# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 1-12



# TWELVE BASKETS, Vol. 1—12

This book does not present a consecutive series of addresses, but a few unrelated messages—fragments of a rich spoken ministry. As the title of the book suggests, they are reminiscent of the fragments collected after our Lord had fed the multitude. These messages which are translated from Chinese and slightly abridged and which appeared formerly in booklet form are now collected into thess volumes.

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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 1



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 1

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# MESSAGE ONE

## Two Kinds Of Knowledge Of The Lord—
## That Which Is According To The Flesh
## And That Which Is According To The Spirit

## •Outline

- •Mary The Magdalene's Knowledge Of The Lord
- •The Knowledge Of The Lord Of The Two Disciples On The Way To Emmaus
- •The Seven Disciples' Knowledge Of The Lord

## •Scripture Reading: John 20:11-18; Luke 24:13-16; 25-32; John 21:1-14

John 20:11-18 "But Mary stood outside at the tomb weeping. Then as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb And beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. When she said these things, she turned backward and beheld Jesus standing there, yet she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing that He was the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni! (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God. Mary the Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that He had said these things to her."

Luke 24:13-16 “And behold, two of them were going on the same day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia away from Jerusalem. And they were talking to each other concerning all these things which had occurred. And while they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.”

25-32 “And He said to them, O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them clearly in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. And they drew near to the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther. And they constrained Him, saying, Stay with us, because it is near evening and the day is already gone by. And He went in to stay with them. And as He reclined at table with them, He took the loaf and blessed it, and having broken it, He began handing it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him; and He disappeared from them. And they said to one another, Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was opening to us the Scriptures?”

John 21:1-14 “After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. And He manifested Himself in this way: Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathanael from Cana of Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and two others of His disciples were there together. Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We also are coming with you. They went forth and got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. Now as soon as the morning broke, Jesus stood on the shore; however the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, Little children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you? They answered Him, No. And He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. They cast therefore, and they were no longer able to haul it in because of the abundance of fish. Then that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord! Therefore when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment around himself, for he was naked; and he threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about

two hundred cubits away, dragging the net of fish. Then when they got out onto the land, they saw a fire of coals laid there, and fish lying on it and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just now caught. Simon Peter therefore went up and hauled the net to the land full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast. But none of the disciples dared to inquire of Him, Who are you? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This was now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after He had been raised from the dead."

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From the Lord Jesus' resurrection until now, there are two kinds of knowledge of Him. One kind of knowledge is according to the flesh, and the other kind of knowledge is according to the Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul said, "So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." In Galatians 1:15-16, he also said, "It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me." These verses show us the proper means by which we can know the Lord Jesus today. Let us see these two kinds of knowledge of the Lord Jesus by considering a few concrete examples from the Bible.

## MARY THE MAGDALENE'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

While Mary the Magdalene was weeping outside the Lord's grave, "two angels in white...said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. When she said these things, she turned backward and beheld Jesus standing there, yet she did not know that it was Jesus" (John 20:12-14). It is strange that when she turned and saw Jesus, the One whom she had seen and followed for years, she could not recognize Him. The reason that she did not know the Lord at all, even though she knew Him so well before, was because the Son of God who had been in the flesh had been crucified on the cross and resurrected. The body which she desired to see was gone. All those who knew

Him according to the flesh did not know Him any longer after His resurrection. He was no longer the Lord Jesus that she knew. He had become the Lord Jesus that she did not know. He was no longer a historical Jesus; He was living in the Spirit. He was no longer the Lord Jesus in the flesh but the Lord Jesus in the Spirit. She could no longer know Him by the same means that she did when she knew Him in the flesh.

"Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing that He was the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away" (v. 15). Mary's senses were no longer very clear. Formerly, she knew Him by using her ears. Her ears had not changed, but they no longer worked when she tried to identify Him according to her ears. Formerly, her eyes could identify Him. Her eyes had not changed, but they could not identify the Lord Jesus anymore. She had not changed, but Jesus of Nazareth had changed. Mary was still the same Mary, but Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead. Her ears, eyes, and understanding had now become useless. According to the old ways it was possible to know the earthly Lord Jesus in the flesh. But it was no longer possible to know the resurrected, spiritual, and heavenly Lord Jesus, who now lived in the Spirit. Mary had not changed. The Lord Jesus had changed. Because the Lord had changed, there had to be a change on Mary's part before she could know the changed Jesus. She had to have a new revelation before she could have a fresh knowledge of the Lord.

"Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni!" (v. 16). It is strange that as soon as the Lord mentioned her name, Mary recognized the Lord. This calling of her name by the Lord is a kind of revelation. What is a revelation? A revelation is not the Lord standing there and saying, "I am Jesus." A revelation is when a person suddenly and inexplicably comes to know the Lord. When the Lord Jesus called, "Mary," she did not come to know that her name was Mary. When the Lord called, "Mary," she realized that this was Rabboni. The Lord did not say anything to her; all He did was call her name, and she became clear within. She received inward knowledge. This is the meaning of a revelation.

Here we see an important principle. Revelation does not come through the ears, the eyes, or any other power of perception. Revelation is a mysterious thing;

it is a knowledge beyond the power of comprehension of the ears and eyes. It is a mysterious kind of knowledge. This is revelation.

After Mary knew the Lord, she hurried to the disciples to tell them about it. Although the disciples heard it, they were still bewildered.

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD OF THE TWO DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS

After the Lord's resurrection, two of the disciples went to Emmaus. On the way they were talking to each other concerning all the things which had occurred, that is, about the things concerning the Lord Jesus which Mary had related. At that moment, the Lord Jesus Himself drew near to them and went with them. Yet their eyes were kept from recognizing Him; they did not know the resurrected Lord. They knew the Jesus who was in the flesh. But they did not know the Lord who had resurrected. Resurrection was a mysterious thing to them, and they could not believe in it.

The Lord conversed with them, taught them, and clearly explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, beginning from Moses and from all the prophets. Yet they still did not know Him. Although they understood the teachings of the Scriptures and were touched and even burning in their hearts, they still did not know the Lord Jesus. This shows us that doctrines and revelation are two different things. They understood the Scriptures, but they did not know the Lord. They knew the teachings about Christ, but they did not know Christ.

When it was near evening and they were coming close to Emmaus, they constrained Him to stay with them. As they reclined at table, Jesus took the loaf and handed it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. This shows us clearly that there are two kinds of knowledge of the Lord. One kind of knowledge is from the Bible, while the other kind of knowledge comes when the Lord opens men's eyes. Some are very familiar with the Scriptures and can even speak to others about them, but they do not know the Lord Jesus. Others know not only the scriptural teachings, but their eyes have been opened by the Lord and they know the Lord Jesus also. These are two very different

things. We must realize that Christianity does not have only the Bible but also personal revelations. It is true that without the Bible, there would be no Christianity in the world. But we have to remember that without revelation, we do not have a personal Christ.

One problem among God's children is that much of their knowledge is "transmitted" knowledge; it is transmitted from one's mouth to another's ear. One man understands with his mind and transmits it into another man's ear. Everything is transmitted, and hence everything is just a doctrine and teaching. We must remember that it is useless to have Bible knowledge without knowing the Lord. The two disciples that were on the way to Emmaus knew the Scriptures already, and while the Lord was talking with them and explaining the Scriptures to them on the way, their hearts were burning. Yet they still did not know the Lord. The only true knowledge of the Lord is inward knowledge. Do you have such an inward knowledge of the Lord?

## THE SEVEN DISCIPLES' KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

One day, "Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathanael from Cana of Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and two others of His disciples were there together. Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We also are coming with you" (John 21:2-3). It is strange that they were good fishermen, yet once they had followed the Lord, they could not catch anything when they went back to fish. They caught nothing during the whole night. Even more strange is the fact that as the morning broke, when Jesus stood on the shore, they did not recognize Him. The resurrected Lord Jesus cannot be recognized by human eyes. Peter, John, and James had been with the Lord all the time. Nathanael was one of the earliest ones who knew the Lord. As for Thomas, the Lord even purposely manifested Himself to him in order to remove his disbelief of His resurrection. Yet now, they all failed to know Him. They needed another experience and another power before they could know Him. "Then Jesus said to them, Little children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you? They answered Him, No. And He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. They cast therefore, and they were no longer able to haul

it in because of the abundance of fish" (vv. 5-6). Then what happened? John, the disciple who reclined on the Lord's breast, recognized that it was the Lord, and he said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment around himself and threw himself into the sea. A minute earlier they heard Him and saw Him, yet they did not know that it was the Lord. Now suddenly they knew; they knew in a mysterious way. This knowledge is revelation. This knowledge is unshakeable; it is an inward seeing, an inward knowledge, and an inward strength. This knowledge gave Peter renewed strength.

"When they got out onto the land, they saw a fire of coals laid there, and fish lying on it and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just now caught" (vv. 9-10). None of the disciples dared to ask who He was, knowing that it was the Lord. Do you not feel that this word is quite ambiguous? If they knew that it was the Lord, they no longer needed to ask Him. They were not without questions; they were just too afraid to ask. They dared not inquire of Him. This means that they did not know, yet they dared not ask because they were afraid. Yet it says that although no one dared to inquire of Him, they all knew that it was the Lord. They did not know it outwardly, but they knew it inwardly. Outwardly they were still wondering who this man was. Yet inwardly, they knew that it was the Lord. They may have said, "I do not know Him when I see His face. I do not know Him when I hear His voice. In my mind, I want to ask Him who He is. But in my heart I do not need to ask Him because I already know that He is the Lord." Have you ever had this experience—on the one hand, you do not know anything, but on the other hand, you are very clear? This is the experience of many Christians. We are not clear about many things and are bewildered about many things. But at the same time, we are very clear. This is the meaning of revelation. Revelation makes a person clear within; it is knowing something within. Blessed are those who walk according to revelation! Blessed are those who know the Lord according to revelation! Only they have power before the Lord, and only they know what the Lord can do.

Outward knowledge cannot replace inward revelation. We must have an inward knowledge of the Lord. Once we have inward knowledge, no one can

shake us. May the Lord open our eyes to realize what we cannot realize otherwise. With our mind and our senses, we can only know Jesus in the flesh; this knowledge is not that useful to us and does not give us any strength. May the Lord truly reveal His Son in us so that we can be clear within, have inward knowledge and understanding, and have no doubt whatsoever within us.

## MESSAGE TWO

# THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE CROSS

## •Outline

- **•How Were Men Saved In The Old Testament?**
- **•How Are Men Saved In The New Testament?**
- **•The Timelessness Of The Cross**
- **•The Eternal Freshness Of The Cross**
- **•The Memorial Of The Cross**
- **•The Cross And Spirituality**
- **•Eternal Salvation**

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 9:15-17

Heb. 9:15-17 "And because of this He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that, death having taken place for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, the death of him who made the testament must of necessity be established. For a testament is confirmed in the case of the dead, since it never has force when he who made the testament is living."

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These verses show us the relationship between the cross of Christ, the old and new covenants. Under the old covenant men sinned the same way that they now do. Since there was sin, there was the need for the Savior. If a man has sinned and has not received God's forgiveness, he will have to bear his own judgment of sin. God cannot forgive man's sin simply by His mercy. To do so would put Him in unrighteousness. For this reason, in God's way of redemption He established the way of substitution. Under the old covenant He used many

sacrifices and offerings to make atonement for man's sins. Since many animals died on man's behalf, man received God's righteous forgiveness. The word "atonement" in Hebrew means to "cover up." Under the old covenant the atonement was but a covering up of man's sins with animals' blood, because the Bible clearly says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). For this reason, at the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world to die for men. Through His one offering up of Himself, the eternal salvation of redemption was accomplished. The sins which were not removed by the blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament are now removed through His death, for He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As through the blood of many sacrifices, God foresaw the blood of His Son and its effectiveness. However, unless the Lord Jesus dies, God still could not put an end to the problem of sin in the first covenant. When Christ died, the sin under the first covenant was removed, terminated the first, and initiated the new covenant.

"And because of this He is the Mediator of a new covenant..." His being the Mediator of the new covenant is based on His redemption of the sins of those in the first covenant. Originally, man was to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. However, because of his sin, man was kept from inheriting it. Now the Lord Jesus has died. Man is redeemed from sin, and the called ones are qualified to receive the eternal inheritance. Hence, the Lord Jesus became the Mediator through the death on the cross. On the one hand, He brought an end to the sins of the old covenant. On the other hand, He brought in the blessing of the new covenant.

Verse 15 is related to His being the Mediator and verse 16 considers Him as the One who made the testament. The word "testament" is "covenant" in the original language. In the above discussion, we had the law of the covenant. All those who transgressed the law died. Christ died in order to redeem us from sin. After this we may consider the testament of the covenant. A testament means an arrangement made by a testator for the passing of his possessions to his heir at the testator's death. The Lord Jesus is the Testator, the One who made the testament. All the blessings of this age and the next belong to Him. Since He was

willing to bear the sins of those in the first covenant, He is also willing to pass on all that is promised in this covenant (testament). In order to redeem man from his sins, He had to die. In order for man to inherit the testament, He also had to die. (If a man is alive, the testament he makes will not come into effect. He must die before the heir can inherit the inheritance.) Here we see the profound relationship between Christ's death and the old and new covenants. In short, without His death there would not be the old and the new covenants. Without His death, the Old Testament could not be complete, for the requirement of its law would not have been met. Without His death there could not be the New Testament, because there would be no way for the blessing of its testament to be passed on to the called ones. He died and terminated the first covenant and has enacted the second covenant.

## HOW WERE MEN SAVED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

If the blood of bulls and goats was not able to remove sin, as we mentioned earlier, how then were those in the Old Testament saved? It was by the cross. Man had sinned. Hence, only a man could accomplish the redemption of sin. Although the animals were innocent, and although they were without blemish, they could not redeem man from his sins. Why then did God promise in Leviticus 17 that the blood of creatures was able to redeem one from sin? There must be some very profound meaning here. The things of the law "are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). Hence, the sacrifices and the offerings in the Old Testament all refer to Christ. Although Christ had not yet died at the time of the first covenant, God intended that all the sacrifices offered at that time be a type of Christ. Their death was taken as the death of Christ. Through the blood of many animals, God saw the blood of His beloved Son. Through many bulls and goats, He saw "the Lamb of God." Through the many sacrifices, He saw the substitutional death of Christ. When He accepted those offerings, it was as if He was accepting the merit of the death of His Son. Because of this, man was redeemed from his sins. God reckoned the innocent bulls and goats as His dear Son. Hence, He could forgive the sinners based upon the sacrifices they offered. Every time the offerings were slaughtered, they spoke of

the coming sacrifice of the Son of God as the sin offering on Golgotha and of His accomplishment of the eternal work of salvation. Because the Lord is a man, He is able to redeem man from sin. Because He is God, He is able to redeem all men, past and present, from their sins.

Those who offered the sacrifices in the Old Testament, consciously or unconsciously, believed in a coming crucified Savior. All their sacrifices were to turn them to the coming Savior. Although the Lord Jesus was not yet born at that time, faith did not look at what could be seen. Rather, it looked at what could not be seen. Faith saw a vicarious Savior from afar and trusted in Him. When the time came, the Son of God came and died for men. What had only been a matter of faith then became a fact.

## HOW ARE MEN SAVED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

We know that we are in the New Testament age. How are we saved in this age? Christ has died and salvation is accomplished. If we believe in the Lord Jesus, which means that by faith we receive Him as the Savior, we will be saved. Some have a hard time understanding how Christ could have died for them before they were even born. Indeed this presents a problem to the physical senses. Yet to faith, this is a glorious truth.

First, we must realize that time cannot restrict God. To us mortals, a few decades is a long time. But our God is an eternal God. To Him, even a thousand years do not mean much. Although time can restrict us, it cannot restrict Him. Hence, even though we believe in a Lord who died once for us many years ago, we are saved.

The Bible says that the Lord Jesus offered up Himself once and accomplished the work of redemption (Heb. 7:27). He is God. This is why He can transcend time to redeem those who were thousands of years before Him as well as those who are thousands of years after Him. Not only can He redeem those thousands of years after Him; if, unfortunately, the world goes on for millions of years more, His redemption will still be effective. Once He finished His work, it was accomplished forever. If a sinner desires to be saved now, the Lord does not need to die for him again. This one only needs to accept the merit of the Lord's

one offering, and he will be saved. Our faith is not restricted by time either. Faith can lead one into the reality of eternity. As men in the Old Testament looked to a coming Savior and were saved, in the same way we look to a past Savior and are saved. The fact that the matter is past does not mean that it is over. Rather, it means that it is done. The men in the Old Testament looked forward. We at the present time look backward. Faith caused those in the Old Testament to accept a coming Savior. Will not our faith cause us to accept a past Savior?

In reading Hebrews 9:12-15 it would be very meaningful if we link together the three "eternals" in these verses. The Lord accomplished an eternal redemption. By offering up Himself to God through the eternal Spirit, we have obtained an eternal inheritance. Hence, whenever men believe in Him, they receive this redemption. We ought to realize that the worth of the cross is not determined by man. Rather, it is determined by God. God considers the redemption of the cross as eternal. Therefore, we sinners who have no righteousness of our own should acknowledge God's word as true and should act according to His word and believe in the cross of His Son and be saved.

## THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE CROSS

This is the most crucial point. Although the Bible says that the Lord Jesus offered up the sacrifice for sins once, it points out that "having offered one sacrifice for sins, [He] sat down forever..." (Heb. 10:12). The word "one" means that the Lord's sacrifice for sins was perfect; He only needed to redeem man from sins once. However, this sacrifice for sins is forever. It is an eternal sacrifice for sins! This means that not only is the effect of this sacrifice for sins eternal, but the sacrifice itself is eternal. Although Christ has resurrected and is living forever, it seems that His cross continues to exist! May we realize the timelessness of the cross! It is not a past event of nineteen hundred years ago. It remains fresh today.

Revelation 13:8 says, "The Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world." Our Lord is the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world until now and forever. To Him, the cross is not merely an event of a certain time, on a certain date of a certain month of a certain year. Rather, it is something that has existed since the foundation of the world until now. When He created man, He

foreknew the price of the coming redemption. He created man with His power. In the same way He redeemed man with His blood. It is as if He was crucified from the beginning when He created man. For thousands of years He suffered the prolonged suffering of the cross. The one death on Golgotha merely signified the grief God's Spirit had borne for a long time. What grace this is! What wonder this is! We have no words to express the meaning of this verse. Before the Lord Jesus left heaven, and while He was still in glory, He knew the suffering of the cross already. He knew during the thousands of years before He came. He knew this at the time of creation. Since eternity past, the cross has been in God's heart. When we consider how in eternity past God knew that He was to create man and that man would become fallen, we realize how His heart, humanly speaking, must have grieved over it. Because He so loved men, He ordained before the foundation of the world that Christ would die on our behalf (1 Pet. 1:20). Although Christ only appeared once in the last times for our sins, through His love for the world He has been grieving and aching since the foundation of the world, as if He has been crucified a thousand times already! What a pity that many people are now still grieving Him, as if crucifying Him afresh. When we realize such love of His, we cannot help but marvel and stand in awe before Him! This is God's heart! If we realize this, will we not love God all the more? Hence, humanly speaking, those in the Old Testament believed in a coming cross, while those in the New Testament believe in a past cross. Actually, there is no distinction of time and period. The cross of the Old Testament is a present one, and the cross of the New Testament is also a present one. May the Lord open our eyes to see that the cross is timeless.

## THE ETERNAL FRESHNESS OF THE CROSS

Many people push the cross back nineteen hundred years and consider it as old, outdated, and obsolete. Although it is true that world history considers Christ's Golgotha a historical event, in the believers' spiritual experience the cross of Christ is still fresh, not old.

Hebrews 10:19 and 20 say, "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, which entrance He initiated for

us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh." In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was divided into two sections. The first section was called the Holy Place, and the second section was called the Holy of Holies. The two sections were divided by a veil. Those entering the Holy of Holies had to pass through the veil. God's glory was manifested within the Holy of Holies. No ordinary person could enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter it once a year, bringing blood to make atonement for himself and the people alone. Now through the blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross, we can enter the Holy of Holies any time.

Those entering the Holy of Holies had to pass through the veil. The veil signifies the body of the Lord Jesus. When He was crucified, the veil of the temple was rent in half from top to bottom. If the veil had not been rent, men could not have passed through it. If the Lord Jesus had not died and His body not been broken, men could not pass through Him and enter the Holy of Holies. At the present time, we come to God through the death of the Lord Jesus.

This way through the veil was opened up for us by the Lord Jesus. This way is "new and living." The word "new" in the original language refers to something freshly offered or freshly sacrificed. Here we see the eternal freshness of the cross! The high priest could not rely on the offerings or sacrifices of the previous years. He had to have fresh offerings and fresh sacrifices. He only dared to enter and was able to enter the Holy of Holies through the blood of these animals. What about us now? We come to God by the blood of the Lord and through His body. Every time we come before God, we do not have to offer up sacrifices afresh. Our Sacrifice is forever fresh! The Lord Jesus' cross does not turn old with the years. Its freshness is the same today and forever as it was at the time of crucifixion. Every time we come before God, we can sense the freshness of the Lord's cross. In the ancient times, unless the high priest had fresh blood of newly offered sacrifices, he would die before the Lord. The sacrifice of previous years could not redeem him from his current year's sins. If God did not consider the Lord's redemptive sacrifice as eternally fresh, we would have perished long ago. Thank the Lord that the cross is forever fresh before the Lord. The Lord considers the crucifixion as something freshly accomplished.

This way is also "living." This word can also be translated as "forever living." This way is a way that is "freshly offered." It is also a way that is "forever living." Christ has died and has resurrected; He has accomplished salvation for us and has led us to God. We should know that Christ has resurrected and that His resurrection remains until today. We should also know that Christ has died and that His substitutional death continues until today. The greatest events in the earthly life of Christ were His death and resurrection. Both are not past, obsolete events. They are still fresh today. Since we have such a fresh, redeeming Savior, we should receive Him and come to God through Him to receive forgiveness and blessing.

Revelation 5:6 records how John saw the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. He said, "And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain". When John saw the Lord in heaven, it was many years after Golgotha. Yet the Lord was like One who had just been slain. The words "having just been slain" can also be translated as "having been freshly slain." In heaven at the time of the ushering in of eternity, the Lord will still be the One who is freshly slain! Oh, the eternal freshness of the cross! Truly the cross passes through all ages and remains fresh! In the future when the heavenly glory breaks forth, the redemption of the cross is still fresh, how can we consider it as being old today?

One point deserves our attention. In the Old Testament Christ is twice called the Lamb (Isa. 53:7; Jer. 11:19). In the Gospels and Acts He is mentioned as the Lamb three times (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32). In the Epistles He is mentioned as the Lamb once (1 Pet. 1:19). However, in Revelation He is mentioned as the Lamb twenty-eight times! The glory of the Lord's cross will outshine all ages! God purposely called His Son the Lamb in this book of eternity. The Lamb here is seen as having been freshly slain. The wound is still there! The eternal wound guarantees eternal salvation. The crucifixion of the Lamb becomes our eternal memorial. The glory of the cross will prove unfading!

## THE MEMORIAL OF THE CROSS

God Himself knows the eternal worth of His Son's cross. He has manifested

to all the eternal freshness of the cross of His Son. Now He desires to gain the redeemed ones so that they would know this fact also. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings power. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings love. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings victory. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings longsuffering. If we truly know the freshness of the cross, what inspiration we will receive from it! What motivation we will derive from it! If the cross is not old in our heart, we will surely have an intimate fellowship with our Lord. If a believer has forgotten the cross, it means that he has forgotten the Lord.

The Lord intends that His cross be forever fresh in our spirit and our mind. This is why He told us, "This do, as often as you drink it, unto the remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25). The words "as often as" imply "frequently." The reason the Lord established His supper is for His saints to remember Him always in His death. He foreknew that many would consider His cross as obsolete. This was why He charged His disciples to always remember His death at the Lord's supper. He knew that worldly affairs, distractions, and temptations would come and would secretly rob the freshness of the cross from us. This is why He charged us to take the supper often and to remember Him. How fresh was the cross to us when we first believed! But after many days, the cross seems to have become hazy. When we first realized the victory of the cross, how fresh it was to us! But through frequent mention of its glory, the cross seems to have become common. However, the Lord does not want to see us losing the freshness of the cross. He desires that we remember the cross often and always have the death of the Lord before us.

We must never consider the Lord's cross as a mere historical monument. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus should be openly portrayed before our eyes all the time (Gal. 3:1). The book of Galatians is an epistle on the cross. When the cross was openly portrayed before the Galatians, how free they were! When they tried to receive the Holy Spirit through the keeping of the law or be perfected through the work of the flesh, they lost the freshness of the cross. One can tell the spiritual condition of a saint just by his attitude toward the cross. If he considers the cross as something old, it shows that he is cut off from the source

of his power.

## THE CROSS AND SPIRITUALITY

What are the benefits of knowing the freshness of the cross? The benefits are innumerable. We know that anything new easily touches men. If something happened long ago, it does not have the power to stir men up. If we have the Lord's cross openly portrayed before us every day, how much we will be moved by it! Joseph in the ancient times was only willing to be Christ's disciple in secret. Nicodemus only dared come to see the Lord in the night. But when both saw the crucifixion of the Lord, they were greatly moved. As a result, they risked offending the crowd and asked for the body of the Lord for burial. The cross can make the most fearful men the most courageous ones. When they beheld Jesus on the cross and the way He suffered and was rebuked by men, the love of the cross inspired them and moved them. Hence, if we have the death of Christ before us all the time, we will be moved in the same way that they were moved. The cross will then become our strength.

"Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). We should be able to answer this question. If we truly see the Lord's cross all the time, if we truly see how He suffered there, if we see the wounds on His hands and feet and the crown of thorns on His head, if we see how His love and blood mingled, and if we see His sufferings and sorrow, will we not be deeply moved, and will we not cease from doing things that do not please Him or cause Him sorrow? It is because we lack the eternal fresh revelation of the cross before us that we despise the love of the Lord.

If the cross on which the Lord died for us is forever fresh, our crucifixion with Him will also become unchanging. If we have a fresh revelation of the cross day by day, we will add to ourselves many fresh experiences of faith in our dying together with Him. It is because we do not see a daily cross that we have many experiences of sin resurrecting in us. If we see the eternal freshness of the cross and its ever unchanging nature, our death to sin will also be unchanging. Many children of God fail because they do not realize that the death of the cross is not just something that happened a long time ago, but something that is with us

continually all the time.

## ETERNAL SALVATION

We know that many times we fall unconsciously. Thank God the Father, who does not reject us because of this. The Bible says that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). He did not cleanse us just once. The blood of His Son is still continually cleansing us. The word "cleanses" in the original has the sense of a continual action. This is the perpetual work of the cross. How wonderful it is that God has prepared for us such a salvation! If we stumble by accident, and we come to Him and confess our sins, He will forgive us, and the blood of His Son will cleanse us from all sin. What eternal freshness there is in the cross!

If we realize this, we will break forth in loud praises to God the Father. Unfortunately, many people do not know that they are saved forever. We are either not saved or saved forever. If we have once truly accepted the Lord's sacrifice for sin, and if we have once truly trusted in the merit of His cross, His cross will forever speak for us. "This is the law of the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall be upon the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it" (Lev. 6:9). The burnt offering is a type of Christ, and the altar is a type of the cross. The burnt offering shall be burning until daybreak, that is, the merit of the Lord's redemption is continually pleading for us! In the night, the Israelites may have been in the camp still murmuring, but the burnt offering on the altar continually interceded for them! We should realize that in the same way the blood is interceding for us. Once we have accepted the cross, it speaks for us forever! This is the eternal salvation.

In the future, when we see the cross in heaven, it will not have become old through the ages. For this reason, the salvation we have received will not become a mere monument through time. Eternity will not be a monotonous and tasteless life. Eternity may be long, but it will not take away the glory of the cross. In eternity we will see God unfolding the glory of the cross for us bit by bit. Lord, teach us the eternal freshness of the cross!

For what reason do the heavenly hosts praise the Lord? "Worthy is the Lamb

who has been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12). At that time we will also praise the Lord forever because of His cross. The cross is the subject of the Bible on earth today. It will be the cause of praise in glory in the future.

Brothers and sisters, how fresh is the cross! The cross does not know what time is. The cross does not know what oldness is. May we be constantly moved by it! Oh, may we be lost in the cross all the days of our life! Oh, may the cross not lose its power on us for a day! Oh, may we allow the cross to do a deeper work in us every day! May the Father open our eyes to see the mystery hidden in the cross of His Son. "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE PATHWAY TO GLORY

### •Scripture Reading: Luke 9:28-31

Luke 9:28-31 "And about eight days after these words, He took with Him Peter and John and James, and went up into the mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the appearance of His face became different, and His garment dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, Who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure, which He was about to complete in Jerusalem."

*  *  *  *

The Gospels record that God spoke from the heavens three times. The first time was when the Lord Jesus rose up from baptism (Matt. 3:16-17); the second time was on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:28-35), and the third time was after the Lord said, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone" (John 12:24-28). There is one reason why God spoke to the Lord Jesus these three times: He purposely chose the cross! He did not choose a way better than the cross! His baptism was a choice of the cross, a choice of death and burial. On the mount of transfiguration, He also chose the cross; He did not ascend to heaven from there, but just paid attention to the matter, "what He was about to complete in Jerusalem." When He entered Jerusalem and a few Greeks requested to see Him, it was the most glorious moment of His life. But He still chose the cross. He did not choose to be a king as the result of men's adulation.

In Luke 9 of the Bible, we see how the Lord chose the cross. Many people say that the mount of transfiguration is a type of the kingdom of God. But the Lord Jesus said that the mount of transfiguration was the kingdom of God. In Luke 9:27 He said clearly, "But I say to you truly, There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the kingdom of

God." The kingdom of God descended to the earth for a moment, and the Lord Jesus manifested His glory in the kingdom. The Lord could have ascended to heaven from there, but He was discussing all the things related to the fact of what "He was about to complete in Jerusalem." He purposely chose the cross. At that time, the Lord Jesus was standing at the place of the rapture and the resurrection. However, He had a clear view and a clear vision that the pathway to glory was not the mount of transfiguration, but another way.

Before He came to the mount of transfiguration, the pathway was not so clear. Although it had been decided before the foundation of the world, the pathway became clear after the conversation on the mount of transfiguration. The pathway had to pass through Jerusalem. From this point on, we see the Lord descending from the mountain and heading toward Jerusalem. From Luke 9 to 23, we see a line that leads to Jerusalem. This course was spoken on the mount of transfiguration.

Was the Lord's heart for Jerusalem itself? No, it was but for what He would accomplish in Jerusalem, which was the cross. Going to Jerusalem means the accomplishment of God's will, which is the bearing of the cross. On the mount of transfiguration, God's glory purposely descended to the world, and the Lord Jesus was enveloped in this glory. In that vision the Lord Jesus clearly saw that the way into glory was through going to Jerusalem. His face was set toward Jerusalem. Isaiah said that He set His face like a flint (Isa. 50:7). He faced Jerusalem with a stone-like face; there was no change in Him; He went straight from the mountain to the cross.

Why should we pay attention to this matter today? It is because the day of the rapture is near! The day when the Lord will rapture the saints is near! If a person wants to be raptured, he has to go to Jerusalem. This means that we have to bear the cross; we have to take this pathway. Please remember that even though the Lord Jesus knew that the time of His being taken up was at hand, He did not wait passively for the rapture. The Bible says, "And as the days were being fulfilled for Him to be taken up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). The cross came before the rapture. If we know that the day is near, we should also set our mind to obey God's will concerning us, which

is to bear the cross. The meaning of going up to Jerusalem is nothing other than bearing the cross, which accomplishes God's will.

What do we see along the way to Jerusalem? Let us consider the items one by one.

"And they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans...And they did not receive Him, because His face was set to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:52-53). The Samaritans did not receive the Lord for one reason: His face was set to go to Jerusalem. Whenever we set out to do God's will and take the way of the cross, others are not willing to receive us. We have to ask God day after day to give us a stronger desire for His will. Although men may not be pleased, nevertheless the Lord knows us. At that time, two disciples could not stand the rejection of the Samaritans, and they wanted revenge. The Lord turned and rebuked the two of them, saying that they did not know of what kind of spirit they were. If we are rejected, we feel like saying, "Wait until the judgment seat, and we will see who is right." The Lord rebuked such an attitude. Having said that, the Lord turned to other villages. He did not have time to care for the treatment of the people.

"And He journeyed throughout the cities and villages, teaching and making His way toward Jerusalem" (Luke 13:22). This teaches us not to drop everything just to wait for the coming of God's kingdom because the day of the rapture is near. Rather, we should continue in the way of the cross. This is the course; we cannot stop our daily work. The Lord taught as He made His way throughout the cities and villages. If the cross has done a deep enough work in us, everything will render us help and will cause us to gain deeper and richer experiences.

"In the same hour some Pharisees came up, saying to Him, Get out and go from here, for Herod wants to kill you. And He said to them, Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and accomplish healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I am perfected. However, I must journey today and tomorrow and on the following day because it is not acceptable for a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:31-33). In these verses, the Lord spoke some strong words. He said that Herod was a fox. The Lord was comparing Herod to God. On one hand the will of the king was to be operated; on the other hand, the will of God in heaven had to be fulfilled. Compared to God, Herod was just a fox.

Although the fox was cunning, it could not stop the Lord from going to Jerusalem. The Lord could not stop His journey because of the word of a fox; He could not change His face or His course because of Herod. He said, "I must journey."

Luke 17:11-19 shows that on His way to Jerusalem, the Lord passed through Samaria and Galilee, as He entered into a certain village, He healed ten lepers. This teaches us that along the way, if there is anything that we ought to do, we should do it. Whether it is the preaching of the gospel or the rendering of help to others, as long as it is something along the way, we should try our best to take care of it. The Lord was set for Jerusalem, but when anything came along His way, He took care of it. He did not decline just because He was set for Jerusalem. It is right for us to wait for the rapture, but it is also right to do our best to save others. Revelation 22:17 is very meaningful. It says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come!" These two "come's" are the prayer of the Spirit and the bride for the Lord's coming. Following this, it says, "And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." This shows that after we yearn for His coming, we preach the gospel. May we save a few more men while we are on the earth!

