

GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION AND BUILDING

In **Matthew 13** we have the seeds for **growth** and **transformation**, both of which are for **building**. In 16:16 Peter recognized that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. After Peter made this declaration, the Lord seemed to say, “You have recognized that I am the Christ, the Son of God, but I must tell you something more. It is not sufficient for you to know Me. You must realize that you are a stone and that I will build My church with you as a stone.” Matthew includes most of the basic points in the New Testament. It gives us the **seed of growth, transformation, and building**. All these items are not only related to the church but also to the kingdom. Matthew 16:18-19 reveals that the Lord Jesus used the terms church and kingdom interchangeably. “I will build My **church**...I will give to you the keys of the **kingdom** of the heavens.” The church is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the church. The church, which the Lord Jesus builds up with living stones, is the kingdom.

A STONE FOR THE BUILDING

The book of Matthew portrays the Lord Jesus as the wonderful One who has come to sow Himself as the seed of life into us. After the sowing of the seed, there is growth, transformation, and building. The building is the building of the church, which is the kingdom. John 1:42 tells us about the first time that Peter came to the Lord Jesus. When his brother, Andrew, brought him to the Lord, the Lord did not teach him or instruct him; rather, He changed his name from Simon to Cephas. In a sense, this was a prophecy. The Lord prophesied to Simon that he would be called Cephas. Both Cephas and Peter mean a “**stone**.”

The incident recorded in Matthew 16 occurred **about two years after** Peter’s first meeting with the Lord in John 1:42. When Peter confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord reminded him, “You are a stone.” It was not sufficient for Peter to know that He was the Christ and the Son of God. He also needed to realize that **he himself was a stone** for the building. The Lord was going to build the kingdom. **He would build Peter into the church and give him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens**. According to the book of Acts, Peter used at least two keys. He used one key on the day of Pentecost to open the door for the **Jewish** people to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (2:38-42). He used the other key in the house of Cornelius to open the door for the **Gentiles** to come into the kingdom (10:34-48). The keys were given to Peter and also the authority to **bind** and **loose** was committed to him.

BINDING AND LOOSING

The church in Matthew 18 is surely the local church, and the local church has the authority to bind and loose. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord Jesus told Peter that he had the authority to bind and loose, but in Matthew 18:18 the Lord changed the subject from singular to plural. Matthew 16:19 says, "Whatever you (singular, Gk.) bind," and Matthew 18:18 says, "Whatever you (plural, Gk.) bind." **This means that we too have the power to bind and to loose. The authority that Peter had, we also have. Have you seen your position? Have you seen your authority and rank? We all can bind and loose, just as Peter did. Peter was a stone, and we also are stones. Peter had authority to bind and loose, and we also have this authority.**

FROM CLAY TO STONE

Many Christians have not seen the authority and the position that have been committed to them. However, if we are going to realize our **position** and **authority**, we must be transformed. We were pieces of clay; we must become stones. By nature as a human being, Simon was clay, but the Lord Jesus changed his life and transformed his being. The Lord Jesus not only changed Simon's name, but He also transformed his being into a stone. In the New Jerusalem there is a foundation stone with Peter's name on it (Rev. 21:14). He is no longer a piece of clay; he has become a **foundation stone**. Peter in the four Gospels was clay, often taking the lead in making mistakes. **But if you read the New Testament carefully, you will see that this muddy Peter was under the process of transformation.** In Acts 1 Peter was no longer muddy; he had become a piece of transparent, precious stone. In the four Gospels Peter was somewhat opaque, but when he stood up in Acts 1, he was transparent.

ONENESS BY THE SPIRIT

Before Pentecost had actually arrived, Peter was transparent. He was so bold, strong, and positive, remaining in Jerusalem with one hundred and twenty, praying for ten days in one accord (v. 14). One hundred and twenty people prayed for ten days in one accord without dissenting or disputing. Do you doubt that they had the Holy Spirit? Without the Holy Spirit they could not have done it. They were Galileans who had given up their own country and were staying in Jerusalem in spite of the threatenings of the Jews. **One hundred and twenty people prayed for ten days in one accord! If they did not have the Spirit, I am afraid they would have begun to fight after only ten hours. Their being in one accord and continuing in prayer indicates that they had the Spirit within them before the day of Pentecost.**

TRANSFORMATION

Peter received a new name, signifying a new element, and a new being. He was transformed. To be transformed is not simply to be changed outwardly; it is to have a new element added into your being. Transformation brings in a new element and eliminates the old element. To be transformed is to be both charged and discharged. We all need to be charged with Christ, just as a transformer is charged with electricity. When Christ is charged into us, He will discharge many old things. In this way we will be renewed and transformed. Transformation is not merely to have an outward change or correction. In the process of transformation a new element is added to replace the old. As this process continues, we become new and transformed. This is exactly what Peter experienced; the old clay Simon was discharged, and Peter became a precious stone.

In the local churches today we are all under the process of transformation. Day by day Christ is charging Himself into us, and He is discharging and carrying away all the old elements. This process of charging and discharging is transformation. Throughout the past years I have seen some amount of transformation, especially with the young people. Many young people in the local churches have been transformed without regulation or outward correction. Although no one tried to teach them or change them, they were transformed. Some new elements of Christ have been charged into them, causing a discharge of the old elements.

