

“UNTHINKABLE GROWTH”

MATT. 13:1-9, 18-23

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Thank you for inviting me this morning. My message this morning is really quite simple. First, I'd like to talk about how Hope Church, this church, has helped the Japanese ministry and mission in Japan.

You know when Hope Church was started, right? It was in 1862. Hope Church was, at that time, the only English-speaking church in Holland. In 1871, two ex-samurai Japanese students came to the United States. They came initially to New York City but did not know where to begin their studies. The first President of Hope College, Rev. Philip Phelps happened to be in New York City at that time for fund raising. When he heard about the two Japanese students, he felt compelled to speak with them.

Following his conversation with the young men, Rev. Phelps was moved to help them find the right school for their studies, and he offered them scholarships to study at Hope College. The historical record tells us that it required about one week for the young men to make their trip from New York to Holland, traveling first by steam engine and then, from Kalamazoo to here, by horse and buggy.

Back in the 1870's, Christianity was banned in Japan. Consequently, before arriving here, these two young men had decided before arriving here that they would not to be influenced by Christianity. However, because of the Christ-like love and care provided them by Rev. and Mrs. Phelps, they decided to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior and to be baptized.

Do you know where they were baptized? Right here, at Hope Church, back in 1872. Their names were: Kimura Kumaji and Ogimi Motoichiro. They studied at Hope for 8 years and graduated in 1879. When they graduated, did you know that 1/3 of the graduating class of 1879 was Japanese? Amazing, isn't it?! Well, there were only 6 graduates that year. Anyway, Ogimi was the valedictorian, and he gave his speech in English, Japanese, and Latin.

While they were at Hope College, they traveled extensively in Michigan. They went to Grand Rapids, Lansing, Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, and Kalamazoo. As they traveled, they prayed that the Japanese people who would come to Michigan would be saved.

Their prayer was answered after 120 years. The Japanese ministry in West Michigan started in 1992 in Holland. And currently, we have ministry stations in Holland, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, and Kalamazoo, just as Kimura and Ogimi prayed at each location.

More than 2,000 different people have come and worshipped at the Japanese services and have heard the Word of God proclaimed. Some Hope students have been baptized, and some missionaries have been sent to Japan from the Japanese ministry.

Two peoples' prayers changed Michigan and Japan. After going back to Japan, Kimura and Ogimi started a number of churches in Japan, and also several Christian schools including Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo Women's College, School for the Blind, and others. The two young men were able to produce many, many Christians. And the fruit of their efforts of sowing seeds continues to grow.

If you sow seeds, they will grow in time. And, just as Ogimi & Kimura reaped a crop, you will, too. You do not need to choose where to sow. You just need to sow seeds of God's Word. If the ground is good, they will produce a good crop.

I am sure Ogimi and Kimura did not expect this much crop – probably 100 times as much! But isn't this what happens to Christians, children of God's promise?

Today, we read Genesis 25. Isaac's wife, Rebecca, was barren. So, Isaac prayed, and God answered his prayer! Rebecca is pregnant! Wonderful! That is what the Christian life should be like, right? But, something strange was happening. Babies were fighting in her stomach! Not only that, after they were born, Esau, the eldest son – he did not care for things of God!

Maybe not in this congregation, but sometimes you see a great Christian couple struggle to raise a son or daughter who is totally against God, does not appreciate things of God.

Besides that, these kids who should have been blessings to Isaac and Rebecca became, instead, thorns in their sides. The Bible says, "Isaac loved Esau; Rebecca loved Jacob." It's a warning sign for a couple. In today's standard, they were a dysfunctional family!

But, take a look at the next chapter, Genesis 26:12. "When Isaac planted in that land, he reaped in the same year a hundred times what he had sown, because the Lord blessed him." Isaac produced 100 times! Did you know that the Bible mentions that Isaac was the only one who produced 100 times what he had sown?

Did Isaac do something special? No, actually, he lied and cheated a king right before this passage. I am sure he repented afterwards, but the Bible says, "Isaac was able to produce 100 times because the Lord blessed him."

Isaac was called the "promised child". God takes care of his promised children. Who are they in the New Testament? It is us!

Why can we go to heaven? Did we do something special? Why does God answer our prayers? Why are we allowed to experience miracles? Why does the Holy Spirit live inside us and instruct us what to do? That's what Romans 8, today's passage, is talking about.

If you are feeling like "my family is dysfunctional," "my life is a mess," or "I don't know what to do with my life," then look at the life of Isaac and the promise of Matthew 13. Life of promised child is not over, yet.

The only thing God asks of you is to have good soil in your heart, receptive, repentant, reflective, and rejoicing... Then, God's Words, which have been sown on your heart, will produce crop – a 100 times, 60 times, or at least 30 times. "He who has ears, let him hear."