We certainly should not change our direction because of the things that come to us along the way, and we should not be caught away by the things we meet to the point that we stop advancing. We should work, and we should save others. However, our course should be set toward Jerusalem. If something is a frustration to our journey toward Jerusalem, we should stop that work. The Lord could have healed the ten lepers on the way and then stopped there without going further to Jerusalem. He also could have healed all the lepers in Samaria, but if He had done this, He would not have been able to save us. It is right for Christians to save sinners and help others. But if a person is stopped by these things from doing God's will, he should not continue them. These things should only be done along the way.

"And taking the twelve aside, He said to them, Behold we are going up to Jerusalem" (Luke 18:31). The Lord did not say "I am going," but "we are going." It is not enough for us to take the way of the cross alone; we should exhort others and lead them on to do God's will and carry the cross also. How do we wait for

the rapture? “It is one thing for us to believe that the Lord will come. It is another thing for us to wait for His coming.” God does not want us to believe in the Lord’s coming in creed only; He wants us to wait for the coming of His Son. The church should pass through everything that God has ordained for it. The book of Ephesians is filled with God’s grace. Yet at the same time, it is filled with man’s responsibility. If God has not gained what He has purposed, He will not be satisfied. “And all things which have been written through the prophets regarding the Son of Man will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31). May everything God has ordained for us be accomplished in us.

“He spoke further a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. He said therefore, A certain man of noble birth went to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:11-12). Going to a distant country is going to heaven. The Lord said these words was because the disciples thought that as soon as they entered Jerusalem, God’s kingdom would come and the Lord would be king. The disciples thought that they were going to Jerusalem to enjoy the blessing, but the Lord told them that they were going there to suffer. The disciples thought that going to Jerusalem was for reigning, but the Lord told them that it was for dying on the cross. Before the rapture and the resurrection, there will be a period and surely a heavier cross!

“And having said these things, He went on before them, going up to Jerusalem” (Luke 19:28). He is leading us on in the way which is ahead of us. Before that, His face had been toward Jerusalem. Here, it was still the same. He did not change. He does not charge us to go while He stays behind; rather, He leads us along the way.

Verse 41 says, “And as He drew near...” Verse 45 says, “And He entered into the temple.” This shows us that the Lord approached Jerusalem step by step!

Let us consider His prayer on the last night at Gethsemane, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:39). Some interpret the “cup” mentioned at Gethsemane as dying. This interpretation is not entirely correct. The cup refers to the cross. In other words, the Lord asked God to spare Him from going to the cross if it was possible. But

then the Lord also said, “Not as I will, but as You will.” The Lord could pray, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,” but He could not pray, “If it is possible, let Your will not be fulfilled.” It is true that the cup was important. But there is a distinction between the cup and God’s will. The Lord showed us that God’s will was more important than the cross. When putting the cross and God’s will together, and He obeyed, knowing that the cross was God’s will. Before this time He could choose, but once He knew that the cup was God’s will, He obeyed.

Brothers, what is the mount of transfiguration? The mount of transfiguration is glory; it is the glory after the rapture and the resurrection. However, the mount of transfiguration not only signifies glory; it also signifies a revelation, a vision, and a clear view. The mount of transfiguration reveals that the pathway to glory is through Jerusalem. Today we need the revelation, the vision, and the view of the mount of transfiguration, so that we will clearly see that unless we carry out God’s will by bearing the cross, we cannot expect to be raptured. Knowing the coming glory without having the revelation concerning how to enter the coming glory is useless. May the Spirit of God grant us a spiritual vision, so that we know the relationship between the rapture and the accomplishment of God’s will. After we have such a view, may we bear the cross and follow the Lord faithfully unto death. May we be like our Lord, who was set toward Jerusalem and did not turn at all. May we be able to say what Paul said, that “I have not disobeyed the heavenly vision.”

The glory is in sight, yet we must first pass through the cross. The day of the rapture is near, but there is a calling for us to purposefully carry out God’s will and obey Him. This is the pathway which led the Lord to be taken up! The rapture is ordained, and Jerusalem is also ordained. The times when we experience the most suffering with the Lord are the times when we are most intimate with Him. The Lord is ahead of us, and we are behind Him. We should follow the Lord to finish this course!

# MESSAGE FOUR

## ANYTHING TO EAT?

**•Scripture Reading: Luke 24:41-43; John 21:4-5, 9, 13**

Luke 24:41-43 "And while they still did not believe for joy and were marveling, He said to them, Do you have anything here to eat? And they handed Him a piece of broiled fish; And He took it and ate before them."

John 21:4-5, 9, 13 "Now as soon as the morning broke, Jesus stood on the shore; however the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, Little children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you? They answered Him, No. …Then when they got out onto the land, they saw a fire of coals laid there, and fish lying on it and bread. …Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise."

*  *  *  *

The above passages record incidents that happened after the Lord Jesus' resurrection. In both instances, the Lord asked a question of the disciples. In both cases the Lord's question was the same. In Luke He asked, "Do you have anything here to eat?" In John He said, "You do not have any fish to eat, do you?" The meaning in both cases is the same. He wanted to find out if they had anything to eat. Luke 24 says that they had something, while John 21 says that they had nothing.

In Luke, the disciples only gave the Lord a piece of broiled fish. By then, the disciples might have finished their meal, and only had a piece of broiled fish left over, and they gave it to the Lord. Many times, the Lord asks us for something to eat. We may be like the disciples, who had only a piece of broiled fish. That was all that they had.

In John, the disciples did not have anything, yet the Lord prepared fish and bread for them. The Lord did not give them just fish, but bread as well. Many

times we are like the disciples, laboring all night without catching anything. In our despair and weariness, the Lord asks us if we have anything to eat. We have to admit that we have nothing. But the Lord has something. He not only has fish, but bread as well to satisfy us.

Why did the disciples have fish when they were in the room (Luke 24) but not when they were at sea (John 21)? Here we see one thing: the Lord's intention was for the disciples to wait in the city for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). The house was the place where they should have been. This was why they still had a little fish. But they had no knowledge of the Lord's resurrection and went to the sea to fish. They wanted to return to their old way. In the end, they did not have even a piece of broiled fish. They did not catch anything because the fishing was done outside of God's ordained will. While they remained in the house, they may not have been perfect, but they still had a piece of broiled fish, and they still had something to give to the Lord. We should find out if the place we are and the labor we have expended are according to God's will. If we act according to our own will, we will be like the disciples who received nothing for the whole night and had nothing to eat. Whenever we are at a place that is far away from the Lord, we have nothing.

The Lord asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" It seems as if the Lord was hungry. When the Lord was hungry, could they satisfy Him? Brothers and sisters, what do we have that can satisfy the Lord? The Lord is seeking, and He is looking for something from us that will satisfy Him. He is waiting for us to satisfy Him. "And they handed Him a piece of broiled fish." It seems as if they were saying, "Lord, we have something. We are full and have some leftovers, something that we were saving for tomorrow. But we will give this little bit to You." The Lord Jesus "took it and ate before them." Whatever we consecrate to Him, even if it is just a little, the Lord will accept. He will accept everything that we consecrate to Him. As long as there is a little intention within our heart to say, "Lord, this is for You," He will accept it. As long as there is a small voice within us which says, "Lord, this is for You," He will take it.

Those who did not even have a piece of fish were the ones who spent their whole night fishing at the sea. That night, seven people were fishing at sea, but

they caught nothing. They had returned to their old way, but they caught nothing. We have to remember that when we have nothing to eat and to give to the Lord, it means that we are away from the Lord's way and doing things apart from the Lord's ordained will. Otherwise, we would not be so poor that we would not even have a piece of broiled fish. All those who have no fish, who have nothing to consecrate and nothing to satisfy the Lord with, must have tried to satisfy themselves first and walked according to their own will. If one labors according to his own will, he will not even have a piece of fish; he will not even be able to satisfy himself. But when a man realizes that he is rebelling against God and has not satisfied the Lord's heart in the way he is taking, and then he drops his past ways and stops his erring footsteps, he may not be able to give much to the Lord, but the Lord will have much to give to him. Although he may not be able to give much to the Lord, the Lord will have fish and bread ready for him; under these circumstances, He will satisfy him. Therefore, brothers, please turn! Although you may have been wrong in the past, you can stop your footsteps today and tell the Lord, "Lord, I have turned back." When you turn back to the Lord, He will satisfy you! You may not be worthy, but He has the grace. He will supply you, fill you, and comfort you.

If we can give a little to the Lord, let us give it to Him. Although we have only a little gift that may be insignificant, we should give it to the Lord. Even if we have nothing to give to Him today, we should be satisfied with His grace. We may not have anything to give to Him, but He has a rich supply reserved for us. The most pitiful thing is holding back a little piece of broiled fish and not giving it to the Lord. The most pitiful thing for us is laboring a whole night when the Lord has abundant grace freely reserved for us. Let us give the Lord our little piece of broiled fish, and let us satisfy Him. May we receive fish and bread from His hand and be satisfied with them. May we satisfy the Lord, and may the Lord satisfy us.

## MESSAGE FIVE

# TELL HIM

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:30-32

Matt. 14:1-12 "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist ; he is risen from the dead ; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put [him] in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded [it] to be given [her.]And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought [it] to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus."

Mark 6:30-32 "And the apostles gathered together to Jesus and reported to Him all that they did and all that they taught. And He said to them, Come by yourselves privately to a deserted place and rest a while. For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have opportunity to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place privately."

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The Lord Jesus is a person in whom men can most easily confide. He allows others to tell Him anything. The Bible records many instances in which the Lord spoke to men. But it does not record many instances of men speaking to Him. To

my knowledge, there are only two passages of Scripture which talk about this. The first is in Matthew 14, where John's disciples came to tell the Lord something. The second is in Mark 6, where the Lord's own disciples came to tell Him something.

These two passages of Scripture show us two different pictures. One is a sad picture; the other is a happy picture. One picture shows us that John the Baptist's disciples realized that their teacher was dead and had come to a tragic end. What a sad thing this was! After John's disciples had buried their teacher, they came to tell Jesus about it. The other picture shows us the Lord's twelve disciples being sent to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons. This was a happy experience, and the disciples came and told the Lord about it.

The Bible records many instances in which the Lord spoke to men. But it does not record many instances in which men came to the Lord to tell Him something. Our Lord is a Lord in whom men can confide. Men can easily tell the Lord what they want to say. Any words can be told to Him. From these two passages, we can see the Lord's sympathy for us. Many times we encounter sufferings. Many times we have joy. Many times we need someone to share our sorrow or joy, but we are unable to find someone. Sometimes when we tell others, they do not listen. If we encounter a difficult or unsolvable problem, we want to tell others, but they may think that it is an unimportant matter. It is something very important and crucial to us. But when we tell others about it, they ignore us. Sometimes we tell others about something very joyous, but they do not understand and share our joy. At other times we feel depressed, but others cannot share our depression. Sometimes others may have had similar experiences and have the ability to feel our sorrow or joy, but they do not want to share our feelings. They already have enough joy or sorrow of their own, and they are unable to bear the joy or sorrow of others. They cannot feel what we feel. Sometimes we hope to find someone to whom we can tell our sorrows and joys. It is hard enough to find someone who will listen to us. It is even harder to find someone who will sympathize with us.

Many times we think that the Lord is great. Even though our Lord is great, He does not neglect the small things. We may think that what we tell Him must

also be something great, or else He will not listen. Little do we realize that our Lord never neglects the small things. There is nothing that is too small for the Lord to listen to. He is willing to listen to everything. He is willing to listen to everything concerning us. He was willing to listen to His own disciples, and He was willing to listen to John's disciples. The disciples of John had followed their teacher for a long time. One can imagine the affection there was between them and John. When their teacher was killed, how could they not be brokenhearted? The Bible does not say that they complained about Herod, nor does it say that they cried all day long. They only buried John's body and then came to tell Jesus.

Some would bury their dead and then say, "Everything with me is over. I have lost all hope. He is dead, and I have lost everything. Everything I had left with him." Yet these are the times when we should draw near to the Lord. We can tell the Lord our sorrow. He will not rebuke us as being too worldly, too affectionate, or too attached to our dead ones. He knows our emotion, and He sympathizes with our heart. Some may have never experienced the sorrow of losing their parents, wife, brothers, or relatives. Nevertheless, when they lose something, they still feel as if their "John" has died, and they are left in despair and disappointment. They feel that the sky above them is no longer blue and that everything around them has lost its ardor; they find no way out. At such times it is most unprofitable to not bury the corpse, to cry, and to be sorrowful over it all the time. They should bury the corpse, like the disciples of John did, and go and tell the Lord. We should realize that when we have a thorough talk with the Lord and pour out our heart to Him, our intimacy with the Lord is one step further, and we know Him a little more. Intimate contact with Him at these times is hundreds of times better than our ordinary fellowship with Him. By these contacts we advance in life. We should bring our problems to the Lord and tell Him about them. He can comfort us and help us. If a person has never shed tears before the Lord, if he has never shared his joy or sorrow with the Lord, and if he has never talked with the Lord about his private matters, he has never had any intimate fellowship with the Lord; he has never had any deep acquaintance with Him. We are not saying that you cannot ask others to pray for you or ask others to help you. We are saying that one can only be drawn closer to the Lord through

telling Him everything.

Once John's disciples told the Lord of their sorrows, every problem dissolved. No matter what we tell Him, He will listen. No man can sympathize with everyone. But our Lord can sympathize with everyone. He is sympathetic to every one of our problems. He cares for the affairs of us all. In His heart, there seems to be no one else's affairs but ours. He bears all our sorrows. No matter how weak we are, He will sympathize with us and bear our sorrow for us. Our Lord is willing to bear all our anxieties and patient to listen to our speaking. Do not think that He will not listen. We should never be lazy in bringing our matters to Him. He is waiting for us to tell them to Him, and He is happy to listen to our speaking.

The Lord not only wants to listen to our sorrows; He wants to listen to our joys as well. We feel that it is relatively easy to mourn with those who mourn, but it is hard to rejoice with those who rejoice. Many people think that sympathizing with others means having pity on them. But having pity on someone is not sympathizing. To sympathize means that one can rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Sometimes we may see others bubbling over with joy and consider them to be too exuberant and frivolous. This means that we cannot sympathize with the joy of others. Paul said, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). This is to sympathize with others. The Lord is willing to be sorrowful with us, and He is willing to rejoice with us.

Mark 6:30 tells us that "the apostles gathered together to Jesus and reported to Him all that they did and all that they taught." The things they did were worth rejoicing about (cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 10:17). They went to the Lord and told Him all their joys. Many people go to the Lord when they have difficulties, but how many pray when they are rejoicing? When men are in sorrow, it is natural for them to ask the Lord for help. But when they are happy, it is easy for them to forget about telling the Lord.

Mr. Charles Spurgeon once went with a friend to the countryside for a horseback ride after he became exhausted from his preaching. At one point he was elated, jumped off his horse, and invited his friend to do the same. His friend

was surprised at his move and asked him what he was going to do. He said, “Since God has given us such joy, let us thank Him at this very minute.” The two of them knelt down by the road and prayed. We cannot have laughter all the time, but whenever we have joy, we should tell the Lord. We should remember the Lord at the moment of joy and share our joy with Him. The Lord never rebukes us for having too much joy. He cares for our feelings in a spontaneous way. Therefore, we should not forget to tell the Lord our joy.

What did the Lord do after He heard His disciples? He said, “Come by yourselves privately to a deserted place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). The Lord did this in order to give them some rest. Many times we go privately to a deserted place to rest because we are unhappy and depressed. With no other recourse to take, we go to a deserted place all alone to rest. But such occasions frequently make us more distraught than before we went away. Our Lord did not merely tell the disciples to go to the deserted place to rest; He told them to go with Him. The Lord’s presence gave them sweet rest and renewed their strength.

Our Lord is happy to listen to our sorrows, and He is happy to listen to our joys. He is the Lord to whom we can tell everything. Since we have such a Lord, why not tell Him all the secrets of our hearts?

# MESSAGE SIX

## BLESSINGS THAT CAN BE ENJOYED TODAY

## •Outline

- **•They Will Not Hunger Or Thirst**
- **•Neither Will The Scorching Heat Nor Sun Strike Them**
- **•He Who Has Mercy On Them Will Shepherd And Guide Them To Springs Of Waters Of Life**
- **•God Will Wipe Away Every Tear From Their Eyes**

## •Scripture Reading: Isa. 49:10; Rev. 7:9-17

Isa. 49:10 "They will not hunger or thirst; / Neither the scorching heat nor the sun will strike them; / For He who has compassion on them will lead them / And will guide them beside the springs of water;"

Rev. 7:9-17 "After these things I saw, and behold, there was a great multitude which no one could number, out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands. And they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, Saying, Amen. The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanks and the honor and the power and the strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying to me, These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where did they come from? And I said to him, My lord, you know. And he said to me, These are those who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will tabernacle over them. They will

not hunger anymore, neither will they thirst anymore, neither will the sun beat upon them, nor any heat; For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and guide them to springs of waters of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

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These two passages mention a few kinds of blessings: (1) not hungering or thirsting, (2) not having the scorching heat nor sun strike them, (3) being guided to springs of water, and (4) God wiping away every tear. The first three blessings are mentioned in both passages, while the fourth is mentioned only in Revelation.

Revelation records a great multitude which no one could number standing before the throne and before the Lamb. John did not understand who they were. Later, one of the elders asked him, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?" (Rev. 7:13). John answered, "My lord, you know" (v. 14). The elder then said, "These are those who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 14). He also told John the four kinds of blessings these ones have.

Revelation 4:2 says, "There was a throne set in heaven." The throne is in heaven. To say that these people are standing before the throne means that these ones are in heaven. How do they move from earth to heaven? Who are they? These ones are "clothed in white robes" with "palm branches in their hands." Palm branches signify victory. Hence, they are the overcoming believers who are raptured to heaven.

"These are those who come out of the great tribulation." The "great tribulation" here is not the great tribulation of the three and a half years but the "affliction" referred to by the Lord when He says, "In the world you have affliction" (John 16:33). It is called the "great tribulation" because the twelve apostles, Stephen, Paul, and all the ones who came after them suffered the same tribulation.

These overcoming believers will enjoy a few special blessings. They stand

before the throne of God; this means that these blessings are eternal blessings in the heavenlies. It is obvious that Revelation 7:16-17 speaks of the condition in eternity.

Apparently, the blessings mentioned in Isaiah 49:10 are the same as the ones mentioned here. Actually, there are some differences. What are the differences? Isaiah 49:6 says, "It is too small a thing that You would be My Servant/To raise up the tribes of Jacob/And bring back the preserved of Israel;/I will also set You as a light of the nations/That You may be My salvation unto the ends of the earth." Has this verse been fulfilled yet? Acts 13:47 says, "I have set you as a light of the Gentiles, that you would be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth." From this we see that Isaiah 49:6 has been fulfilled. God has made Jesus Christ the light of the Gentiles. This is a picture of today. This is the condition of the age of the gospel.

Furthermore, Isaiah 49:8 says, "In an acceptable time I have answered You,/And in a day of salvation I have helped You." If we compare this with 2 Corinthians 6:2, we will see that Isaiah 49:8 also refers to the present time.

Since Isaiah 49:6 and 8 refer to the present time, we can say that verse 10 must also refer to the present time. This is in contrast with Revelation 7, which refers to eternity future.

God does not expect us to enjoy these blessings only when we reach heaven. He expects us to have a foretaste of heaven even now. Although we cannot have a full taste of it, at least we can enjoy three-quarters of it. We know that when we reach heaven, surely we will not hunger or thirst anymore or suffer the heat but will be guided to the springs of water. Why then do we not believe that we can enjoy these things today? God says that we can enjoy these three kinds of blessings even today!

These ones "will come from a distance/...from the north and the west/And others from the land of the Sinim" (Isa. 49:12). While they are suffering on the way, God promises that "they will not hunger or thirst;/Neither the scorching heat nor the sun will strike them;/For He who has compassion on them will lead them/And will guide them beside the springs of water." God has given us such wonderful promises. We are these pilgrims; we have left our earthly homes and

are on our way to the New Jerusalem.

## THEY WILL NOT HUNGER OR THIRST

To hunger and thirst is to have a hope that is not yet satisfied. Who are the ones who will not hunger and thirst? "Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst" (John 6:35). "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (4:14). Christ promises that everyone who believes in Him will be satisfied and receive a satisfying life. It is not us satisfying ourselves with Christ but Christ becoming our satisfaction. The world can only satisfy us temporarily; it can only satisfy us for a moment. It cannot satisfy us forever. "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever" (vv. 13-14). This is the Lord's word.

God does not say that we can be satisfied only when we reach heaven. We can be satisfied even today. Do we believe that we will not hunger and thirst today, just as we will not be hungry and thirsty in heaven? Today the Lord Jesus can satisfy our heart as much as He will satisfy us on that day in heaven. The Lord said, "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever." Once we drink, we are satisfied. This satisfying life can be ours today.

## NEITHER WILL THE SCORCHING HEAT NOR SUN STRIKE THEM

Those who live in subtropical lands do not feel the scorching of the heat and the sun. But if one travels to tropical lands, he will realize the intensity of the striking from the heat and the sun. A brother once said that when a man walks out of the house without his umbrella in a tropical country, he will be sick for a few months. Once three people went to a certain land. Two of them died of heat on the way; only one survived. However, if one is inside a house, he will not be hurt by the sun because there is a shelter. Without a shelter, one will be hurt by the heat. The Bible mentions God's overshadowing as a kind of shelter. There is one kind of life that is under God's overshadowing; it is a life that is hidden in

God (Psa. 36:7-9).

Are you sheltered? In spiritual warfare, we have the helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:17). Our life is a hidden life. We are hidden under God's wings on earth today as little chickens are hidden under the wings of their mother. In Psalm 91, we find that those who dwell "in the secret place of the Most High/Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty" (v. 1). The Lord will deliver these ones from many perils. This is a blessed life. We are a sheltered people.

## HE WHO HAS MERCY ON THEM WILL SHEPHERD AND GUIDE THEM TO SPRINGS OF WATERS OF LIFE

Springs are with God (Psa. 87:7), while the river of water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). In other words, we are very close to God; we are right beside Him. God leads us to His presence, and the Lamb shepherds us. To put it another way, it is the Lamb who shepherds; it is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who feeds the lambs with His experience as the Lamb of God. We can never improve ourselves. We need a Shepherd to feed us all the time. What a restful enjoyment this is! This again is something that we can enjoy today.

## GOD WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES

Today we can enjoy the three blessings above. But this does not mean that we will have no tears. We have to wait until we reach heaven before our tears will be wiped away. Isaiah 49:10 does not mention this kind of blessing because it records the condition on earth. Our Lord Jesus was completely restful while He was on earth; He could walk through all difficulties. Yet He wept beside the tomb of Lazarus, and He also wept on His way to Jerusalem. Finally, He wept in Gethsemane. Hebrews 5 says that He prayed "with strong crying and tears" (v. 7). This shows that tears are unavoidable in this age. However, our tears are put into God's bottle and recorded in His book (Psa. 56:8). One Christian said that even though tears are bitter, God remembers them; therefore, they are a blessing!

Although we cannot avoid tears today, if we believe in God's word, we can be satisfied, and we can have God's sheltering and the Lord's shepherding. God has promised that we can enjoy these three items of blessings today.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## LEAKING AND DRIFTING

THE CHRISTIAN (1934-1940)—Issue No. 14

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 2:1-4

Heb. 2:1-4 "Therefore we ought to give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard lest perhaps we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved firm and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, How shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation, which, having had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord, has been confirmed to us by those who heard, God bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various works of power and by distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His will?"

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The book of Hebrews contains various passages of warnings. Every time there is a word of warning in Hebrews, we can find an important teaching immediately preceding or following the warning. An important teaching may appear first, and then a word of warning follows. Or an important teaching may be preceded by a warning. This is the structure of the book of Hebrews. In this book, there are five or six warnings. The passage we read in Hebrews 2 comprises the first warning. This warning is placed in between chapters one and two. What does chapter one cover? Chapter one is on glory. What does chapter two cover? Chapter two is on shame. Chapter one is on God and chapter two is on man. Chapter one is on glory and chapter two is on suffering. Chapter one tells us who Christ is from eternity past to eternity future, while chapter two tells us what He has accomplished in time. Chapter one is on His person, while chapter two is on His work. In between these two chapters, we have a word of warning. What is this warning about? It is a warning for us to give heed

concerning the person of Christ and His work. What kind of attitude should we have when speaking of the person of Christ and His work?

First we must be clear concerning the teaching and the background of this book. Before we study the first warning in Hebrews, we must briefly mention the ones to whom this book was addressed. We know that the book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews. A group of Jews were saved; they understood the things concerning the Old Testament, the temple, and the worship in the temple. At the same time, they also knew about the New Testament and the worship in the New Testament. They had known Christ and believed in Him, received Him, and were saved. Now they had both of the above things. They were Christians and not outsiders. This letter was not written to the Gentiles, nor to those who had never known salvation. This letter was written to those who knew salvation already. They were not unbelievers, but Christians. The word Hebrews is very meaningful; it means river crossers. The first Hebrew was Abraham. Abraham lived first on the east side of the river. Later he moved to the west side. Because he crossed the Euphrates River to the west side, he became a Hebrew. Hebrews means the river crossers. The book of Hebrews was written to the river crossers. It was written to those who had given up something behind them and were pursuing toward something before them. They left the former world behind, and following God's word, they journeyed on to a new place. God wrote through the apostle to the Hebrews who had forsaken the world and who were standing in a new realm. They were like us who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who have denied the former world, and who are standing today on a new ground and in a new sphere. This letter was written to this group of people.

It is very interesting that such a warning was given to this group of people: "Therefore we ought to give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard lest perhaps we drift away." This is the first warning; it was given to the Hebrews, the Israelites. Behind them was one world, and before them was another kind of life. God issued a warning to this group of people through the mouth of the apostle. This warning also tells us what the present danger is. The danger is to drift away. Today we will study this warning in detail. It says that we should give heed, and that if we do not give heed, there is the danger of drifting

away. This warning is needed because there is the danger ahead, the possibility, of drifting along with the current. The result of drifting along with the current is to miss so great a salvation. Why do we have to give heed? It is because this great salvation has been accomplished by God already, and we have to give heed lest we lose it. We have to give heed because there is the possibility of missing this great salvation. Who is behind this great salvation? It is God, the Lord, and the Holy Spirit; They have distributed it to us.

Let us now consider Hebrews 2:1. We cannot study all four verses. We can study only the first verse, using the other three verses as supplements. Verse 1 says, "Therefore,..." This means that this verse is a continuation of what was spoken of before. Because the Lord Jesus, as spoken of in chapter one, is so lofty, glorious, and excellent, because He is such a God, full of glory, and above all men and even the angels, we have to give heed to the things that we have heard. Because the things that we have heard convey such a Jesus to us, we have to give heed. The Bible is a wonderful book. The Gospel of John is different from all the other Gospels, and the things it records are different from those that are recorded in the other Gospels. When one reads Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he can place them side by side. But one cannot put the Gospel of John alongside the other Gospels; it has to be placed in a different category. It does not record the birth of Jesus by Mary, because it starts from the beginning, from eternity past. Everything it says has to do with things that are in glory, at the beginning, far above all, and before the ages. Our gospel today does not merely tell men, either sinners or believers, about a fisherman who walked by the Sea of Galilee nineteen hundred years ago. Nor do we want to show men merely a carpenter from Nazareth who lived nineteen hundred years ago. Neither are we presenting to men a Jesus who is merely human, a son of man born of Mary. Rather, we are presenting One whom God calls His companion. We want men to know the Lord Jesus as the One who was there from eternity past and who is in the glory now. We have to speak about His relationship with us, and about the things we have seen. He is not a bastard. The Jews thought that He was just a bastard born in the land of Judea nineteen hundred thirty years ago. But this is not what we preach. We begin from eternity past; He was there in eternity past. This is why we have

to give heed to the things which we have heard.

Friends, we have to give heed today. But to what do we have to give heed? We have to give heed to the things which have been heard. What have we heard? We have heard the things concerning the Lord Jesus. How much have we heard? I believe those who are sitting here have heard a great deal about the Lord Jesus. We have heard so much. What should we do now?

We ought to give heed! The apostle included himself in this admonition. I do not know who the writer of Hebrews was. Some have said that it was Paul, and others have said that it was Luke. Since it does not tell us who he was, we do not need to say anything about it. God did not tell us his name, and we do not have to guess it. I will not say who wrote this book. I will not do what the Bible has not done. Let us suppose that it was written by the apostle. We can see how careful the apostle was. He said we and not you. The danger of drifting could happen to the apostle also. There was danger to not only the Hebrews or the new believers. All the river crossers are included; even the apostle was included in this category.

Here we find the Greek word pararrhueo. This word has two meanings. The first meaning is to leak away, to slip away; the second meaning is to drift away with the current and become lost. There are different translations of this word. Some convey the sense of drifting, while others convey the sense of leaking. But both meanings are present in the word. Since both meanings are present, we will consider both meanings. This morning, my intention is to show you both meanings of the word.

What is leaking? Here is a pan of water. Suppose there is a hole in the pan, and you have to bring the pan from one end of the room to the other end and back, or suppose you have to bring the water from the well to the kitchen. You have to run quickly because the water will drip away. By the time you have the pan in the house, the water will be gone. The apostle said that we should give heed lest we leak away. This means that since we have heard so many things concerning the Lord Jesus, we should not allow them to leak away. In some respects, I am very unhappy about Christians today. If you ask them the names of their sons, they can tell you right away. They never forget the names of their sons.

But if you ask them what the Bible speaks of, what Matthew 1 or Mark 16 speaks of, they will not be able to remember a thing. I am afraid that many people do not have the slightest idea what John 1—3 is about. They may remember something while they are listening to a message in the morning. But by the afternoon, they have forgotten many of the things. Many people have a good memory about many things, but the things concerning Christ always leak away. It is impossible to talk to them about the things concerning Christ. Friends, may I say an honest and seemingly unkind word: this proves where our heart is. We know where our door is and where our home is. Yet many of us are unclear about too many of the crucial matters in the Bible. These things have leaked away. God has often given us the opportunity to hear things about Christ. Yet much of what we have heard has leaked away. We cannot deny this fact before God. We cannot deny the fact that we have forgotten many things concerning Christ. We can say our mind is not sharp enough, but it is not a matter of the mind. If there were something wrong with our mind, how could we still eat our meals properly and manage our houses properly? Why do we not forget about the things of others? I can accept our negligence of our own affairs or the affairs of others, but I cannot accept our negligence of the things of Christ. We have allowed them to leak away. The problem among Christians today is that they have allowed God's word to slip away from them. When temptations come, everything of the Lord has leaked away. It is a dangerous thing to be leaking. This is not only my danger; it was the apostle's danger also. Temptations often come, and we desperately try to find a verse, but we cannot find one. We cannot find our weapon at the crucial hour, because there is leakage. Why do we never forget the things that our children have asked us about? Why is it that they never leak away from us? This is one reason why so many people fall into the hand of the enemy. If we do not have any leakage, we can immediately deal with Satan. We cannot say, "Satan, I know that you are coming to tempt me. I can do nothing. So please wait, and let me go and find a verse." If we do this, we will fail immediately. In His three dealings with Satan, the Lord Jesus did not slip once. The problem today is that there is the leaking and there is the drifting. We can remember everything except the things of Christ. Friends, I must say an unkind word (we preachers often have to speak

unkind words). I have to say that this condition proves that our heart is not on Christ. Our heart is on the things of the world. This is why we have forgotten Christ. If there were no hole, there would be no possibility of any leakage. I do not know what your holes are. In order to leak, there must be holes. Without a hole, there cannot be any leakage. It may be only a small hole, but as long as there is a hole, there is the leakage. Without a hole, there would be no possibility of any leakage. Why is it that many people have allowed the things of Christ to leak away? The only reason is that they have paid too much attention to their family, their money, their children, their possessions, their business, or their education. There has to be something to which your heart is attached, which becomes your hole and results in the leakage. Some may be worse; they may have sins which they have not properly condemned. A few days ago, a missionary told me that he has met a few Christians who are not very honest and who lie a great deal. It is very pitiful that a Christian can lie and be dishonest. We all have to find out where our hole is. I do not know what kind of worldly things or sins have caused us to forget about and lose the things of Christ. We must find out if we have any holes and if the things of Christ have leaked away. If there is dishonesty or other transgressions in us, we have to deal with them. When the sins are dealt with, the leaks will be stopped.

I know a brother who has a poor memory. If you say two things to him, he will listen to the second and forget about the first. He easily forgets. He has been a Christian for six years. Has his forgetfulness been a hole to him? Not at all. He forgets about everything, but he never allows anything concerning Christ to leak away. If you speak to him about Christ, he remembers it very well. If you speak to him about the world, he forgets about it right away. He will tell you that he cannot remember so many things. I cannot excuse anyone for forgetting about the things concerning Christ, because God's Word does not excuse anyone. Do not think that a clever person with a good memory will remember every spiritual thing; do not think that they have an edge over the not-so-clever ones. There is not such a thing. The wise ones are the same as the foolish ones; both are sinners. There may be differences in secular things, but there is no difference in spiritual things. We cannot judge whether or not a person has had any leakage

based on his memory. I can prove to you in many ways that many people with poor memories do not have any leakage, because they are single in following the Lord. You may not have lived in rural communities, and consequently, may not have seen many of these cases. If you go to a country girl, or an old woman from a village, who does not have much knowledge, she may not be able to tell you much about the world. But if you tell her about the Lord, she can understand very well. I met one Christian who was ninety-seven years old. The book he wrote had the third largest circulation in the world. The book with the most circulation is the Bible. The second best-read book is The Pilgrim's Progress. Other than these two books, no other book has been more widely circulated than the book this old man wrote, which is called Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment. I met this old man once when he was ninety-seven years old. His memory had faded, and many times he could not even recognize his own daughter-in-law. When I went to see him, I greeted him five times, but he could not respond to me. By the sixth or seventh time he was able to respond. All the worldly things had leaked away from him. But the things of the Lord had not leaked away. He had not allowed anything that was revealed to him to leak away. He kept repeating, "I cannot live without Him, and He cannot live without me." This was the only thing he said: "I cannot live without Him, and He cannot live without me." Everything with him was gone. I can say that all the gray matter in his brain was practically gone. But the things of the Lord had not leaked away from him. Was not the woman by the well of Sychar able to drink to her satisfaction? That Samaritan woman could fill herself up with the living water. But if there had been a hole in her, everything would have been gone from her in two days. I must warn you honestly that you must deal with the things that cause the leakages. Perhaps you are not single enough, or perhaps there is sin in you. I must say a word at the risk of offending you: The way we spend our money often exposes our holes. We allow ourselves to get by with a torn Bible, but we have the money to buy toy cars for our children. This shows the kind of things that we remember and the kind of things that we forget. It shows where our heart is. O Lord, be merciful to us! What we forget in our heart can be expressed in the things that are without. If there is no hole in our heart, there is no possibility of a leakage. Many people

are not concerned about the things of Christ. I have to ask you to pardon me again for saying these things, but I feel that I have to say them. Among us, many brothers and sisters are too pitiful. No matter what subject is brought up, they can easily join in the conversation; they have answers for everything and can carry on any conversation. But once you speak of spiritual matters, they immediately become silent, as if this subject is beyond them. Many people are clever in many things; they are astute and clear in their mind and sharp in their memory. But they cannot conduct any conversation on spiritual matters. This is a bad sign. May the Lord be merciful to us. Here are holes! We have allowed everything that we have heard to leak away. We have heard so much concerning Christ. Where have we kept it? May the Lord be merciful to us!