BUILDING

The transformation is for the building. In Matthew 13 we see the sower, the seed, the growth, and the transformation. The vegetables are transformed into minerals. Although we are wheat, we can become precious stones and pearls by transformation. Both precious stones and pearls are transformed items. In Matthew 13 we cannot see the purpose of growth and transformation. For this, we need to proceed to Matthew 16. In this chapter we find a very significant statement: “You are a stone” (v. 18, Gk.). It is not sufficient just to recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Christ. We must also realize that we are stones. It is very good that we know Christ, but we must also know ourselves. Sisters, are you stones? I am afraid that tomorrow morning you may find that it is very easy to shed some tears. When you are about to cry, you should remind yourself that you are a stone. Furthermore, a stone will never lose its temper. Brothers, are you stones? What will you do if your wife gives you a difficult time tomorrow morning? Will you lose your temper? If you lose your temper, it indicates that, at least to a certain extent, you are not yet a stone—you are still clay.

GROWTH BY THE PURE WORD

Matthew 13 tells us about the need for growth. First Peter 2 also tells us that we need to grow. As newborn babes we should long for the guileless milk of the word in order that we may grow and become the living stones. We can become living stones by growing because transformation is included in the process of growth. If we consider the verses in 1 Peter 2, we will realize that both growth and transformation are found there. If there is no transformation with the growth, how can one who longs for milk be a living stone? To be sure, the ones who long for milk are not yet living stones. However, after drinking the milk of the word, they will grow and be transformed into living stones for the building. Again we have growth, transformation, and building. In Matthew 13 we have growth and transformation; in Matthew 16 we have the **building**. We are stones, and the Lord is building us into the church, which is the kingdom. The builded church has authority, and the gates of Hades, signifying the power of Satan, cannot prevail against it. This is the church, a building of transformed materials.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

We all must see what the kingdom is. It is not only a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is the building up of regenerated, transformed persons. This building is accomplished in the local church. The builded church of Matthew 16 becomes the local church of Matthew 18. We cannot separate these two chapters. What is built in Matthew 16 is the local church found in Matthew 18. Some say that the church is only universal. If so, where is the universal church? The universal church is the totality of all the local churches, even as a body is the totality of all its members. If there are no members, there is no body. The universal church does not exist by itself; it is a composition of all the local churches. Those who talk only about the universal church are afraid of being built up together with others in the local church. As stones, we must be built into the local church.

BUILT UP WITH OTHERS

The Lord reminded Peter that he was a stone for the building up of the church. He was not built up in the universal church in a general way but **practically in the church at Jerusalem**. Do not say that you are just in the church. **In which local church are you being built up? Do not say that you are just a member of the Body of Christ. You must have a location.** Once you are located, you are no longer a **wandering star** (Jude 13). We must have a location, and we must be built. Once we are located, we have a good opportunity to be built in. **First we**

are located; then we are built in. Migration is wonderful, but do not move from city to city. We must be able to declare to the whole universe that we have been located and that we are now being built into a particular local church. We must not only be in Matthew 16 in the universal church but also in Matthew 18 in the local church.

Growth, transformation, and building occur simultaneously. We should not think that these are three distinct stages. Although it may sound logical to say that growth, transformation, and building are three separate stages, this is not true according to the spiritual life in the church and the kingdom. Growth, transformation, and building **progress together**. The more you grow, the more you are transformed; the more you are transformed, the more you are built up. The amount of transformation depends on the amount of growth, and the amount of building depends on the amount of transformation.

THE ONE STREET OF LIFE

The New Jerusalem faces four directions—north, south, east, and west. This city has twelve gates, three in each direction (Rev. 21:13), and only one street, the street of life. It does not matter from which direction you came or through which gate you entered into the city. Once you are in the New Jerusalem, you will find yourself on the street of life. **There are no streets of doctrine, of formalism, of gifts, or of tongues. There is one unique street—the street of life.** The essence of this street is life. On this street can be found the water of life, the river of life, and the tree of life (22:1-2). Whatever proceeds along this street is related to life. You may have entered this city **through the gate** of formalism or Fundamentalism or Pentecostalism, but once you are truly in the New Jerusalem, you will be on the street of life. There is no other street.

If the local churches have any streets other than life, we will lose the nature of the local church, and there will be divisions. If we fail to emphasize life, we will repeat the history of Christianity, which is a story of divisions and of many streets. The Presbyterians travel the Presbyterian street; the Baptists travel the Baptist street; the Pentecostals travel the way of speaking in tongues. **We must take the way of life.** It does not depend on what we say; **it depends on what we are.** For the sake of the Lord's recovery we must see the importance of life...

THE CORNERSTONE

In Matthew 21 the Jewish people were trying their best to find fault with the Lord Jesus, to condemn Him, and to cause Him to make a mistake. These religious people were apparently so scriptural, trying to do everything according to the Bible, but the Lord Jesus asked them, *“Have you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner...’?”* (v. 42). Within the Lord’s heart was the thought that both He and His disciples were pieces of stone for the building. The disciples were stones, and the Lord Jesus Himself was the cornerstone... He was telling them that the person whom they had rejected is the cornerstone for God’s building. Peter remembered this, and when the religious leaders were persecuting him, he quoted the same verse from the Psalms (Acts 4:11; Psa. 118:22). Acts 4:12 is frequently quoted by Christians, but few of them also quote verse 11 concerning the building. Today most Christians care only for their salvation; they do not care for God’s building. In the Lord’s recovery we must pay our full attention to God’s building. As long as we are in this building, we are saved. Some Christians like to talk about eternal security. The real security, however, is to be built into God’s building. If we are built into this building, we will be secure. Others are concerned with holiness. If we are truly built into God’s building, we will be separated and sanctified. Other people are troubled about their lack of patience and their temper. If we would be built into the local churches, our temper will be terminated, and we will have the patience we need. First is Acts 4:11 concerning the building, followed by Acts 4:12 concerning salvation. **If we are built into God’s building, we are surely saved.** The Lord Jesus is not only the Redeemer; He is also the cornerstone for God’s building. This is the Lord’s building in Matthew. Christ is the cornerstone, and His disciples are the living stones for the building of God.