complete by what you do.

3. The Nile River and the New Life

Let's look at another incident related to water in Exodus. We will go back to the time before the Israelites were released from slavery in Egypt.

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was afraid to see the people of Israel multiplied and spread in Egypt. So he oppressed them with hard labor. But even then the Israelites continued to increase in number.

Finally, the king of Egypt gave the order that every boy that is born to the Hebrews must be thrown into the Nile.

One Hebrew woman gave birth to a son. He was very cute, and she couldn't kill him. She hid him for three months, but when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him, placed him in it, and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

Now, Pharaoh's daughter went down there. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw a baby boy. She found that he was Hebrew. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him.

Pharaoh's daughter employed a Hebrew woman to nurse him. Actually, the woman was the baby's mother. When the baby grew older, the woman took him to Pharaoh's daughter. And she received him as her own son. She named him Moses, saying "I drew him out of the water."

Moses the Hebrew slave's son died at the Nile. Then he was drawn out of the Nile, and started a new life as a son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was no longer the son of the slave family, but now was the son of the king's family.

(3) Resurrection: Living a New Life

Romans 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Water baptism not only symbolizes that we died on the cross with Christ, but it also symbolizes that we resurrected with Christ, and live a new life.

Colossians 2:12

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Water baptism shows not only death and burial with Christ but also resurrection with Christ, living a new life with Christ, and in Christ. We died to our old self in order to live a new life. Amen!

Galatians 3:26-27

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

A pastor shared this with me. He preached about water baptism in a meeting. One lady came and said that she wanted to receive water baptism. And she said “It’s like joining a sport team, isn’t it? If you join the team, you will be proud of wearing the team uniform. When you put the uniform on, you’ll identify strongly with the team. I grew up in a Buddhist family. I had never thought about God, the Creator who gave me life. Now, I heard about Jesus and met with him. And His Word commands me to be baptized. I want to be clothed with Jesus. I want to remain in him. And I want to show that I believe in Jesus, I love him and obey him through the action of receiving water baptism.”

Before closing today’s message, I want to share with you how we do water baptism at NLIF.

The most important thing is that you understand today’s message and you have the desire to practice what you learned. If that is you, please talk to me, your pastor in person. Then we can start the preparation.

You will study five lessons about Christian life with me, the pastor. The church council will be also informed about your preparation and you will be supported by their prayer and encouragement. We will schedule the date of your water baptism, and it will be announced in Sunday services. You will be given the opportunity to share your testimony in a Sunday service before your baptism. We will do baptism by immersion, following the examples in the Bible.

After your baptism, we will continue to study another four lessons. Most people study all nine lessons before the baptismal service. If you are interested in, please contact me for details.

My prayer is that all people will build a steadfast foundation of faith which will not be shaken even by a severe storm, and that they will all grow into maturity in Christ (Colossians 1:28). “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives.”

For self-reflection

1. “Now the LORD observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. (Gen 6:5 NLT)” What thoughts might Noah have had for the people? What might his life have been like as he was called a righteous man (Gen 6:9)?

- What is your view of current society? What would the life of a righteous person look like today?

2. If you were Moses' mother, what might have been your prayer when you left him at the Nile? What might have been your thoughts when Pharaoh's daughter found him? What thoughts would you have had when you were asked to take care of him by Pharaoh's daughter? How would you raise Moses while you looked after him for Pharaoh's daughter?

- Is there anything you can apply to your life from these thoughts?

3. Imagine you are taking water baptism next Sunday. What would you share at church? (If you've not been baptized yet, this may be a divine opportunity for you to take it. Why don't you pray about it?)