The word pararrhueo not only means leaking; in the original language it also means drifting past. Drifting means that there is no need of exerting any strength. It requires strength to sail a boat. But if one drifts along with the current, there is no need to exert any strength. To drift is to go along with the power of the current. It means to follow the direction of the flow; wherever the water goes, one follows along. Please remember that it is impossible to arrive at one's destiny by drifting. If you want to go to Pu-tong, you have to hold firmly to your rudder and steer forcefully. You cannot drift along. If you drift along, you will never arrive at your destiny. If you want to reach the Kao-chang Temple, you cannot follow the current down to the Wu-soong River mouth. You cannot drift. In order to arrive at a specified destiny, one cannot drift; he has to fight against drifting with singleness of effort. It takes effort to arrive at a destiny. But it does not take any effort to drift; all that one has to do is to lie on the water and float along. Wherever the current takes him, he follows along. Wherever the water carries him, he goes with it. He goes where the wind carries him. This is drifting. Friends, all spiritual things, all spiritual walks, and everything related to Christ require that we firmly grasp the Lord and also require a conscious effort to oppose Satan, the world, and ourselves. Can we rest and be at ease? Is it easy to be a Christian? Can we be careless and drift with the tide? There is no such cheap thing. Please remember that in order to have a single destiny in our heart, we cannot drift. Let me ask what the goal of our Christian life today is. If we wanted

to go to Pu-tong and our boat was moving west, we would surely become worried. If the boat continued in the westward direction, we would never reach Pu-tong and we would miss our destiny. But if we had no intention of going to Pu-tong, and if we had no destiny at all, we would drift along and be satisfied with whatever came along the way.

Every Christian should have an ambition to please the Lord. Needless to say, our ambition is not to please ourselves. We cannot be satisfied with whatever comes along. We have to have a goal and we should press toward the mark, forgetting what is behind and pressing forward to what is before. Many people do not have anything behind them, because they do not have a goal ahead of them. If one does not have a goal, he does not have anything behind him or in front of him. To him every place is the same. In traveling from Nanking to Shanghai, and especially around the Kun-shan district, one sees many buffalo-driven water mills. The water mills are geared to large treadmills, and the buffalos walk around the treadmills day and night, circling them continuously. They are constantly walking, yet they remain in the same place all the time; everywhere is the starting point and everywhere is the ending point; there is no beginning and no ending. They do not know which way is east and which way is west, which way is north and which way is south; they do not have a goal, and all they do is walk around the treadmills. You have to realize that many Christians are the same. They go around in circles every day. There is no front and no back. They are drifting because they do not have a goal. What is the purpose of becoming a Christian? Do you really intend to glorify God as the Scripture says? If you do, you have to show me your faith, and you have to press forward all the way to the end. You have to set your eyes on the goal, and you must resolve to reach your goal. If you see anything contrary to this goal, you have to exert your effort to resist it. If you see the race ahead of you, you will surely forget the things that are behind and press forward toward the goal. Otherwise, you will be drifting. Young men and women, does your Christian life have a goal? Those who do not have a goal will surely drift. Recently I was in Hong Kong, and I visited a co-worker there who is also my friend and whom I have not seen for a long time. He told me about a very rich man in Hong Kong

who is a nominal member of the Anglican Church. He told my friend, “Don’t visit me anymore. You are serving God, while I am serving mammon. You should serve God with all your heart and all your soul, and I must serve mammon with all my heart and all my soul. You have your way and I have my way.” You can see that although this man took the wrong way, he nevertheless had a goal. He wanted to serve mammon with all his heart and all his soul. What I am the most afraid of is drifting. Today many Christians are drifting. Sometimes they serve God, while at other times they serve mammon. They do not have a direction, and they are drifting. If the water carries them to Pu-tong, they go to Pu-tong, and if the water carries them to Pu-si, they go to Pu-si.

Do you know what the danger of drifting is? Drifting is something that goes on unnoticed. If a whirlwind comes and takes you away, you feel it right away, because the change is sudden. If a large steamer comes and tugs you along, you feel it immediately. Drifting, however, goes on unconsciously. But drifting always goes from a higher place to a lower place. There is no question about the direction; it is always from the higher place to the lower place, from the upper ground to the lower ground. Drifting does not take any effort. Moreover, it does not take any feeling. A boat ride from here to Wu-soong takes an hour or more. But if one drifts along, it may take six or more hours. Drifting is slow, and there is not much difference between one minute and the next. There is not much difference in three or five minutes. But in six hours, one can find himself in Wu-soong and in a very different place. Many brothers have not committed any gross sins; they are still quite good. They still read the Bible, come to meetings, offer money, and seem to be the same as before. But after one day, two days, one month, two months, in three or four years, they are very different. One does not backslide suddenly or instantly. There is no such thing as an instant backsliding. No spiritual experience occurs suddenly; everything manifests itself in time. It is a very bad thing to drift along. In the end everything drifts away. You may not have committed any gross sins, but you have backslidden imperceptibly. Perhaps nothing will manifest itself immediately, and perhaps no one sees much of a difference in your Christian life. But you must remember that drifting will never carry you upward; it always carries you downward. Conditions deteriorate day

after day, one day at a time. You may not feel this deterioration, but others can feel it already. All pianists know the truth in the adage: “If a man does not practice his piano for a day, he knows it. If he does not practice for two days, his wife knows it. If he does not practice for three days, the whole world knows it.” A little slippage every day will eventually manifest itself. In the beginning, there is very little difference, but in the end, the difference will become very great. God requires that we live before Him every day. Every day, we have to exercise our spiritual strength, and like the apostle, we have to exercise all our inner strength and the power of our spirit and our soul to stand fast and not drift. If we do this, we will see some progress in spiritual matters. If Satan gave us the whole world in one instant, we would not take it. What he does instead is to cause us to stand still and not advance, to gradually drift along with the tide, until one day we fall. I am convinced that Satan is not hasty in dragging us into gross sins. If Satan tried to induce you to kill a man today, you would surely not do it. He will not induce you to commit any great sins. He always comes slowly. Today he will put a hatred within you. Tomorrow he will put a jealousy within you. Perhaps after twenty years, you will have the thought of killing someone. (Please be reminded that Satan is very patient. His patience far exceeds our patience.) It is not inconceivable for us to do such a thing. Every day we need spiritual strength, and we need to maintain the condition that we had at the beginning. God’s hand will preserve us. Do not become careless just because today is more or less the same as yesterday. A little bit of difference every day will become a big difference in ten or twenty years’ time. May the Lord be merciful to those Christians who think that everything is more or less the same! Drifting is being without a goal. It is not feeling anything. But the result of drifting is always a downward trend; one always travels from a higher ground to a lower ground. We must be clear that no one can drift from the Wu-soong River mouth to the Kao-chang Temple. The current will never carry one upward. No one can drift from the mouth of the Yangtze River to Wu-han. This is impossible. It is impossible for you to expect growth in your spiritual life if you are drifting. I have never seen a person who does not exercise his will experience any progress. D.L. Moody said that he never saw a lazy person be saved. I can also say that I have never seen a lazy person

who grows. It may be possible to strike a fortune by being lazy, but being lazy will certainly not work in spiritual matters. If one does not press forward, he will receive nothing. If one is not hungry, he will not be satisfied. If one does not pray and fast before the Lord, he cannot expect to receive anything. The word perhaps is not applicable here. Drifting is always downward; never think that perhaps one can drift upward. To hope that things will get better in a few days, that the weather will get better in a few days, and that you will feel better is to drift along.

Let us consider some of the dangers a Christian can face. According to the apostle, the greatest dangers are to drift and to leak. Let us take this first warning as our reminder. Everyone can leak, and everyone can drift. We can lose everything that God has given to us by leaking, and we can miss everything that God will give to us by drifting. Pararrhueo means to slide past or miss. You may want to board a big ship moored in the middle of the Whampoa River. When your little boat tries to come close to the ship, the current will be too strong, and you will not be able to resist the current. It will be impossible to fight the current, and you will slide past the ship. This is what the apostle meant. You follow the tide and do not resist the power of the current. As a result, you miss your target. Therefore, we have to find out where our leakage is. If we continue to drift, we will miss our mark. Our present danger lies in our leaking and drifting. This is why the apostle told us to give heed and not to be careless. A careless man cannot be a government official. A careless woman cannot be a good mother. A careless person cannot be a good child or a good teacher, and a careless person cannot be a proper Christian. No careless person can be a proper Christian. All careless people fail to see the danger of drifting and leaking. Only the people who give heed will have the eyes to see, and only they will grow spiritually. We do not give heed enough, and we are too careless concerning spiritual matters. This is why we often slide back gradually. For this reason, the apostle exhorted us to give heed more abundantly to the things that have been heard. Paul said that we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). We have to work out our own salvation by cultivating a fear for our own weakness and a fear for God. Many Christians are fearful of nothing today. In spiritual matters,

fear is one thing that is very necessary. If we live in jesting and laughter every day and if we are careless in everything, without seeing the need of fearing God, and if we do not have any feeling for anything, but are nonchalant and unconcerned about spiritual matters and ignorant of their value to us, we have not seen our need and have not realized our danger.

What is the result of such dangers? The following verses tell us where we will drift to and what we will lose. We may think that to drift and to leak are not serious. But the apostle warned us soberly concerning what we will lose by drifting and leaking this way. What did the apostle say? Verse 3 says, "How shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation." Sin is present. How shall we escape? What are we neglecting? We are neglecting so great a salvation. In a minute we will see what this great salvation is. Perhaps we can touch upon it briefly now. Many sinners perish because they would not let go of one meal. Many others perish because they refuse to let go of a little sleep. There are many instances like these. Sometimes a gospel meeting starts at six, and a sinner needs to eat at half past six. Because of his meal, he perishes. He has neglected so great a salvation. Sometimes a gospel meeting starts at eight, but a person needs to go to sleep early. As a result he misses his opportunity again. But many Christians are negligent also. They have allowed the gospel which they have heard and the things of Christ which they have heard to leak away. They do not care if these things have leaked away. The result is that they miss so great a salvation.

What is the salvation spoken of in the book of Hebrews? I dare not say anything about the salvation mentioned in the other books. But the salvation spoken of in the book of Hebrews is a salvation that saves us to the uttermost. Jesus lives forever and will save us to the uttermost (7:25). This is an uttermost salvation. What is this salvation? This salvation is not just the forgiveness of sin through the blood shed by the Lord Jesus on the cross, and it is not just deliverance from hell into heaven. Of course, the salvation in Hebrews includes the cross. But it has to do particularly with us becoming a fully saved person while living on earth, and with our receiving the glory together with Christ in the millennium. Let me ask you a question. Suppose a brother has done something which is not very proper. His family may say, "Would one who believes in Jesus

do such a thing also?" Although this person is not going to perish again, and although he will not become unsaved, one does not find him different from other men; there is no distinction in him. He is standing on the ground of an unsaved person. Suppose you have a bad temper, and you have believed in the Lord. You have heard about the Lord Jesus being your overcoming life. Yet this matter has slipped away from you. Because you have drifted, you do not have the experience of it, and you lose your temper again. What will your classmates and colleagues think of you? They will think that you are the same as they are, and that you lose your temper just the same. The unbelievers will say that such a believer still loses his temper, and is no different from anyone else. In this way, you have neglected so great a salvation. You have not allowed the Lord to save you out of the sin of your temper. You have not distinguished yourself from the unbelievers, and have missed so great a salvation. Suppose there are many clerks working in a shop. It is a small thing in the world to receive a little bribe. But suppose you are one of the clerks. If you are the same as the others and are not separated from them, you have neglected so great a salvation. When unbelievers take a taxi, they often argue with the drivers. But if you do the same thing, others will say that you are the same as everyone else. They will not sense your difference among them, and you will miss your great salvation. You have not shown your distinction among them in these matters. Among us there are many who are children to their parents. Last night I heard someone say that he did not agree with his mother because she was not fair. The worst thing for a mother to find is that her children complain that she is not fair. Before a mother is saved, her children can say such a thing about her. But what happens now that she is saved? If her children still say the same thing about her, and if she has not changed at all, she has missed so great a salvation. Sometimes people say, "Your children are the same as my children. There is not much difference." When this happens, you have lost your testimony. Many times, we would rather be ridiculed than lose our distinction before our family. They can be wrong, but we must not be wrong. Our difference and our contrast with others is our strongest testimony. I know of one mother who is much opposed by her children, only because she wants them to be different from others. But she insisted that her children be different from the

time they were very young. This is the proper way for children in Christian families to be; they are different from the whole world around them. That mother has been a real Christian. She has not neglected so great a salvation. She is distinct, and she maintains her testimony. We have to be afraid of not being distinct. We have to be different from the world in the way we dress, in the way we handle affairs, and in the way we use our money and our time. You have to be different from the world even in the way you use your towel. Please remember that we should never drift or slip with respect to God's gospel. We have to preserve ourselves from drifting away from so great a salvation. God's salvation not only includes our life in this age, but it includes the kingdom and being in glory with the Lord in the millennium. Salvation is not just for this age; it is for the coming kingdom as well. In order for us to have so great a salvation, and share in the glory of the kingdom, we have to preserve our distinctiveness and should not drift or slip.

Finally, let us consider this whole passage briefly. We will read from verse 1 on. "Therefore we ought to give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard..." We have to give heed to the things which have been heard, which are the things concerning Christ, lest we drift away, lose, or leak away. We must not leak away or drift away, because there is "the word spoken through angels," which is the Old Testament law. The law was ordained through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). Such a word through the angels should not be transgressed against or disobeyed. (To transgress is on the positive side, while to disobey is on the negative side.) "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." How much more serious will it be if we neglect so great a salvation? This salvation is different from anything else in the whole world. It was not preached by men, but by the Son of God; it was conveyed to us by the glorious Son of God. How shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation? We cannot escape, because this salvation had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord, which is different from the law described in verse 2. If the law was spoken through the angels, and those who transgressed against it suffered great punishment, "how shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation, which, having had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord, has been confirmed

to us by those who heard, God bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various works of power and by distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His will"? This is the apostle's warning to us. He exhorts us not to drift or leak away. This is the Lord's own word to us, and it is testified to by God and the Holy Spirit. May the Lord be gracious to us, that we not be careless in the things which we have heard from God. Never think that only those who have committed gross sins have backslidden. We should not drift, and we should not leak away!

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## GOD'S KEEPING POWER

**•Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 5:23; Num. 13:25-33; 14:4-10; Josh. 14:6-12**

1 Thes. 5:23 "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Num. 13:25-33 "And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. And they proceeded to come to Moses and to Aaron and to the whole assembly of the children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to the whole assembly, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him and said, We came to the land into which you sent us; and it indeed flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and we also saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negev, and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites dwell in the hill country, and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the Jordan. But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men who went up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. And they brought to the children of Israel an evil report of the land which they had spied out, saying, The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great size. And there we saw the Nephilim (the descendants of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

14:4-10 And they said one to another, Let us appoint a captain, and let us return to Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the whole congregation of the assembly of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who spied out the land,

tore their clothes. And they spoke to the whole assembly of the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we passed to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If Jehovah is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us; a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against Jehovah, nor should you fear the people of the land, for they are our bread. Their protection has been removed from them, and Jehovah is with us; do not fear them. But the whole assembly said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of Jehovah appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the children of Israel.

Josh. 14:6-12 Then the children of Judah approached Joshua in Gilgal; and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, You know the word that Jehovah spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you in Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of Jehovah sent me out from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I returned such a word to him as was genuinely upon my heart. However my brothers who went up with me made the people's heart melt, but I fully followed Jehovah my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land on which your foot has trodden will be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, for you have fully followed Jehovah my God. And now, look, Jehovah has kept me alive, as He said, for these forty-five years, since the time Jehovah spoke this word to Moses while Israel walked through the wilderness. And now, look, today I am eighty-five years old. Today I am still as strong as I was on the day Moses sent me out; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for battle and for going out and coming in. Now therefore give me this hill country, of which Jehovah spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that the Anakim were there with great fortified cities. It may be that Jehovah will be with me, and I will dispossess them, as Jehovah said.

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It is a distressing fact that some Christians believe in God's saving power, but they do not believe in His keeping power. They have received God's saving grace but have not yet received His keeping grace. They do not realize that He who is the Giver of grace is also the One who maintains us in His grace. Let us see from the Scriptures how we who have been saved by God can be kept by Him.

Joshua 14:11 says, “I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.” This is Caleb’s word. “To go out, and to come in” refers to everyday life; “for war” refers to life under exceptional circumstances. Caleb’s strength was the same as it was in the day he spoke with Moses, in coping with the ordinary demands of daily life as well as with the demands of life under conditions of special stress. Though forty years had elapsed in the interval, he was as strong as he had been in his earlier days. Here we see God’s keeping power. Caleb’s strength was the same on that day as it was forty years earlier. He was as strong at this time as he was then. He was no less vigorous at eighty-five than he had been at forty. There is only one explanation for this; he had been kept by God. We are totally unable to keep ourselves in the grace of God. There is no guarantee that even five years after we have been saved we will be found in the measure of faith we had in our earlier Christian life. We cannot abide in the grace of God by our own effort; He alone can maintain us in His grace.

What was the condition for Caleb to experience God’s keeping power? Let us consider this matter for a minute.

Joshua 14:14 says, “He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel.” And how did he wholly follow the Lord? We are told in Numbers 13 and 14. Numbers 13:30 says, “Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to prevail.” “We are well able to prevail.” A person who wholly follows the Lord is one who believes that the promises of God are trustworthy, that He is with His people, and that they are well able to overcome. Brothers and sisters, do you believe this? Many people believe, but their faith is a vacillating faith. They are very timid. They sing their song of praise, but though the words are right, there is something wrong with the tune. In Caleb’s case it was not so; he sang the right words in the right tune. He said, “Let us go up at once.” A person who wholly follows the Lord and reckons Him to be trustworthy is one who does the will of God and does it at once.

What about the ten spies? They looked at the inhabitants of the land and saw that they were “men of great size” and their cities were “fortified and very large.” They looked at themselves too, and in their own sight they were “like

grasshoppers." Their eyes were fixed on the difficulties before them. Herein lies the reason why so many Christians fail to experience God's keeping power—difficulties fill their vision. If one keeps looking at his difficulties, he will surely find no hope in the situation. God does not want us to set our eyes on the mountains obstructing our path; He wants us to say to the mountains: "Be taken up and cast into the sea" (Mark 11:23). It is useless to set our eyes on the mountains. The more we look at the mountains, the higher they become. Many people cannot overcome because their eyes are always set on their failures. Many people are prepared ahead of time for their failures. Defeat is certain if we are constantly contemplating defeat. Many experiences of failure come because we anticipate them. We may think that we can deal with other problems but that there is no way that we can deal with one particular problem. In so thinking, we have paved the way for defeat as soon as the problem comes to us. As soon as our eyes are set on ourselves, we will surely fail. If God is to save us, He must first save our eyes from looking at ourselves to looking at His promises. We are courageous only as long as we keep God's promises in view. Once we see His promises, we will see that we can overcome!

So many of God's people lack the faith that characterized Caleb; they concentrate their thoughts on the seriousness of their illnesses, the intensity of their scars, and the insurmountable nature of their difficulties. Yet how many are there whose eyes are set on God's promises? Those who do not fear "the children of Anak" are "well able to prevail." Caleb requested Joshua to appoint Hebron as his portion; Hebron was a great city among the Anakim, and the great man among the Anakim lived there (Josh. 14:12-15). He was not dismayed by the fact that the Anakim were "men of great size," nor by the fact that Hebron was "fortified and very large"; he overcame them. The whole question in relation to overcoming is: Are we trusting in ourselves, or are we trusting in the Lord? If we are relying on ourselves then of course we have to consider whether or not the Anakim are strong or weak and whether their cities are well fortified, but if our reliance is on God, then the question of human resources does not even arise. If we are trusting in God, there is no ground for fear, and victory is assured no matter how great the men and how high the city may be.

There is another noteworthy matter in connection with Caleb. In Numbers 14:9 he exhorted the whole congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "Do not rebel against Jehovah; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our bread." He told the Israelites that they could go up immediately, they could overcome, and they did not have to be afraid of them, because "they will be our bread." Bread is something to eat. Bread is something that brings increased strength, that makes one stronger after he eats it. The inhabitants of the land were admittedly "men of great size," but in Caleb's eyes, they were food for God's people. He not only honored God's promises, he despised all the difficulties. Everyone who has genuine faith honors God and lightly esteems all difficulties. But this leaves no room for pride, for only those who humble themselves before God will be able to stand upon His victory.

Every time you meet a difficulty, every time you find yourself in an impossible situation, ask yourself this question: Am I going to starve here, or am I going to eat? If you are relying on the Lord for victory and allow His overcoming life to be manifested in you, you will find fresh nourishment and increased vitality, and you will be fed once again. Bear in mind that people who do not eat well cannot grow into maturity. Our bread is not only the word of God, our meat is not only to do His will, our bread is also the Anakim—the difficulties that are in our way. Many people take the word of God as their bread and the doing of His will as their meat, but they have not eaten the Anakim. Many eat too little of the Anakim. The more we eat the Anakim, the stronger we will become. Caleb is a grand illustration of this. Because he accepted the Anakim as "bread," he was still full of vitality at the age of eighty-five. His strength was the same at eighty-five as it was at forty. So many Anakim had been assimilated by him over the years that he had developed a constitution which showed no trace of age.

This is also true in the spiritual realm. Some brothers and sisters have met few difficulties, but it is obvious that there are many weaknesses in their lives. They are weak before the Lord because they have not consumed enough Anakim. However, there are those who have met and overcome difficulty after difficulty, temptation after temptation; they are full of vigor because they have fed well on Anakim. We have to eat our difficulties and our temptation. Every difficulty and

every temptation Satan puts in our way is food for us. This is a God-appointed means of spiritual progress. The sight of any trouble strikes terror into the heart of those who do not have faith, but those who trust Him say, “Here comes my food!” Praise and thank the Lord, all our trials, without exception, are bread for us. Every trial brings in growth after we have eaten of it. As we accept one trial after another, we are more and more richly nourished.

Let us now look into the practical outworking of this. We must not forget that there is a condition attached to God’s keeping power. If we do not trust Him, He is unable to keep us. In order to experience His salvation, and in order to have His keeping power, we must believe wholeheartedly in His promises. If after we have overcome, we doubt whether our overcoming experience can be sustained, we are discrediting His keeping power. We must believe in God’s keeping power. Every morning when we rise we should say to Him, “God, I thank You for keeping me yesterday, and today You will still keep me. I do not know what temptations may befall me, and I do not know how I can overcome. I cannot do anything; but I believe You will keep me.” First Peter 1:5 speaks of being “guarded by the power of God through faith.” God guards those who have faith in Him. We do not have to grapple with temptations and try to overcome them; the keeping power of God will get us through, and we must believe in His ability to save us from giving way to sin. If we implicitly rely on Him, even when we are unexpectedly assailed by temptations, an amazing thing will happen. In a way we cannot account for, something will ward off all the fiery darts of the evil one. It is the shield of faith. It will come in between us and Satan, so that his fiery darts cannot reach us. Instead of hurting us they will beat upon the shield of faith and rebound on Satan himself.

Paul said, “I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Paul did something; he committed himself to the Lord. If you believe in Him, then you must commit yourself to Him. He can only keep those who have handed themselves over to Him. Many people fail to experience the blessedness of His keeping power because they have never put themselves into His care. They have never said to Him, “Lord, I hand myself over to you and commit to You the keeping of my life.” Brothers and sisters, have you placed

yourselves in His hands? If you truly have, then you will be able to say with Paul, "I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day."

If your life is truly in His hands, then the promise of Jude 24—"to guard you from stumbling and to set you before His glory without blemish in exultation"—will be fulfilled in you. To stumble is to slip and strike against something when we are unconscious of any obstruction in the way. Praise God, He will preserve us not only from falling but also from the slightest slippage. Thank and praise the Lord, His preserving grace operates beyond the realm of our consciousness. Brothers and sisters, if we commit ourselves unreservedly into His care, we will marvel at the way we are kept. When temptation suddenly assails and love is required, we will find love spontaneously welling up from within. When a sudden temptation demands patience, without giving it a moment's thought, our patience will rise up to meet the need. Praise God, as the life we received from Adam spontaneously expresses itself, so also does the life we receive from Christ. We inherited our bad temper from Adam, and we can become angry without the slightest effort of will. We inherited pride from Adam, and we can become proud without any deliberate decision. In the same way, those who have received the life of Christ and committed themselves into His keeping can be meek without making up their minds to be meek, and humble without any effort to be humble. The same spontaneity of manifestation that characterizes the life we have received from Adam also characterizes the life we have received from Christ. To work out what the Lord Jesus has given us does not require any effort on our part. If we trust in His promises and commit ourselves utterly to Him, we will be kept from this day to the day of His return, and we will be kept without blemish. Thank God, we have a salvation which is worthy of our trust and which will withstand every trial.

## MESSAGE NINE

# PUTTING ON THE HELMET OF SALVATION

## •Outline

**One—Six**

## •Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:9, 17, 3:6-7; 2 Cor. 1:12; Eph. 6:17, 4:23; Rom. 12:2, 8:5-6

Gen. 2:9 "And out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

3:6-7 "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make oneself wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

2 "Cor. 1:12 For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you."

Eph. 6:17 "And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God,"

4:23 "And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

Rom. 12:2 "And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect."

8:5-6 "For those who are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh;

but those who are according to the spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace."

*  *  *  *

## ONE

In the garden of Eden, there were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). This shows us that these two trees are in opposition one to another. On one side, there is the tree of life. On the other side, there is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a tree that leads to death. We can say that one is the tree of life and the other is the tree of death. When man ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the result was death. The greatest effect on Adam and Eve after they had sinned was that they acquired knowledge. After they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they understood good and evil. In other words, the influence of the fall on man's physiological constitution and the first subjective impact it had on man was that man's intellect became bigger than before. Before man fell, he had a mind and an intellect. But after his fall, his mind and intellect became different from what God had intended them to be at the beginning; they were no longer what God wanted them to be. For this reason, Paul said in Ephesians 6:17 that we should "receive the helmet of salvation." This shows that man's "head" needs salvation. After many people believe in the Lord, their life and their living are definitely changed. But with many people their "head" is not yet saved. In spiritual warfare, if our "head" is not saved and covered, we cannot deal with Satan. Therefore, it is important to put on the helmet of salvation; it is important for our "head" to be saved.

Among God's children, there is a great problem: we can find excellent men, and we can find men with good behavior, but they all have a "head" that belongs to the old creation. In other words, they have the life of Christ, but they still have

the “head” of Adam. This frustrates them from understanding God’s will. To measure a person’s spiritual life, all we have to do is measure his “head.” The degree to which a man is saved from his “head” is the degree to which he is saved from Adam and the old creation. The basic difference between living in the old creation and living in the new creation lies in the condition of the “head” before God.

## TWO

Second Corinthians 1:12 says, “Not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world.” All of us who consider ourselves to be clever, shrewd, and great need to look to God for His deliverance. We need to realize that the principle of the Christian life is to be according to God’s will and not according to our wisdom. It is trusting in His grace rather than in our wisdom. This is the one thing that we have to learn.

Suppose a matter is presented to you, and you do not know whether you should do it, or you do not know how to do it in the proper way. You consider and reconsider, pondering this way and that. You think if you do it this way, you will have this result, and if you do it that way, you will have that result. If you say this, others will answer in one way, and if you say that, others will answer in another way. You think you should be a little more clever in handling the situation. What does it mean to be clever? It means to face the least difficulty and avoid the most opposition in saying or doing something. But you have forgotten that God’s children do not live on earth in fleshly wisdom. Being a Christian is a simple thing. All we need to do is ask what God wants.

We must realize that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that was in the garden of Eden is still growing among God’s children today. Many of God’s children are still eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil day and night instead of the fruit of the tree of life. They still ask if they should do this or that, and they are still entangled with questions of good and evil. Paul said that it is a simple matter to live before God; we do not live in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God. We are responsible for one thing only, doing His will.

## THREE

Romans 12:2 says, “But be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.” We must all remember that our responsibility is to obey God’s will, while God is responsible for the result of our obedience to His will. We do not have the responsibility of finding a smooth pathway for ourselves. As far as smoothness is concerned, we can say that the Son of God lived the roughest life on earth. He was responsible for obeying God’s will, while God was responsible for His “misfortunes.” When we say that cleverness is useless to a Christian, we do not mean that we should go and do foolish things. Our cleverness is useless in God’s hand, and our foolishness is also useless in His hand. God has no need of our foolishness just as He has no need of our cleverness. We are not saying that foolish things are good; we are saying that whatever is according to God’s will is good. We have to differentiate between the two. Purposely saying foolish things or purposely making a blunder does not make a person better. We have to be responsible for obeying God’s will. If God wants us to do something, we should do it. The result and effect of that action is God’s business, not ours.

We need to ask God to save us from our “head,” so that our “head” has salvation and we have on the helmet of salvation. Whenever we encounter anything, the first thing we should do is confess to God: “Lord, my head and my cleverness are not the principles by which I live my Christian life. As a Christian, everything I do is for the purpose of fulfilling Your will.” This does not mean that we have to act foolishly or become a fool. I will repeat again that God does not need a foolish man, just as He does not need a clever man. We should not live in this world according to what our mind thinks; rather, we should prove what is God’s good and well pleasing and perfect will.

Some people have a commercial mentality. Whenever they encounter something, the first thing that comes into their mind is a calculation of gains and losses. They do this in ordinary matters, and they do this also in spiritual matters. This kind of mentality needs to receive a warning. In spiritual matters, the main thing is not whether one comes out on top; it is not a question of personal gain or loss, but a question of God’s will. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn that in this world we live by only one principle: trusting in God’s grace and doing His

will.

## FOUR

Ephesians 4:23 says, "And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind." This means that man's mind needs to be renewed. Romans 12 speaks of the same thing: "Be transformed by the renewing of the mind." The result is "that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." If our mind is renewed, we will prove what God's will is. Whether or not a man understands God's will has nothing to do with methods; it has to do with the person himself. Many people know methods for finding out God's will, but they themselves are wrong. As a result, they still are unable to know God's will.

Who will know God's will? Only those who have been delivered by God from their mental strength know His will. Our mind must be renewed before we can prove what God's will is. We have to remember that the strongest part of man's natural life is his thoughts. With some, the strength of their natural life lies in their will. With others, the strength of their natural life lies in their emotion. But with most, the strength of their natural life lies in their mind. As soon as you meet a person who is strong in his mind, you touch his "head." When he comes to you, his thoughts come as well. His thoughts are stronger than his spirit. He seems very clever, and his outstanding feature is his thoughts. But unless the Lord breaks this strength and smashes this power, such a person cannot know God's will. We have to ask God to deliver us from trusting in our mind or our mental ability.

Many people constantly confess that their flesh is wrong and that their natural life is not proper, yet they still treasure their thoughts, their views, and their natural life. They say with their mouth that they do not trust in these things, but their heart is still full of their own ideas and cleverness, and they still think that their views and ways are better than others. Their cleverness has not yet been broken, and their thoughts have not yet been dealt with. Therefore, they cannot know God's will. Many people are full of God's will in their mouth, yet in reality, they know nothing about God's will. We know that a wrong person will never know God's will. God needs to do a fundamental work in us through the

cross. In particular, He has to renew our mind. He has to break our old man so that we will no longer appreciate our own cleverness and no longer think that we are better than others. Once our "head" is dealt with, we will prove God's will, and we will know His will. Our problem is that human thoughts often have replaced God's will. Therefore, our "head" needs to be saved. No one who is ignorant of the cross will know God's will. Hence, the whole question comes back to the cross. Do you know that the cross is here to deal with your natural life? Do you know how God deals with you as a person? One day God will grant you grace and lead you to the point where you realize that your self as well as your thoughts are not reliable. Then you will no longer believe in yourself or treasure your natural strength. Then many things will become clear to you. Whenever your natural life is dealt with by God, you will be clear concerning His will.

## FIVE

Romans 8:5-6 says, "For those who are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but those who are according to the spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." What is the mind of the flesh? One characteristic of the mind of the flesh is to believe in ourselves, to think that we know everything, and to be confident of everything. The mind of the spirit also has its characteristic, which is to have no trust in ourselves, to be hesitant and fearful in saying or doing anything. The mind of the flesh is always busy and quick; it always considers itself to be very clever. Yet it does not have any rest, and the result is death. The mind of the spirit is not under the control of natural wisdom; it is under the control of God's command. It does not have any confidence in the flesh and does not act according to the idea of the mind. The result is life and peace. Hence, our "head" must be saved before we can be free from the control of the fleshly mind and before we can have the mind of the spirit. Only then will we have life and peace.

## SIX

Paul said, "Not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you" (1 Cor. 1:12). Please

pay attention to the last phrase “and more abundantly toward you.” The Corinthians were very wise. But Paul said that he did not conduct himself in the world in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God and more abundantly toward them. Thank the Lord that the more wise and judicious we are, the more we do not need to use our wisdom. We trust in the grace of God. This is all the more true when it comes to the things of God and the affairs of the church; we do not need fleshly wisdom or fleshly cleverness.

