

Beginnings – The Constant Factor of Faith

Metamorphosis Series

April 24, 2005

“The seasons, they are a’changin’...”

In Minnesota, especially this time of year, we like change. From winter to spring, from brown to green, from cold to warm ... change is welcome!

But we’re picky about our change. Most of the time we as people don’t like change. It was Mark Twain who said, “The only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper!”

Vicki and I enjoyed a nice trip to Colorado last weekend. We saw a lot of change. Some things have gone through major change in the 10 years since we’ve been there! Other things haven’t changed at all. Case in point – while sitting in the parking lot of the huge, new Super Wal-Mart (a major change) we noticed that the butterflies were migrating (something that doesn’t change - every year they would migrate through on their way north).

Speaking of butterflies – today as we start a study of the book of Colossians we are going to use the Monarch butterfly as our symbol for this series. Why? Because this creature goes through incredible change over the course of its lifetime and many of the stages of its life correlate to the changes we go through as Christians. Let me illustrate...

The Stages of the Monarch Butterfly

This butterfly has four very distinct phases to its life. There is the EGG stage. There is the LARVE or Caterpillar stage. There is the PUPA or Chrysalis (Cocoon) stage. And finally there is the ADULT (Butterfly) stage. For the Monarch this process takes just 30 to 40 days depending on the temperature around them.

This Metamorphosis is a picture of the Process of Christian Growth that each of us goes through as followers of Jesus Christ. We would wish for it to be accomplished in 30 to 40 days but the reality is that it is a much longer process. Today we are going to study Colossians 1 and see the similarities that exist in our lives and the EGG stage of the butterfly’s life.

Monarch females lay their eggs on milkweed, which is the only plant that monarch caterpillars can eat. The eggs are laid singly and generally on the underside of the leaves. The eggs are about the size of a period at the end of a sentence or the head of a pin and are whitish in color. Three to six days after the eggs are deposited, they will hatch.

This very simple process that every Monarch goes through reminds us that:

GROWTH STARTS WITH SIMPLE FAITH

It's the same for everyone. From the powerful to the weak, from the rich to the poor, from the old to the young, from the gifted to the simple – everyone begins their Christian life with a simple act of faith. This was true with the Colossian Christians:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints...(Colossians 1:3,4)

There are times when we would like to think we started differently, but just like with physical birth – all of us start out the same way – so it is in the spiritual realm! We all must begin our relationship with God through a simple act of faith in Jesus and what he accomplished for us on the cross. We are always tempted to make the gospel more complicated, more intellectual, and more involved – but it is what it is. We must never forget this. The Communion Service illustrates this for us every time we partake. It is a simple meal that illustrates a simple message. Perhaps the great apostle Paul said it best, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am chief.”

GROWTH STARTS WITH ONE PERSON TELLING SOMEONE ELSE

Again, it's the same for us all. Sam Shoemaker used to say, “Evangelism is nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where to find the bread.” A beautiful Monarch butterfly doesn't become a reality unless a female Monarch lays an egg. A lost and condemned sinner doesn't become a saved child of God unless a Christian passes on the truth of the gospel.

For the people of Colosse that person seems to have been Epaphras.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf... (Colossians 1:7)

The gospel is always humanly transmitted. There must be a human channel for the gospel to be passed on to another human being. The possession of the gospel comes with an obligation to share it with someone who doesn't possess it. We who know the truth are obliged to be the hands and feet and mouth of Christ. That's where it all starts!

Who was the person for you? If I would call on you we would hear a variety of names – my mom, Billy Graham, my dad, my Sunday School teacher, my pastor when I was 8, my brother, a friend in college, etc, etc. We all start the same way. Someone tells us about Jesus and we make that faith decision.