We have to learn to never bring our secular mind into the consideration of spiritual affairs. I do not know if your secular mind is useful in other things or not, but I do know one thing, a secular mind is definitely not useful in spiritual things. Your secular ways, tactics, strategies, and cleverness may be useful in other things, but they are absolutely useless in spiritual things. In the house of God, it is not a matter of man’s ways or cleverness but a matter of God’s will. Only one thing counts here; it is not what man says or thinks but what God has said. We need to ask the Lord, “God, what is the pattern that You want to show me?” Other than the pattern that He shows us, we cannot have another pattern. We have to learn to obey God’s will and give up trusting in our own wisdom. While we are obeying God’s will, we should look to Him to carry us through all the difficulties that we face in doing His will. From now on, we should look to God so that we can conduct ourselves in the world not in fleshly wisdom but in His grace and so we can obey His will.

# MESSAGE TEN

## THREE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF OUR LIVING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

## •Outline

- **•The Relationship Between The Head (Christ) And The Members—Obedience**
- **•The Relationship Between The Body (The Church) And The Members—Fellowship**
- **•The Responsibility Of The Members In The Body—Service**

## •Scripture Reading: Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:14-26

Col. 1:18 “”And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;”

1 Cor. 12:14-26 “For the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body. And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed. And if all were one member, where would the body be? But now the members are many, but the body one. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. But much rather the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; and our uncomely members come to have more abundant comeliness, But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant

honor to the member that lacked, that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it."

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There are many members in the Body of Christ, and the members are one, each having their different function. God has not ordered all the members to have the same function. All the members are different. "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function" (Rom. 12:4). How then can these members with different functions be linked and fitted together harmoniously in one Body? There are three basic principles which are essential for the harmonious functioning of the Body of Christ. The first defines the relationship between the Head and the members, the second, the relationship between the Body and the members, and the third, the responsibility of the members. All three principles are indispensable.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEAD (CHRIST) AND THE MEMBERS—OBEDIENCE

The meaning of a Christian's absolute surrender is in the words, "I will be obedient to the Lord; I will renounce my freedom and will not disobey authority." The first principle of living in the Body of Christ is to obey the authority of the Head. Both the existence of the Body and the function and activity of the Body depend on authority. Whenever authority has no place in us, the Body is paralyzed. Any part that is disobedient is paralyzed. A paralyzed body does not follow the directions of the head; where there is life, there is authority. If we want to have life, it is impossible to reject authority. Those who are full of life must obey authority. If my hand has life, it cannot resist the direction of the head. To be alive implies that we are being directed by the Head. Therefore, the first principle of living in the Body of Christ is to obey the Head. If we have not yet been dealt with in such a way as to be rendered obedient, what we know of the Body is only a matter of theory, not of life. God must deal with our fleshly life that

we may see how blessed it is to be obedient to the Head. We must aim at obedience. Many times, we seek for opportunities to make good progress, to become holy, and to become righteous. We should similarly seek for opportunities to be obedient.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY (THE CHURCH) AND THE MEMBERS—FELLOWSHIP

Our relationship with the Head is that of obedience, while our relationship with the Body is that of fellowship. Among the children of God, fellowship is a matter of reality and necessity. The life of the Body of Christ needs fellowship, without which there is only death. What is fellowship? Fellowship implies receiving of assistance from other members of the Body. For instance, I am the mouth; I can speak. But I need the fellowship of the ears in order to hear. I need the fellowship of the eyes to see. I need the fellowship of the hands to take things. I also need the fellowship of the feet to walk. Therefore, fellowship means that I receive a benefit from the special features of others.

Some Christians do not understand the principle of fellowship. They want to seek spirituality as individuals, to pray by themselves, to do everything by themselves, to be the mouth, the ears, the hands, and the feet at the same time. But those who know the Lord are not so; they need fellowship. Fellowship implies the fact that we are limited, inadequate, and willing to accept what comes from others and take it as our own.

Fellowship is not a mere doctrine but a reality. In the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, can we honestly say that we pray well every day? Can we honestly say that we study the Bible well every day? Experience tells us that occasionally on account of poor health or for other reasons we cannot pray or read the Bible well. Then do we fail? Do we fall? No. During the week we can have fellowship with God on Monday and do reasonably well on Tuesday through Friday. On Saturday, we may feel tired and unable to read the Bible or pray well. Yet we are not doomed to failure on Saturday because there is an inexplicable strength supporting us. Saturday need not be any worse than the day before. This is because there is a supply from the life of the Body.

Many children of God have a similar experience, not once or twice but many times. Though we are weak, God carries us through because the members of the Body can mutually supply the needs of each other. Someone is praying, "May God be gracious to all His children." As life from another member of the Body flows into us, we are sustained. The life from the Body flows into us and carries us through. So we must realize that we live not merely by our own life but through the life that comes from the Body.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEMBERS IN THE BODY—SERVICE

If we see that the life of the Body is a matter of fellowship and mutual supply, we will realize that before the Lord we should not be one who consumes life but one who supplies life. If many members in the Body of Christ need the supply of life and few can afford to give the supply, the strength of the Body will fail. Therefore, we must pray for others. God will supply life to other members through this prayer. Thus, when the need in others arises, such supply will be forthcoming.

First Corinthians 12:26 says, "And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it." This verse does not say that when one member suffers, all the members "ought to" suffer with it, or if one member is glorified, all the members "ought to" rejoice with it. With God's Word there is not a question of what "ought to" be done. God's Word says that when one member suffers, all the members suffer; this is a fact. When one member is glorified, all the members rejoice; this is a fact. This explains why there are times when we have inexplicable feelings. Sometimes we feel heavy within. But after two days, it is over. There can be no other reason for this except for the fact that we are related in one Body.

At the time of the great spiritual revival in Wales, there was a sister living in another place. One day while she was with two or three others praying, there was an inexplicable power of the Spirit overflowing in her, an experience she had never had before. It continued for four or five months. She could quite effortlessly get in touch with God, as if heaven were near at hand. Then one day

she read the newspapers and realized that the Welsh spiritual revival had supplied her. When one member rejoices, other members rejoice also. The Body of Christ is a living Body with organic life. Paul said, "I...fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). Because we are in one Body, we can fill up the needs of other members.

This is not only a matter of suffering or rejoicing; it is a matter of life. Some members can supply the Body with life, while others must receive life from the Body. We should have both aspects. We truly need the supply of life from the Body, and we should also supply life to the Body. Through fellowship we receive life from the Body, and as members we also supply life to others. When we talk of the Body, it is not a mere doctrine or teaching; the Body of Christ is an absolute fact. It is an absolute fact that God's children are joined together as members of the Body. Therefore, we must gladly receive help from others, and we should also endeavor to help other brothers and sisters.

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In summary, we should yield obedience to the authority of the Lord, enjoy the life of the Body, and supply life to others. These are the three main principles of our living in the Body of Christ.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## THE FUNCTION OF THE ANOINTING

### •Outline

- **•The Anointing Before God—Consecration**
- **•The Anointing To Others—Power**
- **•The Anointing In Ourselves—Teaching**

### •Scripture Reading: Lev. 8:12, 30; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:27; Psa. 133:1-3

Lev. 8:12 "And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to sanctify him."

30 "And Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, and on his sons and on his sons' garments with him; and he sanctified Aaron, his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him."

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away in release those who are oppressed, To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of jubilee."

Acts 10:38 "Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

1 John 2:27 "And as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him."

Psa. 133:1-3 "(A Song of Ascents. Of David) Behold, how good and how pleasant it is / For brothers to dwell in unity! It is like the fine oil upon the head

/ That ran down upon the beard, / Upon Aaron's beard, / That ran down upon the hem of his garments; Like the dew of Hermon / That came down upon the mountains of Zion. / For there Jehovah commanded the blessing: / Life forever."

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## THE ANOINTING BEFORE GOD—CONSECRATION

Leviticus 8 speaks of Aaron being anointed and chapter nine refers to his offering of sacrifices. Before becoming king, David was also anointed by Samuel, and then he began to serve God according to the ministry which God had bestowed upon him (1 Sam. 16:12-13). This shows us very clearly that ministry follows anointing. A person who has a ministry before God must have first received an anointing before God. This is true even of the Lord Jesus. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away in release those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of jubilee" (Luke 4:18-19). We can see from the Word of God that a person who is useful in the hand of God must have first received the anointing before Him. One who has not received the anointing before God cannot serve or work for Him.

Having the anointing can very easily become an outward matter among the children of God. We are prone to link the anointing and power together. It is true that they are associated with each other because God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. The Holy Spirit and power do go together, and the Holy Spirit is the power of God, but the Holy Spirit becoming power upon man is just the result of the anointing; this is not God's primary purpose. It is not the thought which God has in mind at the time of anointing people. We should understand that the purpose of receiving the anointing is not to speak with tongues, to perform miracles, or to work wonders. The purpose of the anointing is to be separated and holy before God.

The anointing is referred to in many instances in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, however, the anointing is not linked together with power. The

anointing had only one significance in the Old Testament: to indicate that the person belonged to God. When I say that this book belongs to me, I affix a seal upon it; when God says that a person belongs to Him, He anoints him. Ointment is for separation as well as sanctification. To anoint means to separate unto Jehovah or to belong to Jehovah for holiness.

This kind of absolute belonging to the Lord constitutes the primary requisite for the ministry. Anyone who has a ministry before God is separated unto Jehovah. Only those separated to Jehovah can have the ministry; only they can participate in the work. Whenever consecration ceases, the work will also cease; whenever there is a change in consecration, there will be a change in the ministry.

After the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus, God's acknowledgement, "This is My Son, the Beloved" (Matt. 3:17), came before the Lord began to work. This was God's speaking. Therefore, the anointing indicates God's ownership. Here is a person whom God can claim to be His own, and here is someone whom He can send or use. After the anointing we see power, spontaneous power. As a result the gospel was preached to the poor, sight was restored to the blind, those in bondage were delivered, and men heard of the year of jubilee, in which God accepts man.

## THE ANOINTING TO OTHERS—POWER

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power before the Lord Jesus went about doing good and healing those who were oppressed by the devil. God anointed Him with ointment. What is this ointment? It is the Holy Spirit, and it is also power. It is very wonderful and precious that the Holy Spirit is ointment on us and power to others. To others the Holy Spirit is experienced as power, whereas on us, it is ointment. Whenever the ointment is on us, those who come in contact with us will touch power.

If we are separated before the Lord, spontaneously we will be power to others. Power is not first but second. If the problem of consecration before God is settled, spontaneously the question of power to others is settled. Whenever there is a problem with consecration (or, in other words, with separation), there

is a problem with power, and there is a problem with the work. Anointing brings in spontaneous power. This is true with David as well as with Aaron.

## THE ANOINTING IN OURSELVES—TEACHING

In learning to serve God, we often come across a fact: when we are going to speak, if we are doing it for God, the anointing will be upon us. We will not need to speak strenuously or painstakingly, for we are conscious of the presence of the anointing upon us. Our words may be rather common and simple, yet we become stronger as we speak and feel the presence of the anointing. When we feel this, others will sense the presence of power. At other times we may also speak, but we feel like a deflated tire; we do not feel that there is any sense in our talking, and others do not sense the presence of power. Herein lies the difference: with the anointing there is power; without the anointing there is no power. The anointing is refreshing to us and power to others.

First John 2:27 says, "And as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him." The scope of this verse is comprehensive because the anointing teaches us all things. The teaching of the anointing is entirely different from the teaching of men. Human teaching requires much reasoning and many words. As a result things become complicated. But the teaching of the anointing is different. The teaching of the anointing does not tell us many things or many words; it teaches us by means of His presence or absence in us. This is the characteristic of the anointing. If we do something that the Lord wants us to do, we will have the anointing once we move, and we will know that it is right. If it is something that we should not do, we will feel like a deflated tire once we do it, and we will know that we are not doing the right thing. The anointing does not instruct us by means of teaching or reasoning. If it did, our minds would have to be changed because the faculty of our mind falls far short of God's mind, and we are unable to comprehend His reasons.

Therefore, whether we are right or wrong is based on the presence or absence of the anointing; it is not based on the presence or absence of reason. All

of God's children should learn one lesson, that in following God, we should not reason with Him; rather, we should see whether or not we have the refreshing of the Holy Spirit. Many times when we consider whether or not we should do something, we find good reasons for it; but when we are about to start, we feel that we are doing it alone, and the presence of the Lord is not with us. There is no anointing, and this indicates that we are wrong. For instance, if we are talking to someone and we do not have the anointing, the more we talk the more impotent and inwardly empty we will feel; we will feel dry and be like a deflated tire. However, if we have a heavy burden within, the more we speak, the more we will have an "amen" within and the more relaxed we will feel. We will know what God wants us to do. Therefore, no child of God should move if he does not feel the presence of the anointing. Once he moves, he will find that he is finished. When we are without the anointing, the more we act outwardly the colder we become inwardly, and others cannot touch anything in us either. When we feel the presence of the anointing, others feel power flowing from us. This anointing is both teaching and knowledge to us and power to others.

Many brothers seek power the same way that others seek life, but the Word of God tells us that death operates in us while life operates in others (2 Cor. 4:12). Those seeking life for themselves will not get it. When death operates in us, life operates in others. Similarly, we do not need to try to see whether or not we have power; we only need to ask whether or not we have the anointing. If the anointing is upon us, power will be in others. If we seek power in ourselves, I am afraid the power will not come; we may instead get something outward, which may be marvelous or somewhat sensational, but it is not the spiritual power spoken of in the Word of God. It is a pity that some of God's children seek for some kind of sensational power. They seek for power that they can sense and be sure of. They may think that if they have such power they will be able to help others, but this is entirely wrong. What we should pay attention to is not power but the anointing and whether we are abiding in the Lord according to its teaching. If we do not do as the anointing teaches, other people will not touch life. We may speak many words which people like to hear or consider meaningful, yet if there is no anointing, there is no spiritual reality and life. When we have the

anointing before God, others will spontaneously receive help, touch life, and contact the Lord Himself.

There is another thing which we should take notice of, that the anointing is not for individuals but for the Body. It is not something that we experience as individuals. The precious ointment that was poured upon Aaron's head ran down upon the beard and went down to the skirts of his garments. In this condition one sees how good and how pleasant it is. Therefore, we should seek not only the teaching of the anointing within us but also for the teaching of the anointing in the Body of Christ. We should be guided not only by the anointing in us but the anointing in the Body of Christ. In many things the Lord is sovereignly ordering everything and leading us, and we should not act contrary to the anointing.

Let me give you an illustration. A certain brother, who was supposed to conduct a meeting, felt very empty inwardly and void of words. Therefore, he asked another brother to speak in his place. While going to the meeting, the latter felt that he should give a testimony when he spoke. He was not usually disposed to do this, but the anointing in him urged him to and so he presented his testimony. There were two people at the meeting who had been there several times to listen to the preaching. They had never understood very much, and they were not very interested in what was spoken in the meetings. In fact, they had not been to a meeting in a long time, but that night they were compelled by friends to attend. Other brothers were praying for them, asking God to give them the appropriate words. The testimony of the brother that evening turned out to be exactly what they needed. This is the guidance of the anointing within us, and this is the working of the anointing in a meeting. We should bear in mind that we can never serve God beyond the leading of the anointing within us. However much the anointing is in us, we should serve God to that limit. Going beyond our limit hinders others and damages them. Therefore, we should keep within the limits set by the Lord.

It is after we truly know the anointing that we begin to know what is meant by the ministry of the word or what serving by means of God's word is. When the anointing is upon us, we have the word. Therefore, it is through the anointing that we serve God. It is God who turns our attention to what He pays attention to,

and it is God who furnishes us with the word by which we serve Him and minister to His children.

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Lastly, we hope the brothers and sisters will sincerely consecrate themselves to God because all service is based on separation. The anointing which God has bestowed on us certifies that we are His. Once we have the anointing, we will sense that we belong to God and that we are the Lord's own! Once we have the anointing, we will be conscious of what the Lord wants us to do. When we act according to the teaching of the anointing, others will sense the power. This power is not the kind of power we imagine in our mind; it is not manifested in loud voices from the pulpit or in miracles and works of wonders; it lies in the fact that while we are serving, others touch life. This power is nothing other than the anointing. May God bless us so that we may truly abide in the Lord, according to the teaching of the anointing.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## DEEP CALLS UNTO DEEP

### ●Outline

- ●Deep Roots
- ●Deep Experiences
- ●Superficial Living
- ●Testifying Without Exhibiting

### ●Scripture Reading: Psa. 42:7; Mark 4:5-6; Isa. 39:1-6; 2 Cor. 12:1-4; Acts 5:1-5

Psa. 42:7 "Deep calls unto deep / At the sound of Your water spouts; / All Your waves and Your billows / Pass over me."

Mark 4:5-6 "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered."

Isa. 39:1-6 "At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah because he had heard that he had been sick and had recovered. And Hezekiah was glad for them and showed them his treasury, the silver and the gold, and the spices and the fine oil, and his whole armory and everything which was found among his treasures; there was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, What did these men say? And from where have they come to you? And Hezekiah said, They have come to me from a distant land, from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in your house? And Hezekiah said, They have seen everything that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them. Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Jehovah of hosts: The days are now coming when everything that is in your house and that your fathers have laid up as a treasure

unto this day will be carried away to Babylon; nothing will be left, says Jehovah."

2 Cor. 12:1-4 "To boast is necessary, though indeed not expedient; yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know; God knows) such a one was caught away to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or outside the body, I do not know; God knows), That he was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed for a man to speak."

Acts 5:1-5 "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property And put aside for himself some of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it. And he brought some part of it and laid it at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to deceive the Holy Spirit and to put aside for yourself some of the proceeds of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? And when it was sold, was it not under your authority? Why is it that you have contrived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. And when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and expired; and great fear came upon all those who heard this."

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Psalm 42:7 says, "Deep calls unto deep." Only a call from the depths can provoke a response from the depths. Nothing shallow can ever touch the depths, nor can anything superficial touch the inward parts. Only the deep will respond to the deep. Anything that does not issue from the depths cannot touch the depths. Others can respond deep within to only what issues from deep within us. When we go to a certain place and listen to a message, the only thing that touches us is something that has issued from the depths of others. If nothing comes from the depths, the help we receive is just superficial. We have to see the importance of the depths. Anything that is not from the depths will never reach the depths of others. If we have never received help or benefit in our depths, we will never have anything issuing from our depths. If we want to render spiritual help to others, something must issue from our depths. If we do not dig deep, we can never gain others. Unless our utterance is from the depths, we will not touch

the depths in others, even though we gain their emotions and thoughts and make them cry or be happy or excited for a while. Only deep calls unto deep. Superficial expressions will not touch the depths of others.

## DEEP ROOTS

One principle in preaching and receiving the word is found in the Lord's parable of the sower. While the sower sowed, some seeds fell beside the way, some on the rocky place, some into the thorns, and some into the good earth. This shows us four different ways for man to receive the word. The Lord Jesus tells us that among these different conditions, one is the rocky place. There is a little earth on the surface, but underneath there are rocks. When the seed falls into this kind of ground, it springs up quickly, but as soon as the sun comes out, it withers because of the lack of root.

What is a root? It is growth that occurs beneath the soil. What are the leaves? They are growth that occur above the soil. In other words, roots are the hidden life, whereas leaves are the manifest life. The trouble with many Christians is that, while there is much apparent life, there is very little secret life. In other words, there is the lack of a hidden life. You have been a Christian for a number of years, have you not? Then let me ask: How much of your life is hidden from view? How much is unknown to others? You stress outward works. Yes, good works are important; but apart from that manifest expression of your life, how much of your life remains hidden? If all your spiritual life is exposed, you do not have any root. Are all your virtues before God manifested before man, or is there something more that is unknown to man? If all your experiences are manifested, then all your growth is upward; there is no downward growth. If this is the case, you are a person who has only leaves without root, and you are on shallow ground.

In our Christian life it is necessary that we learn the meaning of the Body of Christ; we must learn to have a life of the Body. On the other hand, we must learn that the life given to each member of His Body by the Lord is distinctly individual. The measure that has been given to you personally by Him needs to be guarded; otherwise, it will lose its specific character and will be of no particular use to

God. If that which has been specially committed to you is exposed, it will wither.

The discourse of the Lord Jesus on the Mount was most remarkable. On the one hand He said, "You are the light of the world. It is impossible for a city situated upon a mountain to be hidden" (Matt. 5:14). It is open. On the other hand He said, "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret;...when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matt. 6:3-4, 6). On the one hand, if you are a Christian, you must come right out into the open and make a public profession; on the other hand, there are Christian virtues which you should preserve from the public gaze. The Christian who parades all his virtues before men and who does not have anything in the depth of his being has no root; he will not be able to stand in the day of trial and temptation.

We have been the Lord's children many years; may the Lord open our eyes and show us the extent to which our experiences have been hidden from public view. How much would be left if what is known by man was taken away? May God work in us so that we can take root downward.

## DEEP EXPERIENCES

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "To boast is necessary, though indeed not expedient" (2 Cor. 12:1). He admitted that it was "not profitable" (Gk.) for himself to write what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 12. But for the sake of others he had to do it; he was obliged to speak of "visions and revelations of the Lord." Brothers and sisters, this should be our attitude also. Many of us cannot stand the test of visions and revelations; as soon as we have a little experience, we blow the trumpet, and everyone knows about it. Paul knew that it was of no profit to himself to mention the Lord's visions and revelations. Why then did he mention them? He was forced to do so because some doubted his apostleship, and there were problems concerning the foundation of the Christian faith.

Did Paul disclose all his revelations? Far from it. He wrote, "I know a man [who is himself] in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know; God knows) such a one was caught away to

the third heaven" (v. 2). He did not divulge this experience until fourteen years later. What depth there was in Paul! It would be a wonder if we could hide away something we received from God for seven years. But for fourteen years Paul never divulged his experience; for fourteen years God's church knew nothing of it; for fourteen years not one of the apostles had heard of it. Paul's roots were deep beneath the soil.

Some people would be inclined to say, "Paul, let us hear all about that experience of yours fourteen years ago. Tell us about your experience in the third heavens. It would be most helpful for us to know the whole story." But he said, "I know such a man (whether in the body or outside the body, I do not know; God knows), that he was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed for a man to speak" (vv. 3-4). To this present day this experience of Paul's has not been uprooted; still no one knows about that experience.

Brothers and sisters, this matter of root is a matter of extreme importance. If you want to have Paul's work, then you need to have Paul's "root"; if you want to have Paul's outward conduct, then you need to have Paul's inner life; if you want to have Paul's manifest power, then you need to have Paul's secret experience. The trouble with Christians today is that they cannot keep any spiritual thing or any special experience undisclosed. As soon as they have a little experience, they have to tell it abroad. They live their lives before men; nothing is hidden within them. They do not have any root. May God show us Paul's experience, and may He lead us into having depth!

## SUPERFICIAL LIVING

In Isaiah 39 we are told that when the news of Hezekiah's sickness and recovery reached the Babylonian court, messengers were dispatched with letters and a present for Hezekiah. Hezekiah had been a recipient of the grace of God, but he was unable to stand the test of grace. God's Word says, "And Hezekiah was glad for them and showed them his treasury, the silver and the gold, and the spices and the precious oil, and his whole armory and everything which was found among his treasures" (v. 2). Hezekiah could not overcome the temptation

to display everything. He had just been wonderfully healed of his sickness and no doubt felt self-important and thought there were few people in the world who had had such a remarkable experience as he. After all, how many had been given such a marvelous sign at the time of their healing as the shadow on the dial of Ahaz going back ten degrees (Isa. 38:8, KJV)? In his elation Hezekiah displayed all his treasures. This means that he had not passed through the dealing of the cross. His natural life was not dealt with. It was apparent that all his roots were exposed. Whatever Hezekiah knew and whatever he had were known to the Babylonians. Because of this exposure, Isaiah said to him, "Hear the word of Jehovah of hosts: Behold, the days are coming when everything which is in your house and which your fathers have laid up as a treasure unto this day will be carried away to Babylon; nothing will be left, says Jehovah" (39:5-6). The measure in which we display things to others will be the measure of our own loss. The measure in our life that we exhibit before others will be the measure we give up in ourselves. This is a solemn matter, and it demands our attention.

Alas, so many people cannot forbear disclosing their experiences! They have to speak to their heart's delight. This is like Hezekiah opening up his treasures to others. A brother once said, "Many of the brothers fall sick, and when they recover, they give their testimonies. I wish I could develop some sickness—but not a fatal one—and that God would heal me; then I would have something to say at the next testimony meeting." This brother's motive for healing was to be able to give a testimony. He sought an experience in order to have something to talk about. Oh! This superficial kind of living brings grave loss to us; it rules out the possibility of spiritual progress.

## TESTIFYING WITHOUT EXHIBITING

Then should we not bear testimony? Yes, we should. Paul did so, and multitudes of God's children from generation to generation have done so too. But bearing testimony is one thing; delighting in exhibiting one's experience is quite another. What is our object in testifying? Is it that others may profit or that we may have the pleasure of talking? The love of hearing one's own voice and the desire to be helpful to others are two totally different things. We testify because

there is a problem, and we have to speak about it. A testimony is not an after meal conversation piece. Many times while we gossip, spiritual riches leak away. When the Lord so leads, we should testify because we want to render help to others. Paul testified in 2 Corinthians 12, but he did not lightly disclose his experience fourteen years earlier. He hid his experience for fourteen years, and no one knew about it. Even when he talked about this experience, he did not disclose everything. He only mentioned the experience; he did not relate the whole story. He only mentioned the fact that he received a revelation and heard unspeakable words. He did not tell others the words that he heard. Even today, the third heaven is still a mystery, and we still do not know what it is like.

Brothers and sisters, what are our treasures? What are our gold, silver, spices, precious ointments, and precious things? What is our armory? We have to remember that gold is everything that is of God and silver is anything that is related to the redemption of the cross. Spices are the results of our wounds, precious things are the things that relate to the kingdom, and armory is the Lord's work that we have received from God and from the Lord. All these are not doctrines, biblical teachings, or theology. These are the things we have acquired through our fellowship with the Lord. When we fellowship with God, communicate with Him, and are dealt with by Him, we pick up many things. It is wrong to speak about them loosely. This does not mean that we should not testify. But we must realize that many experiences need to be hidden. Brothers and sisters, this is a crucial matter in the Christian life. Many spiritual experiences need to be hidden away and should not be exposed.

The Lord Jesus sometimes gave His testimony, but He was never talkative. It is one thing to give a testimony and another thing to be talkative. The Lord healed the sick and insisted that the story of the healing be kept secret. This charge is repeated again and again in the Gospel of Mark. Once the Lord told a certain person, "Go to your house, to your own people, and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you" (5:19). We may speak of the great things the Lord has done for us, but we must not publish these things abroad as items of news; this only exposes ourselves as being without any root. To be without root is to be without any treasure; it is to

be without any hidden life or hidden experiences. It is essential that some of our experiences remain covered; to uncover everything is to lose everything.

Let us also remember that if we display all our treasure, captivity cannot be averted. Death and exposure go together, and spiritual dryness and exposure also go together. Even if we have to give a testimony, we must be like Paul, who boasted out of necessity "though indeed not expedient" (2 Cor. 12:1). Satan's attack often comes at the time a man is exposed. Any kind of exposure opens us up to loss. Many people are healed of their sickness, and they testify for the glory of God. But many testimonies of healing are not for the glory of God but for the glory of one's own faith. As a result, the sickness comes back. After these ones give their testimony once, they are attacked by the same thing again. This shows us that God covers those who cover their roots, and God does not protect those who disclose their roots; they will be exposed to attacks. If God wants us to testify, we still have to do it. But there are many things that ought to be hidden away. God protects what we hide before Him, and we enjoy it.

The same applies to our work. By His grace and mercy God has accomplished something through us, but remember that what He has accomplished is not a matter for advertisement or material for propaganda. If we expose the work of God, we will find that the touch of death comes upon it immediately; and the loss will correspond to the extent to which we expose ourselves. As soon as David numbered the children of Israel, death set in (2 Sam. 24). May God deliver us from this kind of exposure.

Whatever secrets we have with the Lord must be preserved. We can only move according to God's instruction within us. Only if He moves within us to reveal something, dare we reveal it. If He wants us to share some experience with a brother, we dare not withhold it, for that would be violating a law of the members of the Body of Christ. One law of the members of the Body of Christ is fellowship. Once we suppress this law, the flow stops. We must be positive, not negative, and minister life to others. But if we are engrossed all day with ourselves and with our own things, this talkativeness and exposure opens us to assault from the enemy. I trust we shall learn what the Body of Christ is and what the flow of life among the members is; but I trust we shall also learn the need for

safeguarding the hidden part we have before the Lord, the experiences which are not known to others. No root should be exposed.

As we extend ourselves deeper and take root downward, we will discover that “deep calls unto deep.” When we can bring forth riches from the depths of our inner life, we will find that other lives will be deeply affected. The minute our inner being is touched, others will receive help and be enlightened. They will know that there is something beyond their knowledge. When deep touches deep, deep will respond to deep. If our life has no depth, our superficial work will only affect other lives superficially. We repeat yet again—only “deep calls unto deep.”

## ■CONTENTS WITH OUTLINE


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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 2



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 2

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# MESSAGE ONE

## Five Parables Concerning Things New And Old

### (The Christian 1934-1940—Issue No. 9—12)

## •Outline

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## •Scripture Reading:

Matt. 9:9-17 "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, The sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a patch of unfulled cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Luke 5:27-39 And after these things He went out and beheld a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, Follow Me. And leaving all, he rose up and followed Him. And Levi gave a great reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured at

His disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answered and said to them, Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are ill; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And they said to Him, The disciples of John fast often and make petitions, likewise also those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink. And Jesus said to them, You cannot make the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days. And He also spoke a parable to them: No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new garment, and also the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the wineskins, and it will be poured out and the wineskins will be ruined; But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better.

*  *  *  *

In these two passages the Lord mentions five parables. You may think that there are only two parables: the new garment and the new wine. But according to the record of Luke, there are five closely related parables. These five parables deal with: (1) the unfulled cloth, (2) the old garment, (3) the new wine, (4) the old wine, and (5) "no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better." Let us consider how these five parables show us the salvation that God has prepared for us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

## THE REASON FOR THE PARABLES

The records of Matthew and Luke reveal that while He was journeying the Lord met Matthew, who was Levi, the tax collector, sitting at the tax office. The Lord said to him, "Follow Me," and he followed the Lord. Friends, can you follow a man just at his words "Follow me"? If a stranger were to come to you and ask you to follow him, would you do it? You surely would not do it. There must have been something unusual about this man that attracted Matthew like a magnet

and that forced him to give up his former living, wealth, and everything to follow Him. Matthew did not understand why there was such power behind this man's word, that made him forsake his sinful living and everything. This One turns men to repentance and salvation the minute they meet Him. At the voice of this One, the dead receive life, and at the call of this One, men follow. This man caused Matthew not only to give up his position, but also to open up his home and prepare a feast for his friends and relatives; even strangers were invited to dine.

While they were attending the feast, the Pharisees and the scribes became jealous. They asked why Jesus and His disciples ate and drank. Not only did they eat, but they ate with the publicans and sinners. They began to condemn them. Yet they dared not ask Jesus directly, for they knew that if they asked Him, they would be embarrassed. They could only criticize the Lord's disciples behind their back, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" The disciples could not answer. Perhaps even they did not understand why the Lord did this. The Lord did not tell the disciples why He went to the house of Levi. But when the Lord heard this, He answered, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). This was the purpose for His coming. He did not go to the house of the publican because the opportunity arose for Him to go, nor was He compelled to change His mind because of the circumstances. He did not eat with sinners and publicans through a coincidence. He came with a purpose. The words "I did not come to call" imply that His coming was with a purpose. His incarnation was with a purpose. His walk and His healing were with a purpose. He did not do anything or say anything haphazardly. His life was not purposeless. He said that He came with a purpose. He did not come because He saw the nation of Israel or the Gentiles behaving in a certain way. He did not change God's purpose because of changes in the environment. It seemed as if He was saying, "You think that I communicate with the sinners because I was invited by the publicans and the sinners. Actually, this was the purpose of My coming from heaven. I came to call the sinners to repentance. This is the purpose of My coming." This is like saying that I came from Nanking purposely to Shanghai. I did not come to Shanghai just en route to Soochow. The Lord Jesus came to the world for an express purpose. He did not change His original plan; He did not

adjust His plan or alter His reason for coming into the world. His actions on earth were a demonstration of His original intention for coming to earth. He had the intention from the beginning of doing what He did. Whether in opening the eyes of the blind or in cleansing the lepers, He worked because it was His original intention to work. His actions were not an alteration of His purpose.

The Pharisees were very clever. They could be the teacher of many people, but they could not be the teacher of one Person. You may also be very clever and may qualify to be the teacher of your friends, your relatives, and even us. But you cannot be the Lord Jesus' teacher. You are not qualified for that. You cannot say that the Lord Jesus has eaten too much, or that He has done something wrong, because He knows what He is doing. Eating at the house of the publicans and sinners was something that He foreordained. He did not do this mindlessly, and you cannot say anything about it. This was His decision, His original intention. We human beings have one weakness: we often talk to others for an hour or two hours and do not know what we are talking about. We do things without knowing why we did them, and we are bewildered at what we have done. Perhaps you think that just because there are times when you do not know what you are doing or saying, the Lord Jesus is also the same. The Pharisees thought that just because they did not know what they were doing or saying, the Lord Jesus would be the same. However, the Lord does not do anything foolishly. He said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. He did everything with a purpose; He is never haphazard.

Why did He do this? He said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Moreover, He said that those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are ill. Why did the Lord say this? I have said that after the law came, many people still did not know what the law was. Many people think that the law is just a few commandments. Actually, the law is not just the Ten Commandments; it is what God demands of man, and what man ought to give to God based on His demands. God has demands, and man has to fulfill these demands; this is the meaning of keeping the law. The purpose of the law is for man to break it and be stumbled on it. God gave us the law, not for man to keep, but for him to break and be stumbled upon. Are you surprised by this?

This is not surprising at all. The Scripture says that the law was added because of transgressions. The law merely shows man that he cannot render anything to God. God knows that man is sinful. But man does not know that he is sinful. Therefore, God gave the law in order for man to break it, so that he would know himself. The law was given by God through Moses with the intention that man would realize that he cannot keep it. Friends, do you think that the Lord Jesus is ignorant of this? Since the law was given to expose man's inability to keep God's law, would the Son of God come to the world to ask man to keep what he cannot keep? If the law cannot stop man from sin, would the Son of God require man to do what he cannot do? Since the law cannot save a man, would God give us His Son, whose work is to save man, to cause man not to be saved instead? If the law cannot save man, would the Son of God come, only to find that man is still not saved? God sent His Son in order that man would be saved through Him. In other words, we were all ill. What then should God do?

God wants us to do two things. First, He shows us that we are ill. The worst thing that can happen to a patient is to avoid the doctor. But unless a sick person admits that he is sick, he will not consult a doctor. Second, we have to go see the doctor. This is also very important. Suppose I have a friend who has tuberculosis but does not admit it. He argues that he is tall and strong and big, and that he is not sick. I would advise him, saying, "You have a slight fever every day, and your health is not good. You should rest more and work less. Otherwise, it would be hard to recuperate and be healed if your illness progresses to the second stage." But this friend of mine does not admit that he is sick. He argues: "Am I not well? Do I not have the strength to work?" He still goes to bed late and rises up early, and lives as he pleases. It does not mean that he is well; he is merely denying his own illness. As such he can never be healed. This is the way God treats the world. It does not mean that God does not have the way, the means, or the salvation ready. The trouble is that man does not realize that he is sick and that he is a sinner. This is why it takes God two stages to enlighten man. John 1 says that the law was first given by Moses, and then grace and reality came through Jesus Christ (v. 17). God took four thousand years to show man that he is sick. God gave the law to man in order that he would see that he is a sinner, and that all

men are sinners. God did not give the law for man to keep, but for man to realize that he is a sinner. The purpose of the law is for man to know himself. The law cannot justify man, nor can it save man. The book of Romans makes this point very clear. It says that "through the law is the clear knowledge of sin" (3:20). After we have the clear knowledge of sin, the Lord Jesus comes and says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In the first stage, God gave the law. In the second stage, God gave us the Lord Jesus—grace came. When a doctor diagnoses a patient, the first thing he does is to ask the patient to stick out his tongue, feel the patient's pulse, and measure his temperature. He will show the patient that he is sick and then tell him the kind of sickness that he has. Then he gives the patient a packet or a bottle of medicine. First, the doctor shows the patient that he is sick, and then he tells the patient the way and method to be healed. Therefore, the work in the second stage must be related to the work in the first stage. First, God gave the law so that man would realize that he is a sinner. Second, God sent grace, which is the Lord Jesus, so that man would be healed. But there are some stiff-necked ones who say that they are not sick, and that they do not have any sin. So the Lord Jesus said that He had not come to call the righteous (those who consider themselves righteous). Let the others keep the law and be Pharisees. Now that the Lord Jesus has come, He is telling us that a man must receive help in the first stage and then receive help in the second stage. Yet some men are not willing to receive the testimony of the law. If a man refuses to receive help from the law, he will not receive help from grace and reality. If a man does not receive help in the first instance, he will not receive help in the second. I may think that I am healthy, and I may stand tall. But after the doctor measures my pulse and temperature and examines me, he will tell me that I am sick. I may think that I am a good man, but now that the law has come, it tells me that I am a sinner. I may think that I am a wonderful man, but once the law comes, it will tell me that I am a sinner. This leaves me helpless. But the second man comes; He helps me and saves me. The law can only define a sick man. The commission of the law is to show man that he is sick. If you do not admit that you are sick, you must submit to the law.

A healthy person does not need a doctor; only a sick person needs a doctor.

This is a great and universal principle. Friends, are you sick at heart? Do you have any hidden illness? Do you have any secret sins that no one can touch? Do you have sins that you have committed in darkness? Do you have some illness that cannot be told to others? God will touch your secret and hidden illnesses. It is a pity that, although man knows very well that he is naked and laid bare in God's eyes, and that he has a part in all kinds of unclean evils and human sins, he still tries to hide himself and mend himself. He still tries to improve his conduct a little before believing in Jesus. It seems as if he is trying to recuperate a little before going to the doctor. This is foolish. If you do not admit honestly that you are a sinner, you cannot be healed.

I like the song we sang today. It says, "Just as I am...I come! I come!" [Hymns, #1048]. I have told you before that this hymn was written by a woman in her twenties. She said that she had the sense of sin since she was very young. She wondered how a person like herself could face God. To her this was impossible. She visited many churches and talked with many pastors. She asked them questions and tried to find out from them how she could be saved. This went on for seven or eight years. Many told her that she had to do better before she could believe in Jesus. Others told her that she should pray more and study the Bible more. Still others told her to do good and perform noble deeds, or to do this or do that before she could believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. As time went by, she found herself worse than before. In the end, she met an old preacher. She asked the old man what she must do before she could be saved. The old man put his hand on her back and said, "Go to God just as you are." She jumped up and asked, "Do I not have to do better, make more progress, and improve more before I can believe in the Lord Jesus?" The old man said, "There is no such need. You can come just as you are." On that day, she became clear and realized that she could come to the Lord just as she was.

God knows that we are sick. This is why He sent us the Doctor. Friends, have you ever been sick? Suppose I have a fever of one hundred five degrees. If I ask the doctor to come, will he say that he will come when the temperature drops to one hundred three? The sicker I am, the faster the doctor will come. If a person's temperature is ninety-eight degrees, the doctor may say that since it is only

ninety-eight degrees, there is no need to go. The more serious your illness is, the faster the doctor will come. The woman admitted that she was a sick person and that Jesus Christ is the Physician from God who came to heal her. Not long after she returned home, she wrote this hymn: "Just as I am...I come! I come!"

Friends, what is grace? Grace is to come just as we are. There is no need to change or reform ourselves. We come just as we are. Many people think that a preacher is one who exhorts others to do good. But I never do this. If I exhort others to do good, I am merely putting powder and cosmetics on their faces and then sending them to hell. The Shanghai mortuary does a good job of grooming and touching up dead people and putting them into coffins. If I am a preacher exhorting men to do good, I am doing nothing except telling them to improve themselves and then go to hell. But hell does not need any improved or reformed persons. The Lord Jesus did not come to first make men better and then save them. He came to redeem us. He died and shed His blood for our sins. He died on the cross to accomplish redemption. He resurrected in order that we may not only be redeemed and forgiven, but receive the life of God, be saved, and have eternal life.

## A. The Question of Fasting

When the Lord Jesus said this, the Pharisees immediately raised a question. They did not care if they were sick or well. They wanted to say what they said because they had judged that the Lord Jesus and His disciples were gluttons. They asked why the Pharisees and the disciples of John fasted (fasting being exactly the opposite of feasting), but the Lord's disciples did not fast. They fasted, but the Lord's disciples did not fast. Here was a difference.

What is the meaning of fasting? According to the tone of those who asked the question, fasting meant two things to them. The first kind of fasting was one in which they ate five days out of a week and did not eat the other two days. The Lord's disciples, in contrast, ate all seven days of the week. This is the literal meaning of fasting. But there is a second meaning. They were religious in their background. Their background was excellent. They were not like the Lord's disciples, who enjoyed whatever was before them. They had good works

according to their religion and were able to achieve what men found hard to achieve. This is like Chinese ascetics who cultivate themselves by suffering. It is also like the vegetarians who extol vegetarianism. The Pharisees were even more "noble"; they even refrained from eating. They seemed to have achieved the virtues that ordinary men were not able to achieve. We can see these two meanings here. One said that they fasted while the Lord's disciples did not fast. The other said that they were able to achieve all that the flesh could achieve and had gained for themselves the name of godliness and service to God. They seemed to be saying, "We do all these. Why are Your disciples not doing the same?"

## B. The Reason for Not Fasting

Since there were two implications in their question, the Lord's answer was divided into two parts. The first part was an answer according to the literal meaning of the word. He said that the sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them. He meant that He was the Bridegroom and that the disciples were the sons of the bridechamber. While the Bridegroom was there, the sons of the bridechamber did not need to fast. This pointed out to the Pharisees why the disciples did not fast. They did not have to fast because the Lord Jesus was not yet "taken away" (Luke 5:35). After He was taken away, His disciples would have to fast. Before the Lord was rejected and crucified, the disciples did not have to fast. After He was rejected and crucified, the disciples would have to fast. This was the Lord's answer according to the literal meaning of the question on fasting. In the second answer, the Lord used five parables to explain the reason that the new and the old cannot be mixed together. These five parables are: (1) the impossibility of patching an old garment with unfulled cloth; (2) the impossibility of patching an old garment with a patch from a new garment; (3) the impossibility of putting new wine in old wineskins; (4) the need for new wine to be put in new wineskins; and (5) "no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better." Why did the Lord use these five parables? The Pharisees thought that they ought to do good, have religious works, try their best to keep God's commandments, and please God. The Lord

told them that the literal fasting could come to His disciples only after He had departed from them. But if fasting refers to good works, there should not be any fasting even after He has left the disciples. That kind of fasting would be useless even after the Lord left them. The Lord used these five parables to show the Pharisees that the things He brought in were completely incompatible with the ordinances and ceremonies of the law. The grace which He brought in was absolutely incompatible with the law. The five parables signify that the law and grace can never be mixed. If they are mixed together, the law will no longer be the law, and grace will no longer be grace.

## THE UNFULLED CLOTH AND THE OLD GARMENT

Matthew 9:16 says, "No one puts a patch of unfulled cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made." Here the Lord shows us a parable concerning the unfulled cloth and the old garment. These are common things which we see all the time. But the Lord has much to say about them. If one puts unfulled cloth on an old garment, the unfulled cloth will pull away from the old garment, and the tear in the old garment will become worse. What does a garment in the Bible signify? It signifies our righteousness before God. In this parable, it is taken for granted that the garment is torn already. This means that all of our garments are torn. The Lord does not say that this is a new garment; the old garment is torn. All old garments are torn garments. Every person, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, noble or mean, is a piece of torn garment in the eyes of God. Friends, you have to remember that every one of us is a sinner before God. I am afraid that many Christians (I speak only of Christians, and not of others) are willing to admit that everyone in the world is a sinner, but do not realize the seriousness of such a word. Many Christians are willing to admit that Genesis 3 is the beginning of man's fall. But they have not seen the seriousness of such a word. Our garments are torn. Yet we have not seen our raggedness.

What is the meaning of a torn garment? This verse is not speaking of putting on many garments such as vests and jackets. If so, an outward garment could be torn, and the inner garments could still be whole. Here there is only one garment.

When this garment is torn, the flesh is exposed. In other words, our shame is exposed. While you are sitting here, you may feel comfortable and at peace. (When we leave our home, we often ask our father or wife if our dress is proper. Most likely you have asked such questions before. We want others, especially those around us, to see that our dress is proper.) But there is One who is in secret, yet who is in the light, who sees you everywhere, and who says that your garment is torn. You cannot hide your sin and shame. Your past history is filled with filth and sin, and you will never tell others about them. These things are hidden in your heart and held under your tongue. Yet you cannot hide yourself before God. God is speaking through the mouth of His Son that your garment is torn. Under the light of the law, your righteousness is a torn garment; it cannot cover your shame before God. It is not a question of whether or not your garment is torn; it is already torn. There is, however, a question of what we should do about it. Suppose it is summer, and your garment is torn. What are you going to do? If you do not know that your garment is torn, you will not feel ashamed. But if someone tells you that your garment is torn two inches along the seam, how will you feel? You cannot cover it with your handkerchief or with your hat. While you ride on the bus, you cannot cover it with your umbrella. You feel ashamed and want to run home immediately to change your clothes. You will not think about doing something else or visiting your friend and, therefore, not go home. You will want to go home immediately to mend it or change into another garment. You have been sunk in your sin for twenty, thirty, or even fifty years, and your garment is torn. Do you feel the shame? You may think that since others do not see it and God does not see it, you can get by easily. But there is not such a thing. Your garment is torn, and the only way you have is to mend it. Let us see what the Lord Jesus says about the mending. In the past, we did not pay much attention to this matter. But during the past few weeks, I have been paying special attention to this passage. The word unfulled in Greek does not mean something new; rather, it means something unfinished. An unfulled cloth means a piece of cloth that has not been bleached, dyed, ironed, or starched. It is an unfulled cloth, not an unfulled garment. Although it is a piece of cloth, the process is not yet complete; it is still unfulled. Why did the Lord use this word?

This kind of cloth ruins the old garment. Anything new is from the Lord Jesus. Anything that we have is natural and old. Friends, do we see what is being shown to us here? Many have received something of the Lord Jesus, but they have not received the work of the Lord Jesus in full. They have the outward name of being a Christian, but they have not received the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. If you ask many people who Jesus Christ is, they say that He was a great Teacher. Many nominal Christians say that Jesus was a great model of love and equality, and that we have to imitate Him so that the world can become the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven can be brought to earth, and the world can evolve into a golden age. This is the message of "preachers without the blood." Friends, this is unfulled cloth. This cloth is not bought from the fabric store; it is a patch cut out and stolen from the factory; it is unfinished cloth that is being used to mend the torn garment.

We have met some so-called evangelistic ministries or some preachers who have said that Jesus was not born of a virgin, that He is not the Son of God, that His blood is not for redemption, that He had died but did not resurrect, that His deeds and works before His death were patterns, and that His death is not important. The people who say this only care for what the Lord Jesus did during His thirty-three years on earth. They do not see the necessity of the Son of Man being lifted up. They have not seen that the Son of Man would be lifted up just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14); they do not realize how important this matter is. They consider the Lord Jesus' death to be nothing more than the death of an ordinary person. They do not believe that the Lord's death is the death of God. They do not realize that if the Lord had not died, we would have to die. They take the Lord's teaching as unfulled cloth, and they try to cut out a patch to mend their torn garment. Friends, many people may not say this with their mouth. But they say this in their heart. I once met an unbeliever and gave him a copy of the New Testament. After he read the four Gospels, he still would not admit that he was a sinner. He only admitted that his conduct was not as good as Jesus', and that he should imitate Him. Not only do unbelievers think this way, but Christians also think this way. If you ask whether their Christian conduct is as good as the Lord's, they will readily answer no. But

if you ask them what they should do, they answer that they have to donate more money to the church or do more good works. They admit that their garment is torn, but they try to cut off a patch of the unfulled cloth—the Lord's teachings—to mend their tear. But the Lord said that if anyone tried to patch the old garment with unfulled cloth, the tear would become worse. Friends, the Lord's word is very careful: "No one puts a patch of unfulled cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made."

Some think that since their garment is torn and they are a sinner before God, they should fast twice a week. Some wonder what they should do about their torn garment and decide to take five dollars out of their monthly income to give to the church. Others say, "I have sinned. What should I do? Perhaps I should rise up every morning to read one chapter of the Bible; perhaps I should kneel down while I read." (Please be clear: I am not saying that we should not fast, pray, read the Bible, or offer our money. I am saying that it is futile to try to please God by doing these things or to count them as merits toward patching up our torn garment. Even if a Christian does these things, it is still wrong for him to regard them as merits toward pleasing God, because all these can be works of the flesh.) There are those who say, "I have sinned. What should I do? I will try not to lie or go to movies, and I will try to be good and answer to my conscience so that the world will say that I am an upright and clean person and God will be pleased with me." We think that since we have sinned, we should try to make up our lack by doing these things, and patch them on our torn garment piece by piece. But the Lord Jesus said that this is impossible. You can try to mend the tear, and you can try to make many resolutions. But the more you mend and the more resolutions you make, the worse the tear becomes. For example, you may love the game of mahjong, but you are determined to stop playing it. But the more you make up your mind not to play, the more you cannot stop playing; in fact, you find yourself playing the whole night. You may have a habit of smoking. If you make up your mind to quit, you will find that you will be making resolutions over and over again. You may think this will never happen to you. But in reality, it always happens. The more you mend, the worse will be the tear. There was a

student who spent only half an hour on his homework each day. When the examination came, he tried to hastily prepare his lessons, only to find that he could not catch up with his work. He made up his mind that after his examination, he would spend two hours every day to prepare his lessons. But this resolution, instead of resulting in two hours of work every day, made him incapable of keeping up with even his half hour of work. A person once said that he hated lying, but that he always lied; he was determined not to lie anymore. He was afraid to put this resolution down in his diary, for fear that others would see it. He put a big black circle in his diary every time he lied. As a result, he found that his diary was full of black circles. Why is this? This is the result of the work of mending; the tear becomes worse. Previously, the tear could escape men's eyes. But the more one mends, the worse the tear becomes and the more obvious it becomes. This is a fact.

I have not met all that many people in my life. But I can testify that I have never seen one person who could maintain his good works to the very end, without acknowledging the Lord Jesus as Savior and admitting that he is a sinner. He can be zealous for good works temporarily, and he can be inspired temporarily, but after a few months, everything is usually over with him. At any rate, his condition will never last for more than a few years. Someone once told me about the story of his cousin. This cousin was the chairman of the chamber of commerce, but he became a Christian through the influence of a missionary. For a while, he helped the YMCA and other Christians. But now he has become one of the strongest opponents of Christianity. He opposes Christians and has become a Buddhist. I asked him why his cousin turned out this way. He answered that the gospel his cousin believed in was different from our gospel. His cousin wanted to help Jesus. He thought that Jesus was too busy, and that he had to help Him out a little. Actually, we are the ones who are too busy, and the Lord Jesus is here to help us. The gospel his cousin believed in is different from the gospel we believe in. I agree with his answer. Friends, we can never patch up our life with the life of Jesus. We cannot just accept His teaching and assume that He is here only as our Teacher or wonderful model. If we do this, we are as far away from the kingdom of God as are all great sinners.

Some think that since we cannot mend with the unfulled cloth, we should mend with the old cloth. But the Lord Jesus was very careful. He only spoke of mending the old garment with the unfulled cloth; He did not speak of mending the old garment with old cloth. If unfulled cloth cannot mend the old garment, how can old cloth mend it? We cannot mend the lack of today with the things of yesterday. The Lord never said anything about using old cloth to mend the old garment.

The picture that Luke presents to us is different from the picture that Matthew and Mark present. Luke 5:36 says, "And He also spoke a parable to them: No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new garment." Suppose a man has two garments, one old and the other new. On returning home, he sees that the old garment is torn. Will he cut out a patch of the new garment and mend the old? If he does, he is either a mad- man or an idiot. Can he say that he loves his old garment so much, and has been wearing it for so long, and is so attached to it, he does not want to throw it away? Can he say that since it is torn, he will cut out a patch from the new garment to mend it? Materially, no one would do this. But spiritually, many people are doing this.

The cloth mentioned in Matthew and Mark is the unfulled cloth. It refers to the time before the Lord's death and to the fact that His work was not yet finished. His work was accomplished after His death. When the Lord was dying, He said, "It is finished." His death completed the work of redemption. His living was just an unfulled cloth. Luke shows us not just cloth, but finished cloth. It is not unfulled cloth, but fulled cloth. Trying to put the Lord's finished cloth on an old garment is like someone calling on the Lord Jesus to help him after he has tried his best to do good and cannot. Some Christians I have met have said that they should keep the Ten Commandments. I asked if they had kept them, and they said that they had so far. I asked them what they would do if they could not make it all the way, and they answered that they would ask the Lord for help because the Lord had accumulated so much merit already. I told them that their logic was wrong. I know that I cannot do good, so I ask the Lord to do it for me right from the beginning. I know that I cannot make it even if I try hard, and I

cannot improve myself or do good even if I try. I can only commit myself fully to the Lord Jesus. Some think that they will ask the Lord for help only if they cannot do a proper job. But the Lord Jesus said that no one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If one cannot do good, it is better to throw away the old garment and put on the new garment. If I cannot expect the Lord Jesus to mend my old and torn garment, I might as well not mend it and put on a new garment instead. No sound and reasonable person would do such a thing to his garments. Yet spiritually, many try to tear a patch from the new garment and put it on the old garment.

Where does the cloth mentioned in Luke come from? It comes from the new garment. Today we have a new garment, which is the righteousness of God. We have no other way to save ourselves. We can only confess our sins; there is no other way to remove our sin or please God. Our only way lies in removing the goodness of our flesh and everything that we consider good, that is, in removing our own torn garment, and acknowledging that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior, and that His cross has accomplished the work of redemption. He was crucified on the cross, and He has satisfied God's righteous demand. The garment He gives us is new and perfect; nothing more needs to be added. On the cross the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished." Many people do not realize that God's redemption has been accomplished. They think that in order to be saved, they have to do some good. This is a foolish attempt to tear a patch of new cloth to mend the old garment.

I will illustrate this with a story. Once two persons were discussing religion. Mr. A asked Mr. B if he had a religion. Mr. B said that he did. Mr. A asked further what his religion was. Mr. B said that his religion was to try his best to do good, and that if he was good enough, he would be saved, but that if he was not good enough, he would perish. Mr. B then asked Mr. A what his religion was. Mr. A said that his religion was different from Mr. B's. He said that Mr. B had a "doing" religion, while his religion was a "done" religion. Indeed this is true. Many people today have the same kind of thought; they think that they have to do something. But the Bible shows us that it is not a matter of doing something or improving something, but a matter of what the Lord has already done. Jesus Christ has

borne our sins on the cross. He declared on the cross, “It is finished.” He has absolutely and fully accomplished everything. Therefore, we do not have to do anything anymore. All that we have to do now is to acknowledge that our garment is torn, that we are corrupt and cannot perform any good, and that we need the Lord to give us a new garment. If we try to make penance or resolutions to do good, we will end up making more penance and more resolutions. We can be saved only through trusting in the accomplished redemption. There is no other way except this way.

A carpenter once handed over his possessions to his son (who was also a carpenter) before his death. He told his son, “I have a wood cabinet in my room that I have finished. It is the best and most precious item among my possessions. I built it with the best wood and coated it with the best coatings. I built it and intended to use it myself. But now I am giving it to you.” The son was also a carpenter, but was not as skillful as his father. In fact, he was a novice. Nevertheless, when he looked at the cabinet, he felt that something was missing. Before his father died, he took the cabinet and tried to add one or two drawers and some molding to the furniture. But what he added only diminished the beauty of the cabinet. His mother went and told the father about this, and he called his son over and said, “The cabinet was finished. You have only ruined it by your additions.” Indeed, everything is ready, and there is no need to add anything.

This illustration shows us that the Lord has accomplished the work of redemption. He does not want anyone to add anything or do anything more. Suppose I invite you to a meal at my house. You may think that there are not enough bowls in my house and secretly hide a bowl and a set of chopsticks in your handkerchief. Or you may think that there will not be enough food and bring some bread along. Doing this would embarrass me as the host. As hosts, we may be negligent, but as the Host, God will never be negligent. The Lord says that those who come to Him, He will by no means cast out (John 6:37). Luke 14:17 also says, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Friends, do you think that salvation is a matter of our bringing a bag of merit or a bag of good works to the Lord? Some say, “It is true that Jesus saves me, and that by believing in Him I will

have eternal life. But I have to add some merit also, so that I can become more worthy of salvation and eternal life." If you do this, you are putting God to shame. We should realize that God has finished the work of redemption; there is no need to add anything to it. It is useless for us to try to be saved through our own works.

What will happen if you try to add something or cut out something? "No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new garment, and also the patch from the new will not match the old" (Luke 5:36). This means to ruin the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. It also means that the new and the old do not match one another. The words "will not match" in the original language mean "is not harmonious with." What is the meaning of not being harmonious with something? Suppose an old green gown is torn. If we mend it with a patch of new green cloth, the contrast in color will be like putting a piece of jade on a gold ring. In mending clothes, we have to put patches of similar color on the garment. If we put a patch of new cloth on an old garment, the color of the patch will show a sharp contrast at the torn spot and speak loudly that there is a mismatch. Friends, God's salvation is not only incompatible with our old garment, but it actually exposes our raggedness. The new and the old are totally incompatible with one another. If you have an old garment that needs to be mended, the best kind of mending is one that no one notices. What kind of mending is most conspicuous? It is mending with patches that are different in color from the garment. Although one may be very skillful in needlework, everyone will know that it is a mended garment if he puts white patches against a background of red or blue. (Of course, there is the question of the texture of the fabric also.) What is a mismatch? It is making others see the difference. Are you trying to patch your shortcomings with what the Lord Jesus has? The two do not match. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you have to accept a brand-new garment. If you will only take a little patch, it will make things look worse. If you accept the Lord absolutely, God's righteousness will cover your shame. But if you try to take a patch of God's righteousness (the new garment) and mend it to yourself, it will only make you look worse.

The teachings of Jesus Christ are the unfulled cloth; they cannot save us. It is

His finished redemption that saves us. However, we cannot take a patch from this redemption to mend our ragged conduct. We can only totally place before God the best of humanity and human behavior and put on God's new garment. We can never say, "It is true that Jesus has saved me. But I am merely patching His redemption onto my torn garment." Today God wants us to throw away our torn garment and put on a new garment. Thank the Lord that I have never seen one person without a torn garment; I have never seen one person who is not a sinner. Even among us today, everyone has a torn garment, and everyone is a sinner. Every man is a sinner; there is no exception. Everyone's garment is torn. But thank the Lord that with Him is the new garment. There is no reason that a person should refuse this new garment. Hallelujah! The redemption of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save us. Even if there is a man who is called the greatest sinner on earth, a new garment is waiting for him. If there is a woman who is called the greatest sinner on earth, a new garment is waiting for her. From now on, if a man is not saved, it is not because there is not a new garment. If anyone perishes, it will not be because he is incapable of mending clothes, but because he will not put on the new garment. From now on, man is not saved by his works; he is saved by one thing only: believing and receiving the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus. In the future, when one goes to heaven and finds Paul, or Peter, they will admit that their garments are torn. No one can boast that his mending work is better than others. As long as one believes, he will enter into heaven. Sinners, you have heard today that salvation is not a matter of being a good person or a bad person. Salvation depends on whether you will receive Him or reject Him today. All those who receive Jesus Christ will be saved.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." Hallelujah! This is a fact. If there is a trembling sinner sitting here, he should listen. The Son of God has passed through death, and the new garment is ready. All you have to do is to put it on. Hallelujah! Salvation does not depend on how much your work is worth, but on how much the cross of Calvary is worth. Your work is worth nothing with respect to salvation. The only thing that has real value is the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

## THE NEW WINE

What is the difference between the garment and the wine? And why can new wine not be put in an old wineskin? Garment refers to the outward work of the gospel; it is something visible to man. Wine refers to the inward work of the gospel; it is something that man does not see. There is no difference between the contrast of new and old in the case of the garment and the wine, but the garment is outward, while the wine is inward. We must remember that God's gospel is (1) Christ becoming our righteousness. We can live before God because of this righteousness, and there is no need to add anything to it. Christ has accomplished God's righteousness, and even if we try, we cannot add anything to it. Anything that we are, or any good work of ours will not please God. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has pleased God. When I am in Christ, God sees me as He sees Christ. I am saved, not because I am different from others, but because I am in Christ. I can present Christ before God and say, "God, I can come to You because I am in Christ." We are in Christ, and we have put on Christ. Therefore, we can live before God, and God can be pleased with us. God's gospel is also (2) Christ living in us. Based upon this, we live before men. Spiritually speaking, we live before God. Physically speaking, we live in the world. The garment speaks of the Christ from God who has become our righteousness for us to live before God. The wine speaks of the Christ from God who has become our power and our spring—like the spring inside a clock, which regulates the movement of the clock—for us to live before men.

Why did the Lord Jesus speak of new wine being put in an old wineskin, instead of an old wine bottle? The Chinese put wine into bottles, but in the Old Testament, wine was put into leather skins. This is why the Lord did not speak of putting the wine in a bottle. One cannot put new wine in an old wineskin because new wine ferments, while old wine no longer ferments. If new wine is put in an old wineskin, the old wineskin will help the new wine to ferment, and it will burst at the force of the fermentation. This will cause the wine to spill.

Some wonder why the Lord mentioned these few parables—the unfulled cloth, the old garment, the new wine, and the old wine. Garment refers to our outward justification. We do not need to mend the tear of our old conduct; all we

have to do is to put on the new garment. Friends, it was difficult for us to be saved, but living is not as difficult as you may think. In fact, it is easier than you think. We are saved, and our sins are forgiven, but what are we going to do with the sins that we still commit while living on earth? Please remember that the Lord has not only given you a new garment outside of you, but has put new wine inside of you. Not only is there a new garment outside to cover you and adorn you, but there is a power within you, a power like the power of the new wine, which bursts apart all the old things.

Every time the Bible speaks about salvation, there are two aspects. One is the objective aspect, which is before God, and the other is the subjective aspect, which is within us. Some may not understand the difference between the objective and the subjective side. I will put it in another way: salvation has two aspects. One is justification, and the other is regeneration. No one can be justified without being regenerated, and no one can be regenerated without being justified. Justification is before God; it secures a new position for us. Regeneration is within us; it secures a new life for us. Many people only pay attention to justification and do not care for regeneration. Others pay too much attention to regeneration and do not care for justification. Some think that regeneration and justification are two different things which are not obtained at the same time. Such a teaching is a biased teaching. There must be a balance between justification and regeneration.

The word “must” appears three times in John 3. I will mention only two of them. Verse 7 says that one “must” be born anew, and verse 14 says that the Son of Man “must” be lifted up. In both instances the word “must” is the same. The “must” in verse 14 is objective. The Lord Jesus must be lifted up before man’s sins can be forgiven and before man is justified. The “must” in verse 7 is subjective; it results in us receiving a new life. One must be justified before he can be free before God, and one must be regenerated before he can have a new life in himself.

Are you afraid of meeting God? The young ones always say that they are afraid of meeting God. Will God save us, or will He not save us? Will God say to us, “You workers of iniquity, depart from Me”? When they come to God, they do not

know if God will accept them. Many people wonder how they as a sinner can come to God. When you are in sin and you are swept away by the tide of sin, you do not realize how sinful you are. But once you stop and consider, you begin to wonder what a person as evil as you should do. Do not worry, because the Lord Jesus has come. He has died for your sins and fulfilled God's righteousness. He is now resurrected. All those who come to God through Jesus Christ will be saved. The Lord said that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. Paul also said that "from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified" (Acts 13:39). You should know that you can come to God through Him. Your conscience need not fear, because in Christ there is no longer any condemnation.

Even though you are saved, you may still feel that you are constantly suffering. The will to do good is present with you, but the working out is not. Other believers have experienced changes in their lives, but you do not have the same experience. Even though you are just as saved as they are, they experienced these changes, but you have not. Why is your walk the same as before? Why is there no change in you? You may sense your backslidden condition and sinfulness and often weep. You may think, "I have eternal life, and I am saved, but do I look like a saved person?" You can hardly believe that you are saved. As a result, you exert more effort to do good, to pray, to study the Bible, and to control yourself, in order that God will be pleased with you.

But such an effort only works for three to five days. After three or five months, it is no longer effective, and in one or two years, its effect will be completely gone. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said that we cannot be saved by mending the old garment with new cloth. (In order to be saved, one must put on the new garment.) Even after we are saved, we must continue taking the new wine, which is the power of the new life, before we can overcome all the outward things. The new wine within us gives us the new life and the power of life.

All the justified ones are regenerated. Those who have the new garment surely have the new wine. But where are you going to put the new wine? All those who have the new garment have the new wine. Hallelujah! Thank God that

He has put in us the regenerated life. From now on, we are a new man. The new wine is the power of the gospel. We have such a power within us, which enables us to have a new living and to have the power to overcome everything.

## THE NEW WINESKIN AND THE OLD WINESKIN

What is the meaning of a wineskin? Why can new wine not be put in the old wineskin? Some have said that we are the old wineskin. This is wrong. If we are not the old garment, can we be the old wineskin? We should consider the context. It is impossible for the previous verses to refer to one thing and the following verses to refer to something else. Since the old garment refers to human righteousness in the previous verses, the old wineskin in the subsequent verse must refer to our natural conduct. In other words, the old wineskin is related to the fasting mentioned above. To fast means to boast; it is saying that one is not like the publicans, that one fasts twice a week, and that one tithes. In other words, one can boast before God. This is the old wineskin. The old wineskin is the goodness we had before we believed in the Lord. It is the aspects of our temper and good behavior which excelled above the temper and behavior of others. The old wineskin is not sin, and it is not something torn. (The torn garment is the only thing that is torn.) The old wineskin is our natural, good behavior. It is also the good works which we perform after we are saved. It is going back to being a Galatian again after one has become a Christian, trying to accomplish what man cannot accomplish through the law. It is trying to please God through keeping the law and trying to gain God's favor through one's own strength. This is what Paul meant when he asked if the Galatians could be perfected by the law, after they had begun by grace. "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (3:3). All those who have begun by the Lord Jesus, but who nevertheless try to be perfected by themselves, are putting the new wine into the old wineskin.

I can say strongly that never in history has there been a case where a person tried to mix Christianity with Judaism and the two were preserved. The result of such a mixture always makes Christianity no longer Christianity, and Judaism no longer Judaism. In the end both are not what they were. God has no intention to

have such a thing. Throughout history, Catholicism has tried to mix Judaism with Christianity. On the one hand, they adopted the customs and ceremonies of the Old Testament, and on the other hand, they displayed a signboard on the outside which said, "The New Testament." They say that the high priest is on earth and the temple is also on the earth. Actually, the temple is no longer on earth; it is in heaven. Is Catholicism Christianity? No. Is Catholicism Judaism? No. We do not recognize Catholicism to be Christianity, and Judaism will never recognize Catholicism to be Judaism either, because the Catholics have been the ones who persecuted Judaism the most. Catholicism combines Judaism and Christianity together, like patching a tear together. The result is that the tear becomes worse. The end result of putting Christianity and Judaism together is nothing.

The new wine can only be put in the new wineskin. Only then will the power and effect be preserved. The new wine can perform only that which pleases God according to the ordinance of the new covenant and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once you have the new wine within, you have the power to uphold yourself. If you are not saved, you will not have the experience, and you will not see much change. But if you are saved, you will feel a law controlling you within. One sister has many relatives on her husband's side. There is always the danger of engaging in gossip when she is with them. As a result she is very careful in the things she says. But her son is very talkative. Every time she goes to her relatives' homes, she reminds the son not to speak too much and that when she tugs his sleeve, he should shut up and not speak further. But every time her son opens his mouth, he cannot stop; it is useless for the mother to do anything. He will say, "Let me finish this and I'll shut up." I have personally witnessed this. This boy has his mother beside him to tug at him. But when a Christian walks about, it seems that he walks alone; no one is beside him tugging at him. When he goes to his relatives' homes, he may act politely when others are very polite to him. But after half an hour or an hour, his conversation may heat up. Then something within will seem to be tugging at him, saying, "That's enough. If you go on, it will become ungodliness, and you will not be behaving like a Christian." If he listens to this inner voice and stops, he will have the peace. What is this? This is the new wine. This is not the only experience a Christian can have; there are hundreds of

experiences that are similar to this.