GROWTH CONTINUES THROUGH THE PRAYER OF OTHERS

A female monarch lays the eggs in protected places - on the underside of the milkweed leaves, for example – where wasps and other predators will be less likely to find them. For the Christian the protection comes through prayer. Notice the wording of verse 9:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

“Since the day we heard about you we have not stopped praying for you...” There’s something powerful here. Paul knew the importance of protection for new believers. From the moment he heard about their faith he covered them with prayer! New believers are vulnerable. The Enemy is not happy that someone has chosen to turn away from his kingdom of darkness and embrace the kingdom of light...and he is ready to take them down through discouragement or temptation or doubt. But prayer is a protective force for us – all through our lives, in fact, not just during our early days in the faith.

This is a beautiful prayer. It is a beautiful thing to listen to the prayer of a Christian for his friends. This is what we are doing here. To summarize these verses, Paul is asking for two things:

1. For the discernment of God’s will

Prayer is not so much trying to get God to listen to us but trying to learn how to listen to God! Prayer is not trying to talk God into doing what we want him to do but trying to understand what he wants us to do!

Paul prays that they would have spiritual wisdom. The word he uses is the Greek word, SOPHIA, which meant knowledge of first principles. He also prays that they would have understanding. This Greek word, SUNESIS, meant having the ability to apply the first principles to any given situation that would arise in life. But he continues his prayer...

2. For the power to perform God’s will

We all know that it’s not knowing what we need to do that’s the big struggle for us – what is it? It’s the power to do what we know is right! Paul prays that they would have that power as well as the wisdom and understanding.

We all need someone who will stand in there for us!

I came across a story this week that illustrates this point:

A lady named Dorothy had spent several weeks in special training and prayer to be trained to lead a Bible study group. Finally the big day arrived for her first class. Getting her family of six out the door and off to school was turning out to be a bit more hectic than usual. Breakfast wasn’t turning out right. Some of the kids were arguing about whatever. Dorothy was losing her composure until in the middle of it all her husband came into the kitchen and sized up the situation quickly. He said, “OK kids, settle down! Give your Mom a break, she only has 45 minutes before she has to become a radiant Christian!”

GROWTH CONTINUES THROUGH THE PRAYER OF OTHERS

Finally,

GROWTH CONTINUES BECAUSE OF CHRIST

The letter to the Colossians contains probably the most exalted description of Christ in all of Scripture. Verses 15-23 are 9 verses that all of us should read and study and absorb into our spiritual bloodstreams. What we have in Christ is far richer than any material possession we could own; far more powerful than any position we could earn or be voted into; far more incredible than any feeling we could experience. He is Supreme! And because he is as verses 16, 17 say, growth in our spiritual lives is possible because he holds all things together.

All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (See Colossians 1:16,17)

Just like a botanist could spend hours and hours explaining the intricacies of the Monarch so we could spend hours and hours studying the intricacies of these verses. I invite you to make the book of Colossians your source of study over the next 4 weeks. You will discover riches here that you never knew existed! You will be amazed again at Jesus Christ! And you will grow in your faith!

Let's review as we close:

GROWTH STARTS WITH SIMPLE FAITH

Maybe for you, today, the response to this message is to make that simple faith decision. You realize you've never done that for yourself. You've talked about it. You've thought about it but you've never done it yourself. Make that choice for Jesus Christ today!

GROWTH STARTS WITH ONE PERSON TELLING SOMEONE ELSE

Maybe for you, today, the response to this message is to begin again to ask God who he wants you to help along the journey to Christ. I may involve saying the words of the gospel. I may involve being the hands and feet of Christ. Which ever it is, start!

GROWTH CONTINUES THROUGH THE PRAYER OF OTHERS

This point may have spoken to your heart. You want to begin again to pray for those who are young in their spiritual journey. They need prayer – every day!

GROWTH CONTINUES BECAUSE OF CHRIST

And maybe for some, today, the challenge of God's Word is to ask Him once again to "Open the Eyes of your heart – you want to see Jesus." He is far more than any human being! He is the Famous One of the Universe – of all Time and Eternity! I've asked the Worship Team to lead us in that song by Chris Tomlin as we close.

Prayer...