But friends, can the new wine be put in the old wineskin? No, it will not work. It is right to put the word of the Scripture within us. But some have tried to put the word of the Scripture on the wall in order to practice according to what is written. This is an act related to the old wineskin. In other words, this is to act according to oneself. The law in the Old Testament was on the outside, while the law of the New Testament is on the inside. This is the difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament. An Old Testament saint cannot keep the Ten Commandments. Neither can a Christian keep the Ten Commandments. The old wineskin is a kind of outward restriction; it requires that we do things ourselves and remember things with our mind. The Old Testament was written on tablets of stone, and it did not give anyone the power to keep it. The New Testament is written on tablets of the heart (2 Cor. 3:3), and we have the power to keep it. Thank the Lord that we do not need slips of paper here and there to remind us; there is One within us to remind us.

The new wine cannot be put in the old wineskin, because the old wineskin cannot preserve the new wine. The new wine can only be put in the new wineskin. We have to realize that God has not asked us to keep the outward law, but to keep the inward law. God asks us only to keep His law of freedom. This law is not dead, but living. Romans 7 speaks of the law of the Ten Commandments, but Romans 8 speaks of the law of the Spirit of life. This law brings the Spirit of life to us, and it abides in us, enabling us to keep God's law.

One day I was talking about 2 John 7-9 to a brother who could not read very well. He had had a very interesting experience. He said, "It is strange that the Bible would write about such things. I once met an old pastor in a chapel who did not believe that the Lord was born of a virgin; he did not believe in resurrection or ascension. Yet at the same time, he was a pastor of a Presbyterian church and the editor of a certain publishing house. He was actually an outsider as far as Christianity is concerned. When I realized that he was such a person, I began to wonder if I should have communications with him. I turned the pages of the Scripture and could not find any answer, and besides, I did not understand the words. Then I knelt down and prayed, `God, You have put the Holy Spirit

within me to be my overseer. Please ask this overseer to show me if I should communicate with this man.' I then knew that I should exhort him, and that if he ignored my exhortation, I should not communicate with him anymore. I did not realize that this word of the Bible exactly matches the Holy Spirit's leading within me!" This is a fact. Although this brother could not read very well, he was led by the new wine within. If God required that we depend on the outward letter alone, what could the people who cannot read do? God is not a respecter of persons. Man despises the illiterate ones, but God does not despise them. Not only do we have the new garment outside of us, we have the new wine inside of us. It is useless for us to make a resolution to fast twice a week. We are not merely justified and saved, we have the new wine in the new wineskin, which enables us to overcome all outward things.

## THE OLD WINE

"And no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better" (Luke 5:39). This is common knowledge in the world. Everyone who has tasted old wine does not like to taste new wine. I have a friend who always insists on drinking old wine. It is true that man likes old wine and thinks that new wine is not as good. But God does not give man old wine. Why is this? It is because the old wine does not have the strength; its fermenting power is gone. The new wine, however, has the strength. The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus because they had drunk too much of the old wine. I am not saying that Christians do not need to fast, to offer money, or to do good. I am saying that it is useless and meaningless to try to use these things to obtain our salvation and please God. Our mentality is the mentality of those who have drunk the old wine. We all want to do good. We think that with some change and improvement all will be well. Actually, if a man drinks only old wine, he will not have the fresh strength and the bursting power. Day after day, and even year after year, it will be ineffective. It is futile to try to please God by fasting and by good behavior. Only those who drink of the new wine through the Lord Jesus Christ will be accepted by God.

## MESSAGE TWO

# TWO KINDS OF OFFERINGS

## •Outline

### •One—Four

## •Scripture Reading: Gen. 3:7, 21, 2:15, 4:1-8; Rom. 8:6-8; Phil. 3:3-4

Gen. 3:7 "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

21 "And Jehovah God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife and clothed them."

2:15 "And Jehovah God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it."

4:1-8 "And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain and said, I have acquired a man, Jehovah. And again she gave birth, to his brother Abel. And Abel was a tender of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the course of time Cain brought an offering to Jehovah from the fruit of the ground. And Abel also brought an offering, from the firstlings of his flock, that is, from their fat portions. And Jehovah had regard for Abel and for his offering. But for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. And Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell. And Jehovah said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and his desire is for you, but you must rule over him. And Cain said to Abel his brother, Let us go into the field. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him."

Rom. 8:6-8 "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the

spirit is life and peace. Because the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Phil. 3:3-4 "For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, Though I myself have something to be confident of in the flesh as well. If any other man thinks that he has confidence in the flesh, I more:"

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Genesis 2—4 are very familiar to us. We often preach the gospel from them. But what God says to His children in these chapters is actually more than what He says to the unbelievers. Through these few chapters of the Bible, God shows us the way He has established for us to walk in.

## ONE

After Adam sinned, he immediately employed a way and a method to save himself: He used fig leaves to sew himself an apron. The fig leaves were grown from the ground, and they were the result of Adam and Eve's dressing and keeping of the garden of Eden. In other words, they tried to use what they produced themselves to cover their shame. Man realized before God that he had fallen and sinned, so he quickly devised ways to remedy the situation. The first act of man after his fall was to improve his behavior.

When we first believed in the Lord, we did not realize the depth and extent of man's works. We thought they just stemmed from man's wish to do good to save himself. Actually, man's work implies that, after his fall, he wanted to satisfy God with the best that he could produce with his own effort. He realized that he was naked, that he was shameful, and that he was not acceptable before God. Hence, he devised a way to cover himself. He wanted to do good to satisfy God's heart.

While man was struggling with his own ways, God gave him a revelation by making coats of skin to cloth them. This signified that not only did the redemption of man require blood and the death of another but also that man's

own works could not cover his shame before God or satisfy God's heart. Since man has sinned, there is only one way of obtaining salvation, and that is through the cross and through death.

Coats of skin signify not only the death of the Savior but also the death of the sinner. Second Corinthians 5:14 clearly says, "One died for all, therefore all died." It does not say that since one died for all, then all do not need to die. It says, "One died for all, therefore all died." In making coats of skin for Adam and Eve, God was pronouncing death upon them. At the time of the Passover, the blood of the Lamb was put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses. God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exo. 12:13). By clothing Adam and Eve with coats of skin, God showed that salvation not only requires the forgiveness of sins through the death of the Savior, but also the death of the sinner.

Salvation involves not only resolving the problem of our sin but also the termination of us as a person. God dealt not only with sin but also with our person. Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; this was sin. They sewed aprons of fig trees; this was their good work. We must realize that God rejected not only the eating of the fruit but the sewing of the aprons as well. If a man sins, he displeases God. If he performs good works by his own effort, he also displeases God. Man's need consists not only of blood but also of death.

## TWO

If we understand Genesis 3, we can readily understand chapter four. After Adam sinned, he sewed aprons with the result of his labor—the fig leaves—to cover himself. Cain, the son of Adam, followed the same principle. He offered the produce from the land, the results of his own cultivation, unto God. Cain did exactly the same thing as Adam. The only difference was that Adam's work was for himself, while Cain's work was offered to God. Adam wanted to cover himself with his works in the hope of making himself a good man, whereas Cain offered God the produce from the land in the hope of pleasing God. In principle, their works were the same.

While this was occurring in Genesis 3, God clothed Adam and Eve with coats of skin, signifying that the cross must be upon them and that death must work upon them. This was God's revelation to Adam. In Genesis 4, Abel took God's way. Abel offered unto God the firstling of his flock and of their fat. What was so special about Abel was that he understood the need of the cross. He realized that man had sinned and had to die and that without his death man could not please God.

What were the results of the offerings of Cain and Abel? The Bible tells us that "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (vv. 4-5). God accepted Abel and his offering, but not Cain and his offering because Abel pleased God in accordance with the way of salvation established by God, while Cain tried to please Him through his own flesh.

Cain's offering implied that even though man had sinned and was fallen, he did not need to die; rather, he could work on his own and use the labor of his work to please God. Man thinks that the leaves he cultivates can cover his shame and produce from the land can be offered to God to please Him. Cain relied upon his works to come before God; he had not passed through death. He thought he could please God by his own effort. But God did not look upon it and would not accept it.

Abel's offering seemed to say, "O my God, the skin You have ordained enabled me to be a proper man. I now offer You the fat under the skin to please You. The skin is for me and the fat is for You." Both the skin and the fat are the results of death. Only through death could Abel obtain skin to clothe himself, and only through death could he obtain the fat to offer to God.

## THREE

Romans 8:7 says, "Because the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be." The man who minds the flesh is the natural man, the original man, the man who is according to his natural birth. This man is not subject to the law of God, neither can he be. Yet the Word of God tells us not only that the fleshly man sins but also that the fleshly

man attempts to do good, because verse 8 says, "And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." This obviously indicates that the man of flesh attempts to please God. No matter how hard he may try, in the end he still cannot please God. Regardless of how man serves God through his flesh, the result is always the same—he cannot please God. His offering, like that of Cain, can never be accepted by God. Only one offering is acceptable to God: our cross and our death. This is like the fat—a sweet-smelling offering before God.

Therefore, our greatest service to God is not how much we can do for Him or how much we can accomplish for Him but how much we can die. But this is not acceptable to many self-righteous men. Man often measures everything by his own work, thinking that if he can have fruit, if he can help others repent and believe in the Lord, he can bring all these offerings to God. But we should know one thing: We cannot serve God according to our work. Man's greatest offering to God is to be on the altar, which is death. Was there ever an offering accepted by God which did not pass through the altar? Was there ever an offering that passed through the altar and still lived? All offerings to God must go through death.

Brothers and sisters, perhaps your emphasis is revival, the repentance of many, and many great works. We acknowledge these as being important, yet they are not the primary need; they are secondary needs. The first thing we should do is confess before God: "Lord, I know I am useless, I am weak, and I am unclean. I know I am full of the work of the flesh. Therefore, Lord, I only look to You. I want to please You; I am willing to lay myself on Your altar as a burnt offering."

As an offering, Cain brought success and fruit, instead of the knowledge of the cross. Cain was successful, and he bore fruit. Yet death is the only condition that enables God to accept man's offering, and Cain's offering lacked death. God's Word says that a man of flesh cannot please God. You may try, but it will be in vain. Cain could offer his offering, but it was not acceptable to God. The pursuit of God's pleasure to many is just an activity of the flesh; there is no mark of the cross or any sign of death in it. However, there are some brothers and sisters who truly know the cross. When you touch them, you discover that they are broken and bruised and have the wound of the cross; we can sense the presence of subjective experience and the result of blows upon them. God desires this kind

of person; He desires this kind of mark in a man. Therefore, work, zeal, or the fruit of work is not acceptable to God. Everything must come from the Holy Spirit. God cannot accept the fruit of man's labor for Him; He only accepts the fruit from man's reliance upon Him. We can only prostrate ourselves before Him and say, "I am only a channel, Lord. I pray that You pass through me." If we do this, we will see blessing, and we will see God's acceptance.

Paul said, "For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). At that time there were people who worshipped God in the confidence of the flesh. It is possible for man to worship God in the flesh, as Cain did; however, God cannot accept man's worship in the flesh. God can only accept man's worship in the spirit.

Our mistake is to infer God's acceptance of a thing by its merit or demerit. But God does not ask whether a thing is good or bad. He asks whether it comes from Him. The goal of many children of God is for Him, but their strength is from themselves. They have a heavenly purpose, but they employ earthly strength to achieve it. The purpose of Cain's offering was not improper, because he wanted to please God just as Abel did. The difference between Cain and Abel was in what they offered. It would be a gross error for us to presume that as long as our purpose is to serve God, to please Him, to do His work, and to bring about spiritual revival among His children, we can employ whatever means there are. We may not say it this way, but this is a fact. If we serve God with our own strength, it is the flesh. The flesh is man's own strength, the strength he has originally. If we serve God with this strength, it is the same as Cain's offering.

Do not think that Abel had a loftier goal than Cain. Both of them had the same goal, that is, to make an offering. Abel was accepted not because he had a loftier goal than Cain but because what he offered was better. Abel's offering signifies the fact that man has no place before God, that man can do nothing, that man must die and not live, that man should tremble before God, and that man should have no confidence before Him. Abel's offering seemed to say to God, "God, I know that whatever comes from me is not acceptable. I cannot serve You. I can only trust in Your life and Your Spirit. I can only depend on the law of the

Spirit of life." Abel's offering was made under these circumstances, and this became a sweet-smelling offering to God.

Therefore, brothers, in serving God it is not how much you have done for God. Your work may not be for the service of God, and the service of God may not need your kind of work. In serving God, the most necessary thing is the cross. The crux of the matter is this: "We are...the ones who serve by the Spirit of God...and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). These are Paul's words. You may have heard this many times, but, brothers, what is your standing today? Where do you stand? What kind of an offering are you making? I am not asking whether you have offered something up. I am asking what you have offered. An offering acceptable to God must go through death. Anything that has not gone through death cannot be counted as an offering. An offering that has not gone through death can never be acceptable to God.

## FOUR

However, this does not mean that we only have to adopt an attitude of looking to God, believing in God, and waiting and trusting in God, when we come before Him. Our attitude alone cannot replace God's work. Perhaps after some brothers and sisters hear a message on the cross, they change their attitude. They may say, "In the future I have to learn to be more humble and gentle before God. In the future when I work, I have to learn to rely on Him more." Even this does not mean they have the sign of death. We need to realize that the cross is God's work upon us. One day the Lord will enlighten us in His mercy, and through this enlightening, we will be crushed and an eternal mark will be left upon us. From that day on, we may still move, but every time we move, we will feel the pain and the absence of strength. A day will come when the cross does its work on us, and we will no longer please God according to our flesh.

Therefore, it is useless to have a mere change in our attitude; what is needed is the true experience of the cross. A person may try to change his attitude, but it will not last long, and he will soon forget the change. When something happens he will become bold in himself again. When others say a few words of praise to him, his face will shine again. When his work is making good

progress, he will feel as if he is treading on the clouds again. Have you seen this? What is the use of having just a change in attitude? It is useless to have the attitude of the cross without the experience of the cross. There must first be the experience of the cross before there can be the attitude of the cross. Paul said, "And I was...in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). He was a person who knew the cross, so he could have the attitude of the cross. If we pretend to be in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling, this will go away in a few days and be forgotten even by ourselves. It is easy for us to have the right attitude and the right message, without the experience of the cross. When this happens, we will easily forget about the whole matter after some time. Once a brother said, "I used to preach the cross, but for some unknown reason I have not touched this subject for the last ten months." Is this surprising? No. If it is only a subject, it will soon be forgotten. If God has done a work on me and touched me, I will spontaneously become a weak person. I will not have to try to be a weak person; I will be weak. I will not have to imitate Paul and be in fear and trembling; I will be in fear and trembling. There will be a sign of the cross on me, and I will be changed into another person. This is having an offering before God, and this is pleasing to God.

This was the experience of Jacob at Peniel. He limped because his thigh was crippled, and he remained this way for the rest of his life. Yet many Christians do not suffer a wound after falling. They fall repeatedly, but after getting up they can still run. Before they fall they are one kind of person, and after they rise up they are still the same kind of person. But when the cross does its work on such a person, he will fall and not be able to get up again. When he finally gets up, no matter how hard he tries, he will not act the same way as before; there will be an indelible mark on him. From that point on, even if he wants to be great, he will be unable to try. A Christian who is truly touched by God finds no heart for his own idea; he cannot be proud even if he tries. God has done a work in him, and he makes his offering through this work. This is the meaning of death, and this is the meaning of the cross.

In conclusion, we must repeat that the cross is not a mere doctrine or teaching; it is God's enlightenment. Once God enlightens us, we can no longer live

as we did before. This is the cross. Men like Peter, John, and Paul in the New Testament and Job, Jacob, Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel in the Old Testament all experienced a one-time intense enlightening from God. After they saw the light, they could no longer live as they did before, and their lives could never be the same. This is the cross. When God's light exposes the self, we will no longer live the same way. This is the cross. We will realize that nothing from ourselves pleases God and that we can only prostrate ourselves before Him. This is the cross. Then we will serve God according to this cross, not serving by the flesh and not trusting in our own works; we will serve by the Holy Spirit and trust in God's life. May the Lord deliver us from mere doctrines, and may the cross truly work on us so that we may make an offering which is acceptable to Him and become a person who is acceptable to Him.

## MESSAGE THREE

# IDLE WORDS LEAKING LIFE

**•Scripture Reading: Prov. 13:3, 15:4; Matt. 12:34, 36-37**

Prov. 13:3 "He who guards his mouth keeps his soul, / But he who opens wide his lips will have destruction."

15:4 "A soothing tongue is a tree of life, / But perverseness in it is a breaking of the spirit."

Matt. 12:34 "Offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

36-37 "And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

* * * *

If a water container has a hole, the water inside will leak away. It is not a question of whether or not there is water in the container but whether there are holes. Some brothers and sisters greatly desire to know about the cross and, at times, are very willing to bear the cross. Such ones should be full of life. Yet it is strange that even though they are so seeking, desirous, and willing to bear the cross, they do not touch any life in them. Instead, they touch death, because all the life that they have gained has leaked away.

Proverbs 13:3 says, "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life:/but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." (KJV)

We are not sure whether Solomon was referring to physical life or spiritual life when he wrote this proverb. But let us consider spiritual things based on this principle. A seeker of the Lord, who has life and wishes to supply the church with life, must be careful with his words. If we are not careful with our words, life will leak away. Why are some people not very useful in the hand of the Lord? They

are not useful because life has leaked away. One only touches death in them; one does not touch any life in them because the life has leaked away through their words. Therefore, we have to guard our mouth, even keeping a close watch on it. Many stories testify that nothing leaks away life as much as idle words. This does not mean that sin is better than idle words. However, it does mean that next to sin the most debilitating thing for our life is our idle words.

Matthew 12:36 says, "And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment." (KJV)

Does it say "every filthy word"? No. Does it say "every blasphemous word"? No. Does it say "every evil word"? No. It says "every idle word." Idle words are redundant words, incongruous words, unnecessary words, and gossiping words. "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." This is what the Lord Jesus said. We have to realize that not only are blasphemous words serious but loose words are also serious. It is a serious thing to speak idle words as well as filthy words. We have to realize that we can make recompense for certain sins, but we cannot make recompense for other things and sins. If we offend anyone through idle words, there is no way to make a recompense for this. We can confess to others, and we can retract our words, but the sound has reached others' ears, and we cannot take it back. It is possible to make a recompense if we have stolen from others. But it is impossible to make a recompense if we have offended others with idle words. This sin will have to go before the Lord. Therefore, the Lord said, "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

Proverbs 15:4 says, "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: /but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit." (KJV)

To be wholesome is to be temperate, mild, and moderate. When a man speaks too much, his tongue becomes hot, and when his tongue is hot, the tree of life is gone. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life. A wholesome tongue is a tongue that is not quick, foolish, or excessive. Such a tongue is like a tree of life. One

cannot smell the flavor of Christ in a Christian who loves idle words. Those who love idle words cannot supply life to others. Idle words are a big hole which leak away one's life.

Idle words leak away life. What then should we do? In order to keep our mouth, we must first deal with our heart. The Lord says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). When the heart has something, the mouth speaks it out. If we have something in our heart, sooner or later, it will come out of our mouth. If we do not speak it here, we will speak it elsewhere. If we do not speak it in this house, we will speak it in another house. Whatever is in the heart, the mouth will speak out. Therefore, in order to learn before the Lord to stop our idle words, we must start by dealing with our heart. If we do not deal with our heart, our mouth can never be dealt with properly. It is the heart that is first filled with all kinds of things before the mouth speaks of them. Never think that a word can be said in a heartless way. The Lord's Word shows us that there is not such a thing. As long as there is a word, there is a heart for it. Because there is a heart for something, the mouth speaks. Hence, in order to deal with idle words, we must first deal with the heart.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian brothers who were in trouble to "all speak the same thing." How can this be? He continued by saying, "That you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion" (1 Cor. 1:10). The life of the church is like the life of an individual. The life of an individual can leak away through idle words. The life of the church can also leak away through idle words. Because we have the same life, we should be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion. Once we are attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion, we can speak the same thing, and we will not have idle words. Therefore, to deal with idle words, we must first deal with the heart.

James 3:11 says, "Does the spring, out of the same opening, gush forth the sweet and the bitter?" If a spring cannot gush forth two kinds of water, a mouth cannot speak two kinds of words. A spring can only gush forth one kind of water. In the same way a mouth can only speak one kind of word. We must deal with idle words before the Lord in a definite way. If this leakage is not stopped, undesirable things will keep pouring in, and things that should not leak away

will continue to leak away. The loss will be immeasurable. We have to stop this leakage at any cost. We need to ask the Lord, saying, “Lord, deal with my mouth so that I can be preserved by Your grace.”

You must deal not only with your own mouth but also with others’ mouths. You have to help those who love idle words, gossip, and idle reports. Some people like to come to you with idle words. You should not allow them to start. You can say to them, “Brother, let us pray.” You should not allow them to speak idle words. You should lead them to pray or recite Scripture verses. You should lead them to the proper path. You can even be more blunt by saying, “Brother, we have to learn to speak words that edify others. It is better that we do not speak any idle words.”

If we want to be one who stops the leakage, we must first ask God to deliver us from our curiosity. We should learn to fear God. Many Christians are curious; they like to hear novel things and even filthy things. Their ears are like a garbage can which takes in all kinds of things. If we are delivered from this, we will save ourselves from many sins and help many brothers and sisters from many sins. If our ears are not itching and if we do not afford others the opportunity to speak idle words, we will preserve our mouth from leaking life and help others to stop their leakage.

May the Lord deliver us from idle words that leak life. Other than sin, idle words leak life the most. If we are preserved in our words, we will be able to preserve life.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## A POOR MAN

## •Outline

### •One—Four

## •Scripture Reading: Rev. 3:17

Rev. 3:17 "Because you say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,"

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### ONE

Among God's children, there is a problem of a Laodicean attitude and a Laodicean heart. A man who thinks that he is rich but, in reality, is poor has a Laodicean attitude and a Laodicean heart.

In spiritual matters, the matter of having or not having is easy to resolve, but the matter of being poor or being rich is not as easy to resolve. Those who have nothing can easily see God, but those who have a little do not easily see God. Many people have nothing before God, and they often meet God. The worst kind of people are those who have a little; they understand a little of this and a little of that. But do they really know? Do they really understand? No. They speak a great deal, but they have not moved a single inch or advanced a single step. They are poor ones indeed.

The biggest problem with poverty is that a man will not easily admit that he is poor. Those who have nothing readily admit that they have nothing. If they have something, they say so, and if they do not have something, they also say so. This is very simple and clear. But poverty is something relative. If Mr. A is worse off than Mr. B, it means that Mr. A is poorer than Mr. B. But Mr. B can be worse off

than Mr. C, which means that Mr. B is poorer than Mr. C. It is easy to make a judgment when one has nothing. It is not so easy to make a judgment when one is poor.

The first time a child has some money, he thinks that he is the richest man in the world. He does not know his poverty. If he does not have any money, he easily understands that he has nothing. But if he has a little money, it is more difficult to show him that he does not have enough money for certain things. In spiritual matters, God can deal with those who have nothing. Those who are poor, however, are hindered by the little that they possess. They think that they have something, and they become proud and self-sufficient.

Someone may have obeyed God only three times during the past ten years, but he never forgets that he has obeyed God. While he is talking about obedience, others who have truly learned the lesson and who are sensitive almost have to stand up and shout to him: "Do you really know what obedience is?" Those who talk about obedience in this way are poor men, truly poor men.

Many people constantly talk about the cross. One may say that what we need before the Lord is the cross. Another may say the same thing, but those who truly know the cross almost have to say: "Brothers, do you know what the cross is?" Just because God has dealt with you a few times does not mean that you have been thoroughly dealt with before the Lord. God dealt with you on the day that you were saved, but this does not mean that you have learned a deep lesson. You are still very short! Those who do not know the cross, yet who talk glibly about it, are indeed poor!

Some brothers say that they are clear that the church is this and that; they say that they did this and that when they saw the Body of Christ. Some sisters say that they are pursuing after the kingdom; they say that they are willing to forsake everything for the kingdom. But those who know them will say that they do not know what the Body or the kingdom is. Many of the things that God's children have are very cheap. They have cheap obedience, cheap crosses, a cheap Body, a cheap kingdom! Actually, they do not know obedience, the cross, the Body, or the kingdom. They are poor men!

## TWO

Poverty is not a hindrance if it does not come with pride. But nothing can be done about poverty when it is in a proud person. Poverty is not the problem. Being like Laodicea is a problem because Laodicea was poor and proud yet thought that she was rich. In the spiritual realm, it is hard to find a person who is poor but not proud. On the contrary, it is often the rich ones who are not proud. It is a pity that many of God's children go around in circles and never advance. The sole reason that they suffer loss is because they think that they have something. Many people talk about the flesh, but actually they do not know what the flesh is. Many people talk about revelation, but they do not know what revelation is. They can say much about obedience. They can say much about the kingdom. They can say much about the cross, dealing with the self, or dealing with the natural life. Yet what they say and how they speak reveal that they are poor and ignorant. They have never touched God. They speak what they do not know and only deceive themselves and those who are like them. In spiritual matters, those who think that they are rich can never make others believe that they are rich. On the contrary, they only expose their poverty.

The church in Laodicea said, "I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17a). This does not refer to material riches, but to spiritual riches. She felt that she had something. But God said, "You...do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (v. 17b). Did she have something? Yes, but what she had was of no benefit to her. If she really had something, she should have rejoiced, yet she was wretched and miserable. She did not behave as if she had anything. Her wretchedness and misery tell others that she was poor.

Poverty is always linked to blindness. Those who are spiritually poor are always blind. The blind ones always think that they are rich. Those who have not seen the cross think that they know the cross. Those who have not seen the kingdom think that they know the kingdom. Those who have not seen the Body of Christ think that they know the church. All those who think that they have something are poor. Whenever we truly see something, we will not dare to boast that we are rich. Whenever our eyes are opened, we will see that we are naked. Only the foolish ones boast of what they have. A Laodicean is poor, but does not

see his own poverty. This is a warning to us.

## THREE

What is poverty? Poverty is not just a question of quantity but also a question of quality. First Corinthians 3 shows us the distinction between gold, silver, and precious stones, and the wood, grass, and stubble. Second Timothy 2 shows us the distinction between the vessels of honor and the vessels of dishonor. Such distinctions separate the poor ones from the rich ones. Even when we have something, we still have to ask what it is that we have. If all we have is a pile of wood, grass, and stubble, we are still poor. It is not enough for us to be a vessel; we still have to ask whether we are a wooden and earthen vessel or a gold and silver vessel. It is easy to be proud when we think that we have something. As long as we have something, we think that we are marvelous. Little do we know the kind of material that we have. This is poverty.

Poverty also means superficiality, childishness, and immaturity. A rich life is a mature life. We have to realize that there is a difference between growth and maturity. A child grows year by year, but after he becomes an adult, the important matter is no longer growth; rather, it is maturity. If one has only a period of growth, his life is not yet rich enough. There must be a period of maturity before there can be riches. Those who take the initial period as the whole period are those who think that they have something; they are Laodiceans, and they are poor ones. Therefore, initial experiences always spoil us from having further experiences, shallow experiences hinder us from having deep experiences, and shallow knowledge hinders us from acquiring deep knowledge.

## FOUR

Being rich is not merely a question of having something. It is a question of how much one has, what he has, and to what degree he has it. It is not the initial experiences. It is not a mere understanding of doctrine or something that one claims with his mouth. When God opens the eyes of a person, he begins to enter the land of spiritual riches.

One brother spent a great deal of time to study the Bible during the first year after his salvation. He concentrated on one subject: the Lord's second

coming. He did a clear analysis of the things concerning the Lord's second coming, and he felt quite proud of himself. One day he met a sister who was deep in the Lord. When she talked to him about the Lord's second coming, she did not analyze; her attention was on how one should prepare himself for His coming. On that day, he learned a lesson. While he was talking about the Lord's coming, here was a person who was waiting for the Lord's coming. The one who only talked about the Lord's coming was poor, while the sister who waited for the Lord's coming was rich.

All those who have truly seen something before the Lord are not presumptuous and do not think that they have something. For example, it may take a person one, two, ten, or even twenty times of revelation before he can really see the truth in Romans 6. The first time he sees the truth in Romans 6, he may feel that nothing more can top this experience. He may say that he has seen it. But the second time he sees it, he will say, "I did not see this before." This means that when the light comes, it will tear down what one originally had. There is a brother who knows the truth about the church very well. Once a few people gathered together and had some light concerning the church. This brother said, "How interesting! I never knew what the church was. But thank the Lord that I see it today." Others may think that if he did not know the church, then no one else would have known anything about the church. But the minute he saw the light, he realized that he had nothing. The shining of the light is also the swallowing of the light; the greater light swallows up the lesser light. All light disappears under greater light. Every time a person truly sees something before the Lord, he will feel that he has never seen anything. This does not mean that he has actually seen nothing; he may have seen something. But after he receives the greater light, he will not think much of what he saw before. On the contrary, he will realize that he had nothing.

Riches come from enlightenment. When the light shines, we become rich. However, when we are enlightened, we do not have a feeling of increase but one of stripping. Once the light comes, all the former things are shattered, and what we originally had is torn down. It is true that when we are under the light, we have some increase before God. But on our side, we do not feel anything. What

goes on before the Lord is one thing, and what goes on in our feeling is another thing. God may give us something once, twice, or three times. If we feel that we have increased, it proves that we have not seen anything. If we truly see something, we will feel as if we are newly saved and just starting out on our journey. It does not mean that we were not saved before this time; it means that in our feeling, we feel as if we were not saved. We feel empty and feel as if we never had a beginning. Hence, those who are rich feel that they have nothing under the light.

Our God is a rich God. He does not wish to see His children being in poverty. His works are not works of wood, grass, and stubble. The vessels He uses are not vessels of dishonor. He is a rich God, and His vessels are rich vessels. God's riches are deep and profound; they are such that "there is no room for it" (Mal. 3:10). His grace is always such that there is not room enough to receive it! His works in us are always such that there is not room enough to receive them. God does not work in a stingy way. He is not weak or miserly. This rich God can make us rich people. He is always giving us more and more. Every time He gives us something, we feel as if we are receiving it for the first time. This may sound strange, yet this is a fact. May the Lord be merciful to us, so that we truly see something before Him and so that we truly have the light. The proud ones are the foolish ones, and they are always poor ones. May the Lord empty us so that we can enter into His riches.

## MESSAGE FIVE

# THE LORD'S MINISTRY

## •Scripture Reading: Mark 10:45; Luke 22:26-27, 12:37

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Luke 22:26-27 "But you shall not be so; but let the greatest among you become like the youngest, and the one who leads like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am in your midst as the one who serves."

12:37 "Blessed are those slaves whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Truly I tell you that he will gird himself and will have them recline at table, and he will come to them and serve them."

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The three passages we have just read help us see how Christ served us in the past, still serves us in the present, and is going to serve us in the future.

Let us consider the first passage: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This verse mentions that the Son of Man came to serve everybody. Whoever comes to the Lord, the Lord always serves them. The Lord feeds the hungry; He heals the sick ones. Without regard to the time and place, the Lord always serves us. The highest service of the Lord was giving His life as a ransom for many. He gave His life to serve man. So many times, we are so eager to serve the Lord that we ignore the fact that our Lord went to the cross and gave His life to serve us. While we were yet sinners, He served us.

Let us consider the second passage: "But you shall not be so; but let the greatest among you become like the youngest, and the one who leads like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who

serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am in your midst as the one who serves" (Luke 22:26-27). The book of Mark concerns Christ serving the sinners. Here it concerns Christ serving His disciples. "I am in your midst as the one who serves." We should remember that the Lord is among us to serve us. This is grace!

The bread before us at the Lord's table clearly demonstrates how Christ has served us. His body was broken for all of us. The meaning of salvation is that Christ serves us first, and then we serve Him. His serving does not end with the cross. Even now He is among us to continue His service. Whenever we have a need, we ought to come to the Lord and let Him serve us.

Once, the Lord sent the multitude away and departed to the mountains to pray. The disciples were on the boat, and the wind was against them. They had been straining at the oar until about the fourth watch of the night. It was very dark and the disciples fell asleep. This was the time when we want to sleep the most. At that time the Lord came to help them. The disciples thought that the Lord was a ghost. They were so frightened that they cried out, but immediately the Lord spoke to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:45-51). The Lord might have said to them, "It is your Lord," or, "It is the Son of God." Instead, He said, "It is I." What is meant by this? Suppose someone knocks at the door, and the host of the house responds with: "Who is it?" If the knocking one answers, "It is I," we can be assured that the host must be familiar with the one who knocks at the door because the host can distinguish the voice of "I." The Lord came to help the disciples with such a dear and intimate voice. Since this is the case, we should enjoy the Lord's serving us even more!

The Lord did not have to pay any temple tax. Even if he had to pay, half a stater would have been adequate. But the Lord was so concerned for Peter that He sent Peter to the sea to fish. When the fish was taken up, Peter opened its mouth and found a stater, which was enough to pay Peter's temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27). The Lord served Peter to such an extent that He even prepared the required tax for Peter beforehand.

When you study the Gospels, do you sense that the Lord served His disciples step by step? You may be amazed and think that Christians ought to serve the

Lord and wonder why the Lord would come to serve Christians! Why does the Lord want to serve the Christians? “For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table?” (Luke 22:27). This verse exposes the human concept. The Lord is in our midst as the One who serves. He is able to serve man because He is so great and is even the greatest. The greater we are, the more we can serve. The smaller we are, the less we can serve. Whoever is the smallest may not be able to serve a single person. The Lord is great; He is infinitely great and can therefore serve man in an infinite way.

The Lord says, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). What can serve man better than light? Whoever follows this light no longer walks in darkness but shall receive the light of life. The Lord says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:48). What can serve man better than bread? Whoever eats this bread shall live forever. Whatever the Lord does is for the purpose of serving. Hallelujah! We have a Lord who serves us. When we face a difficulty or when we do not have any way to work out a problem, it gives the Lord an opportunity to serve us. He is so great that He is able to serve us in everything.

There is one more thing. The Lord washed His disciples’ feet. This was something that Peter would “by no means” allow the Lord to do. But the Lord washed their feet; He served them (John 13:4-8).

Finally, when men came to arrest the Lord, He asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He answered, “I am; if therefore you seek Me, let these go away” (John 18:7-8). The Lord is full of consideration for the disciples. He always served the disciples from the first day He met them to the last day when He left them.

Once, He said to the Father: “Of those whom You have given Me, I have not lost one” (John 18:9). Our Lord always serves us from the first day to the last.

We still have the third passage: “Blessed are those slaves whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Truly I tell you that he will gird himself and will have them recline at table, and he will come to them and serve them” (Luke 12:37). This is too gracious! How can this be possible? However, the Lord said He will serve us again in the future. Once we were indebted to the Lord and received

His grace freely. We will forever be indebted to the Lord and will forever enjoy His grace.

I wonder how many people know how to enjoy the service of Christ. Many times we are misled to think that we should serve Christ. Have we ever asked Christ to serve us? Some brothers have said that their prayers are too cold and that they have to do something to stir themselves up again. At such times they should realize that Christ can serve them in that very matter. Some have felt that they have no interest in the Bible and worry about what they should do the next day. They should realize that in that very matter, Christ can serve them also.

God has given Christ to us for the purpose of serving us. From the day that Christ was crucified on the cross until eternity, Christ will serve us. Although we do not quite understand this, we can enjoy it. We should imitate the disciple John, who reclined on the Lord's bosom and let the Lord do everything for him, rather than Peter, who refused the Lord.

## MESSAGE SIX

# THE SYMPATHY OF THE HIGH PRIEST

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 4:15-16

Heb. 4:15-16 "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin. Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help."

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When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was tempted in all things. He felt pain when He suffered; He felt sorrow when He was misunderstood. He experienced a great deal of suffering and encountered many persecutions. When He experienced these temptations, He had the same feelings as we do. Therefore, He can sympathize with our weaknesses.

The Lord sympathized with man's weaknesses, but He never sympathized with sin. The Lord Jesus was tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin. He never said, "I sympathize with your sins; therefore, I forgive you." He sympathized with the weakness of man's flesh. What is the weakness of the flesh? It is the weakness in our soul. He sympathizes with this kind of weakness. When we suffer in the flesh, our soul feels uncomfortable. The Lord can sympathize with this kind of discomfort.

For the Lord to express sympathy means that He feels what we feel. Do we ever feel what others feel? Have we ever sympathized with others? Many times we can help others, but not have sympathy for them. We do not feel others' sufferings. When we see them in want, we can render them material help. But we have never felt the suffering in their life. When we see a sick person, we can give him food and clothing and serve him. But we may not feel his pain. Outwardly, there may be the grace, but inwardly, there is no sympathy. This means that we

do not feel what he feels.

The Lord is the Lord of grace; He is also the Lord of sympathy. The Bible has two titles for the Lord: the sinners' Savior and the sinners' Friend (Matt. 11:19). The title Savior speaks of His redemption of sinners, and the title Friend speaks of His communication with sinners. He can feel all the pain and sufferings of sinners. Thank and praise the Lord. The Lord Jesus is not only the sinners' Savior, but also the sinners' Friend! Here we see a little of the riches of His glory. Sometimes we may encounter difficulties. Sometimes we may be lonely. Many people may give us a bad face; many voices may cause us sorrow. Everything around us may seem gray. But we have to know that when the billows roll over us, the Lord is not just our Savior; He is also our Friend! He feels the suffering that we feel. He sympathizes with us and goes through our experiences together with us.

Sympathy was a characteristic of the Lord when He was on earth. The Bible records many examples of the Lord sympathizing with men. He sympathized with the sick and healed them. He sympathized with the hungry and fed the five thousand and the four thousand with the loaves. He heard the cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me," and He healed the blind. When He saw the grief of those whose relative had died, He resurrected the dead. If our hearts are open, we will see the Lord's sympathy poured out upon us. Before He was the sinners' Savior, He was the sinners' Friend. We know that our Lord came to the earth to die. If it were us, we would have thought that since our mission was to die, all we would have to do is go through our ordained death. We would not worry about anything else. But our Lord was not like this. Although the cross was in front of Him, before His time had come, while He was on His way to death, He sympathized with those whom He met and who had need of Him. Oh what a loving Lord He is!

If anyone wants to sympathize with others, three things are indispensable: the first is experience. In order to sympathize with others, one must first have the experience. If you are in sound health and have never been sick, you will not be able to sympathize with sick patients. If you have never experienced a toothache, you cannot sympathize with those who suffer from a toothache. If you have never had a headache, you cannot feel the pain of those who suffer from

headaches. If you have never experienced a certain suffering, you cannot share the feelings of those who experience such suffering. Therefore, you cannot sympathize with them. Experience is necessary; it helps one to sympathize with others.

A sister once said, “I have many things which are hard to overcome and many things in which I have failed. Eventually, I sought help from those believers who were better than I. But they did not understand my problem. It seems that they were born ‘holy persons,’ and they had never felt the annoyance of failures.” This shows that a person without experience cannot sympathize with others. Why did our Lord not descend from heaven as a grown-up? Why did He have to come through a virgin’s womb? Why did He have to be nursed, nurtured, and grow gradually? Why did He have to pass through thirty-three years of suffering on this earth? Why was He not crucified three days after He was born on the earth to accomplish His work of redemption? Oh, the reason He was willing to submit to all kinds of limitation and suffer every affliction was that He wanted to sympathize with us. He learned the principles of human living. He was misunderstood and persecuted. He was stripped, mistreated, and forsaken by people. Eventually, He was crucified on the cross. He endured all these sufferings in order to experience the bitter taste of human life and sympathize with man’s weaknesses. His thirty-three years of human living and His preaching during the three years were not only to accomplish His mission and work, but also for the sake of sympathizing with us. He had to do this before He could sympathize with our weaknesses. If there is a broken or wounded heart here today, the Lord is right now feeling what you feel. He knows your afflictions. Not only does He have the grace to save you, but He has a heart that sympathizes with you and feels your feelings.

In order to sympathize with others, experience is not enough. The second thing one needs is love. Some people suffer illness for many years; they are sick every three days and rest every two days. They have tasted the bitterness of their illness, but they still cannot sympathize with the sick patients in the world. They can only sympathize with those they love. They have the experience, but they do not necessarily have love. Consequently, they cannot sympathize with everyone.

The Lord was able to sympathize with everyone while He was on the earth because He not only had the experience, but He also had the love. Once when the Lord came down from a mountain, a leper worshipped Him and said, "If You are willing, You can cleanse me." Immediately, the Lord touched him with His hand and said, "I am willing; be cleansed!" (Matt. 8:1-3). There was a place in His heart for the leper. He could feel the suffering of the leper. Therefore, He touched him. The Lord did not merely have the experience; He also had a heart full of love.

Experience and love alone are not enough. The third thing you need is to not be occupied with your own affairs. This means that nothing occupies you beforehand. Many times a man's heart is occupied with something already; therefore, his heart is closed. As a result, he cannot sympathize with others. He may say, "I cannot even bear my own burden. How can I sympathize with others?" When the Lord was on the earth, He bore a particular characteristic: He put aside His own needs. What our Lord did not do is more marvelous and meaningful than what He did. When He was hungry, He did not turn the stones into bread. When He was taken by the enemy, He did not ask the Father to protect Him with twelve legions of angels. His heart was not occupied with His own affairs. He was never preoccupied with His own affairs so that He could not sympathize with others. Many times when we have our own burdens and sufferings, we have no heart for the sufferings of others. But this was not the Lord's way. If He had been only concerned with the suffering He was about to experience on the cross, He would have been occupied with His own suffering every day. He would not have been able to sympathize with others. If He had thought all the time about His suffering—how it was the greatest and hardest of all sufferings—He would not have been able to care for and help others. But the Lord lived as if nothing was going to happen. When He met the sick, He healed them. When He met the poor, He preached the gospel to them. He acted as if nothing was going to happen. He was fully sympathetic towards others. Every time He sympathized with others, His heart was like a piece of clean paper on which any letter or drawing could be inscribed. Praise and thank the Lord that His heart was empty and wholly reserved for others.

He not only sympathized with the people of that time, He also sympathizes

with us today. He is our High Priest, and today He sympathizes with us in heaven. What He experienced was a thousand times harder than what we experience. We can trust in Him and pray to Him. Whatever difficulty we have, He joins Himself to our feelings. He is gracious to us, and He helps us. He will bring us peace. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help." Many times we feel that others do not consider our problems to be important and that no one can sympathize with us, comfort us, or help us. At these times, we surely feel how heavy our burden is and how much our suffering is. But there is One in heaven who sympathizes with us. We can come boldly to the throne of grace to beseech Him. In heaven, there is One who sympathizes with us and has mercy on us; He feels our burden. He will make our burden light. At times, friends on earth may lighten our burden, but this Friend in heaven is always ready to bear our burden. He not only bears our burden in feeling, but in reality as well. He sympathizes with us, and He is gracious to us. It is as though we are the only ones He loves. He is only concerned about our affairs. He is such a Lord! Thank and praise God! We have such a Lord!

Finally, I would like to add a few words. Since the Lord sympathizes with us, and He personally feels what we feel, He will never burden us with more than we can bear. We should remember that He is with us in every position in our life and is joined to us in our feelings; He will give grace to us. He is deeply touched by our every problem and understands every drop of our tears. No matter how much we suffer, He feels the same suffering. Let us trust Him and receive rest from Him. He is willing to sympathize with us and express compassion to us. Although He is not here today, His heart is still reserved for us.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## A NOBLE DEED

### [Notes On Scriptural Messages (3)]

## •Scripture Reading: Mark 14:1-9

Mark 14:1-9 "Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two days away. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to seize Him by craftiness and kill Him, For they said, Not at the feast, lest there be a tumult by the people. And while He was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He reclined at table, a woman came, having an alabaster flask of ointment, of very costly pure nard, and she broke the alabaster flask and poured it over His head. But there were some who were indignantly commenting among themselves: Why has this waste of the ointment been made? For this ointment could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they were infuriated with her. But Jesus said, Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a noble deed on Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her."

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Mark 14:9 says, "And truly I say to you, Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her." According to the Lord's word here, wherever the gospel is preached, this story should be told immediately afterwards. If the gospel is preached, but this story is not told, there is a great lack. Therefore, we have to speak of this story today. This is what the Lord told me as I was praying yesterday.

When did this story take place? Let us read verse 1: “Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were two days away. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to seize Him by craftiness and kill Him.” The cross was in sight! The shadow of the cross was in sight!

What is the most significant point of this story? We can express it with the words of 1 Peter 3:15. It is to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” The word sanctify is a verb. This story shows a practical way for the carrying out of this verse.

This story only invokes men to do one thing—to sanctify Christ as Lord. The Lord’s word, “Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her,” is an instruction to us that, after the preaching of the gospel, there must be this kind of fruit. This story unfolds to us the meaning of this kind of fruit.

“A woman came [Mary—John 12:3], having an alabaster flask of ointment, of very costly pure nard.” Pure nard is precious enough, whereas a very costly, pure nard is unmatched in excellence. This very costly, pure nard was inside an alabaster flask. The alabaster flask was also very precious. Not only was Mary offering to the Lord a costly ointment, but the flask that contained the ointment was also very precious. We can offer to the Lord only what is most precious.

“She broke the alabaster flask.” Why did she do this? This kind of pure nard came from Persia, and there was no way for the ointment to come out except by breaking the flask. In this way, there could be no counterfeit.

“And poured it over His head.” When she did this, the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment (John 12:3). Not only was the house filled with the fragrance then; even now as we read this passage, we can sense the fragrance! Even the house we are meeting in right now seems to be filled with fragrance! This love to the Lord and this consecration to Him indeed is a fragrance that has lasted until now and will last until eternity.

John 12:3 said that she “anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair.” She placed her glory at the feet of the Lord! For a woman, her hair is her glory (1 Cor. 11:15).

At first she was only seen; now she could be smelled. She drew not only

men's criticism, but men's indignation. However, she ignored all of them and did not care for them. It did not cross her mind that this was the house of a leper. She did not consider her present family condition nor her future hardships. She did not care for the criticism and the indignation of others. She simply did what she did.

She offered to the Lord in the way of "risking all"! We should be just as bold and willing as she was. "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment." This is absolute consecration. There are two meanings to consecration. One is to offer something to the Lord, and the other is to be separated solely unto the Lord in a dedicated way.

The ointment is for sanctification. The tabernacle with all its utensils was anointed. The word Christ means the "Messiah," which is the Anointed One. We should sanctify this anointed Christ as Lord. We should anoint Him and own Him as Lord, even as our Lord. We should offer up everything to Him and should heap everything upon Christ. We should not be afraid of following Him too foolishly or loving Him too fervently. When a young Christian bade farewell to an older man, the latter said, "I have only one wish, that you be a fervent lover of Christ!" There cannot be a limit to our loving the Lord, our serving Him, obeying Him, and our allegiance to Him; we can never overdo these things. The Lord loves to see us loving Him in a reckless way. He loves to see us loving Him beyond reason and against human affection. To Him, the gospel should result in men's being constrained by His death to love Him, consecrate to Him, and fully obey Him to the point that others would consider them extreme.

The degree that we offer ourselves to Him is dependent on the worth of the Lord to us. To those who believe, the Lord is precious (1 Pet. 2:7). Peter knew what this word meant. This is why in his Epistles, he mentioned the word precious many times. He added the word precious to the blood, the faith, the stone, the virtues, and so forth.

What did the disciples do when Mary acted this way? "But there were some who were indignantly commenting among themselves: Why has this waste of the ointment been made?" (Mark 14:4). They thought that this was a waste. But on whom was the ointment poured? Was the One being anointed not worthy of the

ointment? This ointment was poured on the Lord. If this was a waste, it would mean that the Lord was not worthy of it. Was the Lord indeed not worthy of this ointment? Can anything be called a waste when it is applied to the Lord? Those who have never loved the Lord with a single heart think that too much consecration and obedience is a waste. In man's eyes, obeying the Lord, loving Him, and giving up everything for Him may sometimes be too much and may be a waste, but such criticism only shows the degree of love that the criticizing ones have.

"For this ointment could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and given to the poor" (v. 5). They had a better way of using the money, which was to give to the poor. They considered it too much to serve the Lord but not too much to serve men. If a man does not have a love for Christ, he will surely replace the love that he ought to offer to the Lord with works that he does for the Lord. If a man thinks that offering the best to the Lord is a waste, he will surely spend his best on men. If a man is not a Christian, he saves everything for himself. Since he is a Christian, he knows that it is wrong to be selfish. The question is, on whom should the three hundred denarii be spent? Either it is spent on Christ, or it is spent on men. What a pity that many believers today are like the disciples of that day. They do not have a heart single for Christ; they do not have the chastity and the fervent love for Christ. Instead, they try to fill this lack with hard works.

"And they were infuriated with her" (v. 5). At the beginning they were only criticizing. Later they began to be infuriated with the woman, but Mary could not keep back the ointment just because they were infuriated. The flask was broken and the ointment had flowed out. No sacrifice can be retrieved from the altar. Mary dared to do this out of love to the Lord. She did not care about the others' criticism and fury.

What did our Lord say? He said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her?" (v. 6). What the Lord meant was that it was all right for her to love Him and obey Him too much. There was no need to criticize her. Criticizing her this way was to trouble her. Oh, even if we love the Lord too much or offer to Him too much, He will still forgive us!

The Lord thought that it would be wonderful if they would love Him as

much as Mary did. But if they could not do it themselves, they should not stop others from loving Him this way. Our hands should not touch all those who love the Lord, and we should not bother them.

Such an act of Mary was indeed a waste and was too much in the eyes of man. To the ordinary mind, it was enough to use some ointment; there was no need to use the pure nard. And even if pure nard was used, there was no need to have it in an alabaster flask. Even if one used an alabaster flask, there was no need to spend three hundred denarii on it. They could not keep themselves from criticizing and even becoming infuriated. But to the Lord, this act should not be criticized. The Lord said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her?" To the Lord, their criticism and fury were a kind of trouble to her. The Lord thought that such an act was permissible. This was why He said, "She has done a noble deed on Me"! Mary's act was a noble deed and should not be criticized.

At that time, three hundred denarii was enough money to buy a slave. It was enough to hire a few laborers for a few months. When the Lord went to Bethany and stayed at the house of Mary, Martha was busy serving; she did not have any slave to help her. This shows that they were not rich. But Mary did not care for her own ease and comfort; she spent her all on the Lord. We cannot be too much in loving the Lord and in serving Him. It is not a waste to spend everything on the Lord.

"She has done a noble deed on Me" (v. 6). The Lord was opposed to the disciples' concept, who thought that such an anointing and consecration to Him was a waste. The Lord said that it was a noble deed and not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him too much, to obey Him too much, and to be spent on Him too much; it is not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we forget about the criticism of those who are older in the Lord. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we forget about the need of the poor outside. It is not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we waste everything on Him. This is not a waste. The Lord thinks that we can never be too much in the way we treat Him. Our love to Him can never be too much. Our obedience to Him can never be too much. No matter how man sees it, and no matter how those who serve together criticize, the Lord says that this is a noble deed. The result of

the preaching of the gospel is not only to send sinners to heaven but to make every saved person a lover of Christ. This is why the Scripture says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed!" (1 Cor. 16:22).

All the Mary's should be satisfied with this word from the Lord. If we expect approval from our fellow disciples, we have to live according to the worldly wisdom, and we cannot consecrate out of a care for what is on the Lord's heart. We should be satisfied with the Lord's approval, and we should not be concerned about men's criticism.

The Lord was not opposed to the idea of giving to the poor. He was only opposed to their remark that this was too much and that it was a waste to do it on the Lord. He told them, "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you do not always have Me" (Mark 14:7). The Lord meant that there would be many more opportunities for them to give to the poor, but the time was short for them to serve Him.

"She has done what she could" (v. 8). The question here is not how much was done but how much was left. For a rich man to give a little to the Lord is not difficult, but it is difficult for a poor person to offer up all he has to the Lord. "She has done what she could." She did not save anything for herself. Praise comes from the word all. Without giving "all," there is no love. If we love God, we have to love with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind. Many times our attitude toward the Lord is no better than our attitude toward a taxi driver. Sometimes we give a few coins to the taxi driver, but we think it is a waste to give even a few coins to the Lord. What a pity this is!

Why did Mary do this? Let us see what the Lord said.

"She has anointed My body beforehand for the burial" (v. 8). In another two days the Lord would die. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord mentioned four times to the disciples that He was going to die, but they did not understand it. Only Mary understood. She understood that the Lord was going to die for her and that He would die to deliver her from the punishment of hell. She loved the Lord, and she had to anoint Him. The real power of love to the Lord comes from the death of the Lord. Those who do not understand the Lord's death cannot really love Him.

One has to be on time to anoint the Lord. After the Lord resurrected, it was too late to anoint Him! Mary Magdalene bought some ointment and went early on the first day of the week to anoint the Lord's body, but she could not anoint Him. The Lord had resurrected, and it was too late.

"Anointed My body beforehand." This is Christ. Today is the time for us to consecrate ourselves to the Lord. If we wait, it may be too late! After the Lord resurrected, it was too late to anoint Him. After we have resurrected, it will be too late to consecrate ourselves to Him and love Him single-heartedly. At the time of the resurrection, even if there were a thousand worlds, we would gladly give them all up to love the Lord Jesus. But now we need to have the fullness of love that we will have for Him after the resurrection. Now is the time for us to love the Lord.

Romans 6 speaks of presenting our members to God. Romans 12:1 speaks of the presenting of our bodies in particular. This is total consecration. It is easier to present the members, but it is hard to present the body. However, such a presenting is holy. True holiness comes from an absolute consecration. This presenting is also reasonable. It is not a waste. May we offer ourselves absolutely to the Lord, and may we love Him, serve Him, and obey Him while today is still today.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## MARY

## •Scripture Reading: John 20:1-18

John 20:1-18 “Now on the first day of the week, Mary the Magdalene came early to the tomb while it was yet dark and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. She ran therefore and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. Peter therefore went forth, as well as the other disciple, and came to the tomb. And the two ran together, yet the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came first to the tomb. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there; however, he did not enter. Then Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beheld the linen cloths lying there And the handkerchief which had been over His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in one place apart. At that time therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, entered, and he saw and believed; For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He had to rise from among the dead. The disciples therefore went away again to their own home. But Mary stood outside at the tomb weeping. Then as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb And beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him. When she said these things, she turned backward and beheld Jesus standing there, yet she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing that He was the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni! (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet

ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God. Mary the Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that He had said these things to her."

*  *  *  *

After the Lord Jesus resurrected from the dead, He manifested Himself to many people. The Lord Jesus manifested Himself first to Mary the Magdalene. The Lord was eager to manifest Himself to Peter because Peter was in the midst of weakness, but He was more eager to manifest Himself to Mary the Magdalene. He was eager to manifest Himself to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus because they were heading in the wrong direction, but He was more eager to manifest Himself to Mary the Magdalene. He was eager to manifest Himself to John because John was the one He loved, but He was more eager to manifest Himself to Mary the Magdalene. He was eager to manifest Himself to Thomas because Thomas did not believe His resurrection, but He was more eager to manifest Himself to Mary the Magdalene. There were other disciples to whom the Lord was eager to manifest Himself. But the Lord did not manifest Himself to them first. He manifested Himself first to Mary the Magdalene. Why did the Lord manifest Himself first to Mary the Magdalene before Peter, John, Thomas, the other disciples, and the people?

Mary the Magdalene was the last one to leave the site of the cross; she was the first one to come to the tomb. Besides Mary the Magdalene, many others were saved. Besides Mary the Magdalene, many others had demons cast out. But only Mary the Magdalene came early in the morning to the tomb to seek the Lord. There is no doubt that she did not understand many things. Some may even have thought that she did not have a good mind; but she received the best portion, a portion which we may not have. Her better portion was her love for the Lord. Every Christian should desire and pursue after this.

John 1:29 says that when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John the Baptist said this when he saw the Lord for the first time. In verse 36 John saw the Lord

Jesus again and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” John did not say “who takes away the sin of the world” the second time. Had he forgotten? No. This is the experience of a saved person. When a person sees the Lord for the first time, he thinks about himself as well as the Lord. He thinks of the Lord as the Lamb of God who takes away his sin. When he sees the Lord for the second time, he forgets about himself and sees only the Lord. The first time, he thanks Him because of the grace He gives. The second time, he draws near to Him because of Himself. Our baptism is our union with the Lord, while the breaking of bread is our remembrance of the Lord Himself. First, we become the Lord’s believers; then we become His lovers. First, we believe in the Lord’s work; then we are drawn to the Lord’s person. Many of us only know the preciousness of the Lord’s work, but not the preciousness of the Lord Himself. We only know the grace we have received, but not the loveliness of the Lord. The difference between Mary the Magdalene and the others was that she not only appreciated salvation, she also treasured the Savior.

Oh, many people had their demons cast out by the Lord, but only Mary the Magdalene sought after the Lord. Although other women came to seek the Lord, the very first one to come to the tomb was Mary the Magdalene. On the first day of the week, early in the morning while it was still dark, she came to the tomb. She did not care for anything; she came to seek the Lord. A brother once said something very good about this. He said, “Since the Lord Jesus died, the world in the eyes of Mary had become nothing but a void!” The whole world could not draw Mary’s heart, because One had already taken her heart away. Mary’s heart was a heart completely occupied by the Lord. Mary’s heart was a heart captured by the Lord. Oh, the heart of Mary the Magdalene was seized by the Lord!

When Mary came to the tomb, what did she see? What did she do? She thought, “My beloved Lord has died. Today all I want is to have a look at His body.” However, the body was gone! She could only run to Peter and John and say to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” Peter and the other disciple, John, then went to the tomb. They ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb. Stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen cloths; yet he did not go in.

Simon Peter followed him, went into the tomb, and saw the linen cloths; the handkerchief that had been over His head was not lying with the linen cloths, but was folded up in one place apart. Then the other disciple went in, saw, and believed. After the two disciples saw this, what did they do? The Bible says, "The disciples therefore went away again to their own home." They still had a home in the world which they regarded as their best. They still had a home. Although they found that the Lord was not there, they did not feel anything. They felt that going back to their own home was the most important thing to do. Besides the Lord, they still had a place to go.

What did Mary do? "But Mary stood outside at the tomb weeping." She had nowhere to go! She could not go away! How profound is the word "but!" Mary thought in her heart, "You have a home to which you can go, but I cannot because the Lord is not here. You think that the disappearance of the Lord is not important, but I cannot feel the same. Who has taken Him away? How can I leave?" She stood outside of the tomb weeping. In her eyes the world had become a void! The Lord was not there. What else could she do? She could not do anything but stand outside of the tomb and weep. Oh, Mary's heart was a widow's heart! The disciples who followed after the Lord went away. The disciples who had some knowledge went away. John, who loved the Lord, went away. Peter, who was so bold, went away. But Mary, a simple woman out of whom the Lord had driven seven demons, was caught by the Lord. She had no peace. She had no comfort. She could not go away. The Lord was not there; everything was over. Her heart was missing something. Her heart was empty; therefore, she could only weep.

"Then as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb and beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When Mary saw the angels, she was neither surprised nor frightened. Why? Her heart was completely set on the matter of "they have taken away my Lord." She paid no attention to other things. Her heart was so single in thinking about the Lord that even the manifestation of the angels could not attract her attention.

She did not care for what the angels were doing. Her heart was only for her Lord. Even the angels could not move her heart.

Perhaps someone may think, "John loved the Lord so much. If I could only follow after him, it would be wonderful. Peter was dealt with by the Lord very much. If I could listen to his instruction once, it would be wonderful." But Mary's heart was not concerned with these things. Although Peter and John were present, it was not enough. Her heart was a widow's heart! You may think that she should have been glad to have angels talking to her. But Mary did not feel anything. While others may think that the angels were special and attractive in such white and shining clothes, Mary thought only about her Lord being taken away. The angels could not fill up her empty heart, and she could only weep. She thought, "The Lord is gone; I cannot be satisfied anymore! Although Peter and John are here, the Lord is gone; I cannot be satisfied! Although angels are here, the Lord is not here; I cannot be satisfied."

The angels asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." She thought that even though the Lord was dead, His body was still precious. It did not occur to her that the Lord had resurrected. In Matthew the Lord told the disciples four times that He would be raised on the third day after He died (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32). But she did not know anything about this. On that day she was without hope. It would be good enough if she could only have the body of the Lord. Although she was so ignorant, her singleness in wanting the Lord caused the Lord to reveal Himself to her.

The reason the Lord manifested Himself to Mary was to satisfy a heart that was hungry and thirsty for Him. Peter and John went back to their own home. The Lord did not go to find them. But here was a heart which was single and wholly for Him. Therefore, the Lord needed to look for her. Brothers and sisters, it will not matter much if we have less knowledge. What matters is that we have a heart which can urge the Lord to look for us. This is the most precious thing.

"When she said these things, she turned backward and beheld Jesus standing there, yet she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing that He was the

gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." She saw the Lord Jesus, but she thought He was the gardener. The Lord asked her whom she sought. She said, "If you have carried Him away." She forgot to say she was seeking the Lord. She was seeking Jesus the Nazarene. She only said, "Him." In Mary's eyes, there was only one "Him" in the world. In Mary's heart, she supposed everyone knew who "Him" was. Mary supposed everyone should recognize "Him." Mary did not care for anyone but only one "Him." This was Mary's heart.

In Song of Solomon 1:2, the beginning of the first sentence says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." These were the words of the Shulamite who longed for Solomon. The One Mary's heart longed for was "Him." What she said with her mouth was also "Him." In her heart and mouth there was only "Him." If there was "Him," she had enough. We should have enough to have only "Him" in our heart also. It does not matter if we lack spiritual knowledge. It is enough to have "Him." It is not necessary to have more knowledge; what we need is a heart that is wholly for Him.

"If you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." What kind of person was Mary? She was a woman. We do not know whether she was weak or physically strong, but we know that her heart wanted to take Him. She did not consider if her strength was great enough. She did not consider how far the way was. She only considered that she wanted to take Him. Love does not know the meaning of "difficulty." The most wonderful thing in the world is that the presence of love makes everything easy. She did not care for anything. She only wanted to know where others had taken Him. She would then go to take Him. This was Mary's heart.

Under this circumstance, the Lord had to reveal Himself to her. The Lord could not let her weep anymore. The Lord could not first go to find Peter and John, nor could He go to find the two disciples who were on the way to Emmaus. He also could not go to find Thomas. The Lord had to first fill up a heart that was hungry and thirsty for Him. The Lord had to manifest Himself first to Mary.

How did the Lord manifest Himself to her? "Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni! (which means Teacher)." Have we

heard the Lord speak “Mary” with such a voice? At the time of your prayer, in your chamber, if you hear this voice say, “Mary,” it will be enough. When the Lord said, “Mary,” Mary recognized Him. This was a revelation. Once the Lord speaks, it is enough. When the shepherd calls his sheep, the eyes of his sheep are opened. Once Mary heard the voice of the Lord, she knew that it was not the gardener but the Master. She did not need to weep anymore. Once the Lord reveals Himself to us, there is no need to say anything more. The Lord only said “Mary” once, and she immediately recognized that it was the Lord. Brothers and sisters, do we recognize the voice of the Lord?

There was one brother who knew of a family with only a mother and her son. Every evening the son rode home on a bicycle. When he was near home, he always whistled. His mother always knew when her son was back. One day this brother was talking to the mother in her home. As he was preparing to leave, she asked him to stay because her son would soon be home. He asked how she knew, and she replied that she had heard the sound of her son’s whistling. To other people this sound had no meaning, but to his mother it was especially meaningful. The Lord said, “Mary.” Other people may not have felt anything, but Mary recognized this voice. Once she heard it, she recognized that this was the Lord.

Following this, “Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” In Matthew 28, because the women were worshipping Him, the Lord allowed them to touch Him. Here the Lord did not allow Mary to touch Him. What does this mean? Mary had a strong desire to keep the Lord on the earth. She wanted to catch Him and not let go of Him. But what the Lord received on the earth was nothing more than the crown of thorns, the cross, and the tomb. Now the Lord would ascend to the heavens, to the place of “My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” This is why He said to Mary, “Do not touch Me.” Do not keep Him on the earth. The Lord not only resurrected, but He also ascended, becoming the Head of the new mankind and the representative of man. Man had never been in the heavens. By the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the first man went there. Now, those who believe in

Him will also go there. Hebrews 2:9-10 says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor...For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory.” Because of the suffering of death, the Lord received glory and honor, and many sons will also be brought into glory. The Lord has gone. The disciples will go too. After resurrection the disciples were called brothers by the Lord for the first time. In other words, the Lord is the firstborn, and we are the many sons. The Lord resurrected and ascended. His Father is also our Father; His God is also our God. Therefore, the Lord said to Mary, “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.”

Now what else did Mary have to say? She had nothing more to say. She had enough. She truly had enough. Therefore, Mary went back. Now she could go back. Brothers and sisters, if you lack this revelation, if you have not seen the Lord and have not heard the word of the Lord, can you blame the Lord? No. You cannot blame the Lord, because you do not have Mary’s hunger. Please ask yourselves if you have deeply longed for the Lord. Have you longed for the Son of God from the heart? Do you know that the heart of the Lord will never be touched by your rank or by your reputation? But if you truly long for the Lord, even if but for a short time, His heart will be touched! May God create in you a desire so that you will long after the Son of God and love Him single-heartedly.

## MESSAGE NINE

# THE PRINCIPLE OF PRAYING THREE TIMES

**●Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:44; 2 Cor. 12:8**

Matt. 26:44 "And leaving them, He went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same word again."

2 Cor. 12:8 "Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me."

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A key to prayer is to pray "three times" to the Lord. "Three" does not refer literally to the number three; it merely signifies multiplicity. The Lord Jesus prayed to God three times in Gethsemane, and when God answered His prayer, He stopped praying. Paul also prayed three times to the Lord, and when he received an answer from the Lord, he stopped praying. Hence, all prayers have to take care of the principle of praying three times. This does not mean that we should pray once, twice, and three times and then stop. It means that we have to pray until we are through and until God has answered us.

The principle of praying three times is an important principle. Not only must we pay attention to the principle of praying three times in our personal prayer, but we must also take care of the same principle in the prayer meeting. If we expect our prayer to fulfill the ministry of church prayer and accomplish what God wants us to accomplish, we must keep this principle in mind.

The principle of praying three times means that we have to pray in a thorough way. We have to pray until we get through, until we are clear about God's will, and until we receive an answer from the Lord. In the prayer meeting we must never think that just because a matter has been brought up and a brother has prayed about it we do not need to pray about it more. Suppose a sister is sick, and we pray for her. After one brother has prayed, it does not mean

that I do not have to pray more. No, after that brother has prayed, I can still pray, and another person can still pray. This does not mean that every matter must be covered by three prayers. It means that whoever has the burden should pray. Sometimes we need to pray five or ten times. The important thing is to pray until the burden is released. This is the principle of praying three times. This is the key to success in our prayer meeting.

Our prayer should not be like grasshoppers, jumping from one place to another. We should not jump to a second thing before the first thing is thoroughly prayed over and then jump back to the first thing before the second thing is thoroughly prayed over. This kind of skipping prayer will not release the burden or receive answers from God. Such prayers are useless and do not fulfill the ministry of prayer.

In order to fulfill the ministry of prayer, we must have a burden to pray before the Lord. We are not setting up a law; we are merely laying down a principle. We have to know that burden is the key to prayer. If a man does not feel any burden to pray for a certain thing, he will not succeed in his prayer. In the prayer meeting, many brothers and sisters mention many things in prayer. But if you are not touched by those things, you cannot pray for them. Every brother and sister must come to the prayer meeting with a burden for prayer before they can pray. At the same time, we should not merely pay attention to our burden but to the burden of the other brothers and sisters as well. Suppose a sister has a husband who is giving her a difficult time, while another brother has incurred a sickness. In the prayer meeting, one brother may pray for the salvation of the sister's husband. After this, another brother may pray for God to heal the sick brother. Then a third brother may remember another matter. These prayers are isolated prayers; they are not according to the principle of praying three times. There has not been a thorough prayer in one matter before going on to another matter. In the prayer meeting, we have to watch to see whether the burden for prayer has been released. If the prayer burden for that sister has been released, we can go on to pray for the sick brother. But if the first prayer burden has not been released, we should not jump to the second or the third thing and pray for those matters. If the burden of the whole meeting is not released

concerning a certain matter, we should not insert another prayer according to our personal feelings. We have to sense the spirit of the whole meeting and enter into the feeling of the whole meeting. Some matters are answered after one prayer. Some matters are answered after two prayers. Some matters require three or five prayers before the burden can be released. No matter how many prayers there are, the burden must be released before the prayers can stop. The principle of praying three times is to pray until the burden is released.

We have to note the difference between personal prayers and prayers in the prayer meeting. When we are praying by ourselves, we only have to take care of our personal burden. But in the prayer meeting, we have to take care of the burden of the meeting, and we must not care for our personal burden alone. Therefore, in the prayer meeting, we have to learn to sense the feeling of the meeting. Some matters only require one prayer; there is no need to pray anymore for them because the meeting has no more burden for it. But some matters require more than one prayer; they need to be prayed about over and over again. If a burden is not released, we should not pray for another matter. We can only change the subject when the burden is released. Only then can we pick up another burden from the Lord to pray. In the prayer meeting, we have to learn that when one prays for a matter, the second, third, fourth, and fifth person should also pray for the same matter. Even if one person can pray by himself or five persons can pray by themselves, when they come together, they may not be able to pray in one accord. The prayer of one accord is something that one learns. One person may know how to pray by himself, and five persons may know how to pray by themselves. But when they come together, they still need to learn a new kind of prayer; they need to learn to pray in one accord. Our prayer in the meeting is something that is learned; it is not something that we know how to do right from the beginning.

If two persons pray in one accord, God will answer this prayer (Matt. 18:19). This is not a small thing. We have to enter into others' feelings and know what the prayer of the church is. We have to learn to feel whether or not a prayer burden has been released. If we do this, we will know how to fulfill the ministry of prayer in the meeting.

# MESSAGE TEN

## THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH MEETINGS

### •Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 14:26-33

1 Cor. 14:26-33 "What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two, or at the most three, and in turn, and one should interpret; But if there is no interpreter, he should be silent in the church, and speak to himself and to God. And as to prophets, two or three should speak, and the others discern. But if something is revealed to another sitting by, the first should be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,"

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### ONE

Ephesians 2:22 shows us that the church is being built together to be a dwelling place of God in spirit. The whole church gathering together is the dwelling place of God. One characteristic of God's dwelling place is the presence of His light. We know that in the temple in ancient times, there was sunlight for the outer court and light from the lampstands for the Holy Place. However, in the Holy of Holies, God manifested His own glory and radiance, and He Himself was the light. When we become God's dwelling place, there must be light among us because God manifests His glory through His dwelling place. If we meet in a proper way, we can look to God to shine forth His light among us, and we can look to Him to speak to us.

## TWO

First Corinthians 14 teaches us how we should meet. Verse 26 says, “What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” This means that when we meet, some will have a hymn, some will have a teaching, some will have a revelation, some will speak in tongues, and some will have interpretation of tongues. Everyone builds up the church with what they have. Therefore, before the Lord, we must have a very careful understanding of the meaning of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will not guide those who do not have anything to say. He will not guide those who have a hymn to teach or those with revelations to interpret the tongues. The Holy Spirit does not do foolish things. Only foolish people do foolish things. The question of supply at the meeting is not settled at the time of the meeting but in our own house. What we have at home will be what we have at the meeting. What we do not have at home we will not have at the meeting. The “has” in this verse is not the result of personal preference, personal thought, or sudden emotional impulse. What a person receives as he exercises daily before God is what he “has”; they are the things that are constituted in the spirit. This spiritual accumulation is what we have, and it is what we can use to supply the need of the church in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, those who have a hymn should supply the church with a hymn. Those who have a revelation should supply the church with a revelation. Those with a teaching should supply the church with a teaching. Every one supplies the need in the church with what he has, not with what he does not have. Whatever you have is what you can minister to the church. For instance, you may have a hymn that you want to sing; it keeps coming to you, and you cannot help it. This means there is music in your heart; there is a hymn in your heart. This is your hymn. You do not come to the meeting and look for a hymn. Rather, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you supply the hymn you “have” for the edification of the church. There may be a few words which have become very precious to you during the past few days. These are your words. Similarly, you may have a revelation or a teaching; you just supply the church with what you have.

Brothers and sisters, what has the Lord done or said to you these days?

## THREE

First Corinthians 14:26 tells us that the Holy Spirit guides us by means of what we have, while verses 27 to 33 tell us that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is also in accord with the circumstances. For instance, the evening meeting in the church ends at nine o'clock. The Holy Spirit will not guide you to stand up and give a long talk when it is nearly nine; He will make you realize that time is running out and that you should not call a long hymn or talk too much. While you supply the church with what you have, you must also learn the lesson that "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." If you have something, you can bring it to the meeting, but you must consider what others have. In the meeting there may be more than twenty brothers and each one may have a hymn; you also have a hymn. When you realize that two or three have called their hymns, you no longer need to call yours. There is no need for each of the twenty or more brothers to call a hymn; if this happens, the singing will go on until midnight. This is contrary to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants us to do all things becomingly and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). What we have qualifies us to supply others, while the circumstances teach us to be guided by the Spirit. In our meetings we should observe the principle of "two or three" (1 Cor. 14:29). The Spirit will not guide us to supply what we do not have, nor will He contradict the principle of "two or three." If we have something before the Lord, we can be guided to stand up and speak. However, if other brothers have received the same thing, we should hold our peace.

## FOUR

There are two difficulties in the church. First, those who do not "have" think that they "have." In many instances, a child of God is not the kind of person he wants to be, yet he insists on speaking as if he were such a one. In reality, God has never said anything to him or worked in him. He has nothing within him, yet he likes to talk, and he likes to express himself. When this happens, the church is not built up. Second, some people are unwilling to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Lord may have spoken to a brother or a sister, yet he or she waits

and holds back from speaking. In this way the church is deprived of the supply it deserves. If you find that you are empty inside, you should keep silent. If you know that you "have" something, you should supply the church. The Holy Spirit dispenses life to the meeting through what you have, making it possible for God's children to touch life. God may put a word within you; the same word may be in you while you are at work and while you are walking on the street. You realize that God has spoken to you. You should realize that this word is not for you alone but also for the church. When you "have" something, you should supply the church with what you have.

At the time the tabernacle was built in the Old Testament times, the people dedicated their gold and silver to God. The same is true with us today. We should give what we have. Some have a revelation, some have a teaching, and some have a hymn. Let everyone bring what he has. At the time of the building of the tabernacle, the Spirit of God gave wisdom and understanding to men to make fitting utensils out of the gold and the silver and a tabernacle from all kinds of materials. The materials themselves were offered up by the Israelites, while the completion of the tabernacle was brought about through the arrangement of the Holy Spirit. Today we bring in the materials, and the Holy Spirit arranges them. In this way, the church is built up.

## FIVE

In our daily walk, we should have constant communion with God and look to Him for His work in us, so that we will "have" something and be able to supply the church with what we have. We should remember that God guides us in the meeting according to what we already have—a hymn or a revelation. We must first have something that we can share with others. Since we have learned and accumulated something during our daily walk, we can be guided in the meetings and render a supply to others. What we give to the church should not be something that we come up with on the spur of the moment or something that is according to our own good idea but something we have in our daily life, that is, something God has given us during our daily life. During this time, God brings us forward in a certain way, and He makes us a certain kind of person. As a result,

you supply others with what you have. Ideas do not count; doctrines are of no avail; what is of value is what we really have. If we supply the church with what we have, the church will be built up, and the brothers and sisters will receive help. If everyone supplies the church with what they have, the result will be living and rich.

Under normal circumstances in the church, the Holy Spirit will not guide a person to give what he does not have. God used an ass only to deal with Balaam (Num. 22). If we really live a life that befits the children of God, our meeting will become God's sanctuary. Let us pray that we may "have" and that we may use what we "have" to supply the church.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## HEART AND LIGHT

**•Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:8, 6:21-23; 2 Cor. 3:16; Psa. 73:1, 13, 16-17, 25**

Matt. 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

6:21-23 "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

2 Cor. 3:16 "But whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

Psa. 73:1 "Surely God is good to Israel, / To those who are pure in heart."

13 "Surely I have purified my heart in vain, / And I have washed my hands in innocence."

16-17 "When I considered this in order to understand it, / It was a troublesome task in my sight, Until I went into the sanctuary of God; / Then I perceived their end."

25 "Whom do I have in heaven but You? / And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth."

* * * *

These passages all speak of the heart and light. Let us consider the relationship between the heart and light.

Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Seeing is related to light. If you can see, there must be light. Without light, it is impossible to see. This verse also says, "They shall see God." God is light. Therefore, to see God is to see light. The condition for seeing light is having a pure heart; those who are pure in heart can see light.

Matthew 6:21-23 says, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” This verse again mentions the relationship between the heart and light. Whenever your heart follows earthly treasure, your eye cannot be single; you are in darkness and cannot see light.

Second Corinthians 3:16 says, “But whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” What is a veil? A veil blocks a person from seeing. Any time your heart turns to the Lord and is proper, the veil in you will be removed and there will be light.

Psalm 73:1 declares, “Surely God is good to Israel,/To those who are pure in heart.” This is the subject. Then the psalmist said that for a time his eyes were on the prosperity and success of the wicked, and he almost slipped. Yet he did not fall because his heart was still somewhat pure. He did not understand until he entered into the sanctuary of God. He said that before he saw the light he was like a beast, irrational and ignorant. But when he entered into the sanctuary of God, he saw; then he said, “Whom do I have in heaven but You?/And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth” (v. 25). This is the experience of one who sees light after being in extreme darkness. He had not fallen into total darkness because his heart was still somewhat pure. Hence, there was still an opportunity for him to receive God’s grace and to receive light.

These four passages show us that when the heart is pure, one sees God; when the heart is single, there is light within; when the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away; and when the heart is pure, one does not slip and can know God further. Since there is such a close relationship between the heart and light, it is necessary to deal with our heart in order see light.

What is meant by the “heart”? What does it refer to? This is not easy to explain. According to the Scriptures, man is divided into three parts. Outwardly there is his body, and inwardly there is his spirit; between the body and the spirit there is the soul. Is the heart in the spirit or in the soul? It is difficult to say; however, we can say that man’s heart includes his conscience (Heb. 10:22; 1 John

3:20-21), his mind (John 12:40; Luke 2:35), his emotion (John 14:1; Luke 24:32), and his will (Acts 11:23). Our mind denotes the part with which we think, our emotions denote the part with which we feel, and our will denotes the part with which we make resolutions. The heart is linked to the spirit and also to the soul. We may say that the heart includes the mind, but the heart is not just the mind; the heart includes the emotions, but the heart is not just the emotions; the heart also includes the will, but the heart is not just the will. The heart is something in between the spirit and the soul. The heart occupies an important place in man. The issues of life stem from our heart, and the condition of our heart determines the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

What is light? First John 1:5 says, "God is light." Only God is light. It is impossible for us to encounter light without encountering God. God is the Father of lights (James 1:17). God is the source of light. Therefore, when we say that we see the light, it means that we see God; we have met Him inwardly. Because we see God, we have light.

What kind of heart enables a person to see God? Those who are pure in heart shall see God. What does pure in heart mean? A pure heart desires only God and it is focused on God. It is a heart that is for nothing else in this universe except God. Only those who have such a pure heart can see God and can see light.

Dear brothers and sisters, have we not seen other saints stumble? Why have they stumbled? The Scriptures give us a principle: Those who stumble must be in darkness. Some may stumble in the daytime, but it is because they do not see the thing that stumbles them. This is the same as those who walk in darkness. Any kind of stumbling proves that a man is in darkness. Brothers and sisters, regardless of how sound your excuses may be, if you stumble, you are in darkness. First John 2:10-11 says, "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause of stumbling in him; but he who hates his brother is in the darkness." If a man is in the light, he will not stumble. If he stumbles, he is clearly in darkness and not in the light. Is it possible for a man whose heart is only for God and for nothing else to be stumbled? If your heart is for God and nothing else, nothing can stumble you. Even if you are misunderstood, despised, and opposed by everyone, you will still not be stumbled. This is because your heart is

not after man's understanding, esteem, sympathy, or praise; your heart is only after God. If you are after man's understanding and esteem, you will surely stumble when others misunderstand or despise you. But if your heart is only after God, you would not be stumbled even if your circumstances were ten times worse. There is only one kind of person who stumbles—one whose heart is not inclined toward God but rather is seeking and longing for something apart from God. This kind of person lives in darkness. God is like the sun, and we are like mirrors. In order for a mirror to reflect the light of the sun, it must face the sun. Whenever the mirror is misaligned a little, it will lose light. Similarly, whenever our heart is not properly focused, our words will not be properly focused; we will immediately have complaining words, ill-humored words, criticizing words, and gossiping words. This is a very strong proof that we are in the dark and not in the light. Those who are in the light do not stumble. Some brothers and sisters can praise with tears in their eyes. Although their hearts are sorrowful, they can still praise God. They can do this because their hearts are inclined toward God. They live in the light, and nothing can stumble them.

For instance, if your heart is for God and not for your clothes, you will not become angry or complain when your clothes are spoiled or torn. If your heart is not for God but rather for your clothes, the minute your clothes are damaged, your heart will be provoked, and you will lose your temper and complain. This shows that you are in darkness. Only when your heart is toward God will you not be taken away by your clothes. Only then will you have the light, and only then will you see something.

Suppose your heart is on your children, and you love them more than God. When you do this you are in darkness. This does not mean that parents should not love their children. It means that if the parents' hearts are captured by their children, if they indulge in their love for them and have more regard for them than they have for God, they will not have any light. Some brothers and sisters are very clear concerning other things, but they are blind with love for their children. For them, it is reasonable even if their children behave unreasonably. These brothers and sisters are in darkness. Their hearts must turn to God before they can be free from the bondage of their children and before they can have

light and see.

With some brothers and sisters, their hearts are covetous for money. They are surely in darkness because the Lord clearly says that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." When money is in front of their eyes, they will not see God or any light, and they will definitely be in darkness. But if they free their heart from money, they will receive light.

Whenever you are about to engage in a dispute with another person, you should first check to see whether you are dealing with this person directly or whether you have first turned to God. Then you can deal with this person while keeping your heart on God. Only when your heart is aimed at God will it be enlightened; only then will it see accurately. Otherwise, you will speak foolishly and debate foolishly. You will insist that the other party is wrong and that you are right. If your heart is focused on God, many disputes will not become an issue at all.

This is not all. Those who are learning to serve the Lord should be alerted to another thing: not only can man, things, and matters become the source of our darkness, but even our service to the Lord or our gifts and talents from God can become the source of our darkness. Regardless of how useful God makes us and how much gift and power He gives us, these things can easily cut off our relationship with God. If our heart is attached to our work or our gift, the most dangerous time is when our work prospers, because we can fall into darkness easily. This is because none of these things is light; only God is light. There is no light besides God. If we put our heart in anything apart from God, whether it is good or bad, it will prevent us from seeing God. Our heart must not be held by our work; it must not be held by our gift or by the result of our work. Our heart should be toward God. Only then can we have light, and only then will we see.

Brothers and sisters, our heart must be proper and pure, and it must be toward God. If our heart is not toward God, we will surely be in darkness. It is most pitiful to be in such a condition. When our heart is focused on God, we will see light. Once we have light, all the improper things will spontaneously fall away from us. When the heart is proper, there will be light. Once the light comes, it will deliver us from errors. The more light there is, the more deliverance we will have.

If we are free from errors, it proves that we are persons in the light.

Therefore, in order to have light, we must first deal with our heart.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## THE OPENING OF GOD'S WORD GIVES LIGHT

### •Scripture Reading: Heb. 4:12; Psa. 119:130

Heb. 4:12 "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Psa. 119:130 "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; / Your ordinances I have set before me."

*  *  *  *

Many Christians have an unusual number of problems. If these were merely outward problems, they would not be that important. But many of these problems point to inward darkness and to the lack of spiritual clarity; one should not treat this lightly. Some situations are necessary for a Christian in the course of spiritual progress. However, a Christian should not allow himself to remain indefinitely in darkness and unclearness. It is not God's will that we should constantly have problems; God does not wish to see us remain in darkness. How then can we become clear spiritually? Let us see what the Word of God tells us.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This tells us that when the word of God enters, we will be able to distinguish between what is from the spirit and what is from the soul. We cannot discern the difference by merely asking ourselves inwardly; this will only result in confusion. The more we look inwardly and the more we search ourselves, the more problems will arise and the greater the darkness will become. One question will give rise to ten questions, and ten questions to a hundred questions; the questions will go on. On the other hand, if the word of God enters into us,

there will be no need to ask questions; the questions will be gone, and we will become clear. In fact, we will become very clear indeed. For instance, you may meet a man on the street and speak something to him. Although the words may be correct, you feel very uncomfortable afterward. The words were proper and your intention was good, but inwardly you feel otherwise. An hour later you come across a brother and speak to him at length, and the words are helpful to him. This time you feel inwardly satisfied; you feel that a burden has been released and you have rendered a service to God. There is little difference in the words spoken on these two occasions, but there is a great difference in your inward feeling. This difference is very clear to you; it tells you that one is wrong and the other is right. The outward distinction between the two is negligible. Superficially, it seems that the words spoken on both occasions were identical, but inwardly, you perceive a difference. When the word of God is in us, we shall know from within what is from the spirit and what is from the soul. Once we have this inward knowledge, there will be no more questions.

Psalm 119:130 says, "The opening of Your words gives light, /Imparting understanding to the simple." When the word of God enters into you it gives light; you will become inwardly clear, and you will have assurance. The word of God is not just the written Scripture which you read. It is also necessary for the Spirit of God to make this word living in you. Only the living word is useful, and this word will divide your spirit from your soul. This is not a question of reading a book and finding what way is spiritual and what way is soulish. Even if you follow the way given in the book, the result will still be soulish. But when the word of God enters into you and shines in you, it will separate the soul from the spirit; it will even expose the joints and marrow. You will know what is wrong and what is right. This is an inward knowledge. Such a person will no longer need to ask questions because there is light within him, and he sees from within.

Some people ask themselves all the time: "Am I living for God or for myself? Is this the will of God or my own?" Indeed, it is extremely difficult for us to distinguish which ideas and opinions are our own because we are very often deceived by our own thoughts and intentions. Nevertheless, as soon as the word of the Lord enters, it sifts through the thoughts and intentions of our hearts and

immediately shows us which thoughts are perverse, which thoughts are impractical, which thoughts are selfish, which thoughts come from fear, and which thoughts protect ourselves. Inwardly we will see and become very clear. Self-analysis will not give us light; it will only lead us into self-deception. The more we analyze ourselves, the more we will be deceived and the more the word of God will be hindered from entering into us. When the word of God enters into us, our eyes will be opened, and we will no longer need to ask any questions because we will be able to discern the thoughts and intentions of our heart. Brothers and sisters, whenever we have a problem within, we ought to look to the enlightening of God's word. In this way, we will not be deceived.

Many of God's children discern right from wrong according to the conscience. However, we should know that the human conscience is still something very shallow. Life is something much deeper than the conscience. Some things often pass the test of the conscience but may not necessarily pass the test of life. Occasionally we do things by way of "trial and error." If our conscience is clear after we have done something, we thank God for it, and if our conscience is guilty, we ask God for forgiveness. We have to wait until the thing is done before we know whether we are right or wrong. But we should realize that we have a life within us. When the word of God enters into us that life will give light, and we will be inwardly clear even before we do anything. The word of God in us gives light and enables us to discern what is from the spirit and what is from the soul. It follows spontaneously that when we touch the spirit, we will realize it is the spirit; and when we touch the soul, we will realize it is the soul. We will know as soon as we touch it; it will become very clear to us.

The word of God will shine within us and make us clear. It is living and operative. It is not something outward but something inward. We do not discern the spirit from the soul according to outward things; this discernment is the result of inward clearness. Then and only then can we practically know God and recognize the way we should take.

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# MESSAGE ONE

## GOD INTERRUPTING MAN'S SPEAKING

### THE CHRISTIAN (1934-1940)—Issue No. 13

**•Scripture Reading: Luke 9:33-35; Matt. 17:24-27; Acts 10:34-35, 44-46**

Luke 9:33-35 "And as they were departing from Him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tents, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah-not knowing what he was saying. And while he said these things, a cloud appeared and overshadowed them; and they became frightened as they entered into the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My Son, the Chosen One. Hear Him!"

Matt. 17:24-27 "And when they came to Capernaum, those who take up the temple tax came to Peter and said, Does not your Teacher pay the temple tax? He said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive custom or poll tax, from their sons or from strangers? And when he said, From strangers, Jesus said to him, So then the sons are free. But that we do not stumble them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

Acts 10:34-35 "And opening his mouth, Peter said, In truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons, But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him."

44-46 "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. And the believers who were of the circumcision, as many as had accompanied Peter, were amazed, because on the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out; For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God...."

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God is a speaking God. Many portions in the Bible are God's direct speaking. Although other portions are not God's direct speaking, they are nevertheless spoken by God. Consequently, the Bible says that these other portions are also the word of God. In this world, only human beings can speak. But man's speaking cannot be compared with God's speaking. God is best at speaking. Nearly the whole Bible is filled with God's speaking. He is constantly speaking.

One interesting thing that the Bible shows us is that God is not only the best at speaking; He is also the best at listening. Many times, while men speak, God listens. In the Old Testament, a few men spoke, and their speakings were very unpleasant and rather meaningless. Even I am annoyed by their speakings. Yet God listened; He listened to their speakings.

Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, do you know which one contains the most of man's speaking? There is one book in the Bible which records more of man's speaking than the rest. It is the book of Job. Of the forty-two chapters in Job, thirty-five chapters are on man's speaking. We see Job speaking and his three friends speaking. We see Elihu speaking. One by one they spoke. In reading through the whole book, some of their speakings were not at all pleasant. In the end God came in and said, "You have all talked about Me. But you are all wrong; you are speaking blindly and guessing blindly." Job's friends spoke, and Job argued with them. This goes on chapter after chapter. Job's first friend gave his sermon, and Job spoke a sermon back to him. A second friend gave a sermon, and Job followed it with another sermon. A third friend gave a sermon, and Job followed it with another sermon. There are six sermons in a row. The three friends of Job each gave a sermon, and Job gave three sermons. What was God doing? He was silent. Elihu eventually became angry! He was a man who knew God. A man who knew God became angry! "You are all talking nonsense here. You are all wrong." Elihu became stirred up! He could not hold himself back any longer! He had to speak! But still God was not stirred up! God did not speak until chapter thirty-eight, after Elihu had finished his speaking. The book of Job shows us that God is very capable of listening; He is never hasty. Even though these men

were speaking nonsense and making wild guesses, God was still listening. If it were us, we would have stopped them after one or two wrong words; we would have interrupted their speaking with our words. We cannot listen. Yet we see in the book of Job that God is a listening God; He listens all the time.

In the Old Testament, the book of Job contains man's speaking the most. In the New Testament, we do not have a similar book. But there is a talkative person in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains a talkative book, which is Job. The New Testament contains a talkative person. Who is this talkative person? I believe all of us know him, and there is no need for any introduction. In the New Testament, one person was very talkative. The minute there was an opportunity, he would speak. Who is this person? I believe we all know that he is our brother Peter, the apostle. He loved to speak. The minute he showed up, he was speaking. The minute an opportunity arose, he spoke. Three passages—in Luke 9, Matthew 17, and Acts 10—show us that Peter was full of speaking. In these three instances, there is one thing in common: God never allowed Peter to finish his speaking. Peter spoke three times, and in every instance God did not allow Peter to finish his speaking. Peter would speak only a few words, and before finishing one sentence, or a long discourse, God would come in and interrupt his speaking. Hence, our subject today is "God Interrupting Man's Speaking."

We are very familiar with these three stories. But I will repeat them once more. Peter beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. At that time, the Lord Jesus put aside His own flesh and revealed Himself in the glory of God. Both Moses and Elijah were there, and when they were about to leave, Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are willing, I will make three tents here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). Immediately, God spoke from heaven, "This is My Son...Hear Him!" (v. 5). As Peter spoke, God interrupted him. We do not know what else Peter wanted to say. But God interrupted him and did not allow him to go on. "Hear Him! Hear Him!" Peter needed to exercise his ears, not his mouth. When you are before the Son of God, it is not the time to use your mouth. It is not the time to tell God what He should do. When you are before the Son of God, you should use your ears to hear

what He has to say. It is not the time to speak; it is the time to hear and see. This is why God interrupted Peter with His speaking from heaven.

Once a few tax collectors came to him. They did not come to collect Caesar's taxes; they collected taxes for the temple. They came for Peter. They did not come to anyone other than Peter. This is like newspaper reporters, who look only for the government spokesman. They do not look for anyone else; they always go to the spokesman because through his mouth they can always hear something. Others may not be willing to say anything, but the spokesman will always leak some kind of news. They might not be able to find out anything from the other disciples, but they should be able to find out something from Peter. Hence, they went to see Peter. Peter did not go into the house to check with the Lord. Verse 25 says, "He came into the house." This proves that Peter and the Lord were in two different places. Perhaps one was inside the house and the other was outside the house. Peter did not go into the house to ask Jesus. He answered rashly, "Yes." But then he thought about it and wondered what would happen if He did not pay the tax. The word was out, but he went into the house anyway to ask the Lord whether or not he should pay. When Peter entered the house, the Lord Jesus anticipated his question. Please pay attention to the word anticipated. Jesus asked him first. This means that Peter was about to ask a question, but the Lord asked him first. Suppose that there are two persons. Both want to speak, but one speaks first. This is what it means to anticipate. The Lord anticipated Peter. His interruption came even quicker than the time on the Mount of Transfiguration. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God interrupted after a few sentences. But here, no word had even been spoken. The words were interrupted while they were still inside Peter's mouth. The Lord Jesus asked him, "From whom do the kings of the earth receive custom or poll tax, from their sons or from strangers?" (v. 25). Peter answered, "From strangers." Jesus answered, "So then the sons are free" (v. 26). When the Lord said that the sons do not need to pay tax, He annulled Peter's word outside the house or in the courtyard. Later the Lord Jesus said, "But that we do not stumble them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (v. 27). Here

Peter's words were interrupted the second time. The talkative Peter was interrupted by God the second time.

The third time was in Acts 10. Peter did not have the intention at first to go to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. He went because he saw the vision; he saw a big sheet coming down from heaven. As a result of the vision, he went to Caesarea. After he arrived at Caesarea, he began to preach. The Bible says that Peter gave a long message. He talked about God being no respecter of persons and about God sending His Son Jesus. If you read that message, you will see that it was very incomplete. The beginning was great but the last part was brief. It was like someone with a big head, a small trunk, and a lower part that has disappeared altogether. Just when he was coming to the practical application of the message, he stopped. Just as he was about to speak about Jesus, about God appointing Him, about man rejecting Him, about God resurrecting Him, and about how He accomplished redemption, God interrupted the speech. Acts 10:44 is very interesting. It says, "While Peter was still speaking these words..." Please note the word "while." This indicates that Peter did not intend to stop there; he was about to go on. He was prepared to speak more; there were more things in his heart. His mind had prepared more things to say, and he was about to continue, but the Holy Spirit interrupted his words. The Holy Spirit was poured out, and everyone spoke in tongues and magnified God. This interrupted Peter's speaking.

It is strange that during the three times Peter spoke, he was interrupted. The first time God the Father interrupted his words from heaven. The second time God the Son interrupted his word on earth. The third time God the Spirit interrupted his word in Caesarea. God the Father interrupted his words from heaven. God the Son interrupted his words from the house. And God the Spirit interrupted his words in the midst of the Gentiles. God did not allow him to go on; He interrupted Peter. In one case, He interrupted after Peter spoke a few words. In another case, He interrupted before anything was said. The third time, He interrupted Peter after he had spoken a long discourse. There was an interruption after a few words, an interruption after no word, and an interruption after a long discourse. Of the three times that Peter spoke, God

interrupted each time. If you compare these three cases with the story of Job in the Old Testament, you will find one very interesting thing. In the Old Testament, God would listen to man's speaking. Man was always speaking, and God did not object. God allowed man to speak; He was willing to let man speak so much. If this was the case, why did God interrupt Peter's speaking when he spoke these three times in the New Testament? If you read the book of Job, you can see that God is capable of listening to man's speaking; He can patiently listen. Why then did He not allow Peter to speak? Why did He not allow him to continue? Why did He not allow Peter to finish what he wanted to say? You must realize that God is a God who can listen. He can listen patiently to man's speaking. His interruptions of Peter's speaking show that his word needed to be interrupted. If God did not allow him to continue with his words, it means that the words should not have continued. His words should not be heard anymore; they were not worthy words and had to be interrupted. If the listening God interrupts man's word, it must mean that his words should be interrupted and should not be allowed to continue.

If we spend some time to consider these three passages, we will find out that Peter's words in each case had to be interrupted, because they were too crucial to Christianity. If those three speakings had continued, there would be no Christianity left. If the three speakings had continued, Christianity would have been overthrown. God interrupted all three speakings. This shows us that Christianity is something very special. We have to have God's viewpoint, and cannot have man's viewpoint. If we take the human view, God will come in to interrupt our speaking. Let us consider these three instances, and why God interrupted Peter's speakings.

The first instance was on the Mount of Transfiguration. We know that on the Mount of Transfiguration the Lord manifested His own honor and glory, and He showed men the kind of Christ He was. He put on the flesh and came among men. We can say that the Jesus who began from Bethlehem was a disguised Christ. Because He put on the human body, men did not recognize the kind of Christ He was. On the Mount of Transfiguration, He removed His disguise for a short time and showed the three disciples the kind of Christ He was. He showed them what

He was like originally. Many people claimed to be His disciples, but few knew about Christ Himself. Many people knew that He was Jesus of Nazareth, but few saw Him as the Son of God and the Christ. They did not know who He was, and their eyes were not yet open. Peter might have said, "You have talked much about Christ, and my ears have heard of Him. My hands have touched Him, and I have heard His words. I have seen a little of the kind of person He is. But there is something that I do not know. I have seen Him, and I have heard Him, but there is still something that I have not seen or heard." The Mount of Transfiguration was a removing of His disguise. A new revelation was opened to the disciples, and they saw who Christ was.

While this was going on, Moses and Elijah also appeared. We all know that Moses represents the law, while Elijah represents the prophets. Both the law and the prophets were on the mountain. The main features of the Old Testament are the law and the prophets, while the main feature of the New Testament is Christ. According to God's ordination, the law and the prophets, as shadows, will pass away. When the substance is here, the shadows will pass away. Peter saw Moses and Elijah; he saw the main features of the Old Testament. He also saw Christ, the main feature of the New Testament. Therefore he exclaimed, "It is good for us to be here." While he was speaking, God came in to interrupt his speaking. God's interruption of his speaking means that the law and the prophets cannot be mixed with Jesus Christ. God said, a few chapters previous, that "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11:13). "Until John"! From that time the kingdom of God began. We can see that the law, the prophets, and the kingdom of God are consecutive and not parallel to one another. Peter was saying that the law, the prophets, and Christ were coexisting, rather than in sequence. He was saying that Moses, Elijah, and Christ were equal, instead of being consecutive. God interrupted his speaking in order to show him that the law, the prophets, and Christ are not equal, with the latter superseding the former. Once the former two are finished, the latter begins. The latter starts when the first two end. The two parties cannot coexist. No one in the Old Testament occupied a higher position than Moses and Elijah. Yet they cannot stand side by side with Christ. Peter said that he would build three tents, one for Christ, one for Moses,

and one for Elijah. He meant that even though the Lord Jesus should occupy the first place, a second and third place should be reserved for the law and the prophets. God in heaven pronounced that the law and the prophets should not step back to a second and third place, but should not occupy any place at all in Christianity and in the New Testament. In Christianity, in the New Testament, and in the church, the Lord Jesus occupies everything; the law and the prophets must step aside completely. Listen to the voice from heaven. While Peter was saying that one tent was for Christ, one was for Moses, and one for Elijah, the voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, the Chosen One. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35).

There are two meanings here. The first is that now is not the time for us to speak; this is the time for us to listen. This is not the time for us to say what is in Christianity; this is the time for us to listen. Hear Him. This means: "Peter, shut up. There is no place for you to speak. You should listen instead." The second meaning of this word is that even though there are Christ, Moses, and Elijah, we should hear only Him. We should not hear the others. We should hear only Him! Peter spoke of three persons, but heaven spoke of only one. Peter spoke of three names, but God recognized only one. In other words, Peter nominated three names, but God accepted only one.

Up to this point, it is still "all walls and no door." The law and the prophets are no more. Moses is gone, and Elijah is gone. Only Jesus remains. But what do Moses and Elijah represent? Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. But what are the law and the prophets? Let us spend some time to consider what the law and the prophets are. The brothers and sisters who have been meeting with us for some time may be quite familiar with these. But many others may not be familiar with their significance, and I should repeat it for their sake. What are the law and the prophets? What is Christ? The law, the prophets, and Christ are related to the foundation of Christianity, the foundation of the New Testament, and the foundation of the church. What is the law? It is a dead code of right and wrong that exists apart from God. It is dead moral standards that exist apart from God. This is the law. It is something that leads men away from God; it shows men what is right and what is wrong, apart from God. The law tells men what is right and what is wrong, without having anything to do

with God. The law is a collection of regulations apart from God which tell man what he should do. What is the law? It is something that helps you distinguish right from wrong. When one knows the law, he does not have to go to God anymore.

Take, for example, the elementary school system we had in China twenty years ago. At that time, there were not as many elementary schools as there are now. We all spent some time in the private tutorial schools. In those schools, there was only one teacher with seven or eight students. There was absolutely no curriculum and very little printed material. There was no set hour for the school to begin and no set hour for it to end. There were no set rules to follow. The teacher was at one end of the room, and the students sat facing him. School did not begin at seven or eight o'clock, but whenever the teacher arrived. School was not dismissed at one, three, or four o'clock in the afternoon, but whenever the teacher left. The rules were with the teacher. If you arrived after the teacher, you were considered late. If you left when the teacher was still there, you were considered as having left before the scheduled time. The teacher was the rule. What was right and what was wrong? Whatever the teacher liked was right, and whatever he did not like was wrong. There was no rule that said: number one, we should do this; number two, we should do this; number three, we should do that; and number four, we should do that. Whatever the teacher liked was done. Whatever the teacher did not like was not done. A holiday was not a day of a festival or a set date; when the teacher did not show up, it was a holiday. Everything hinged on one man. His likes and dislikes were the standard of morality, his conduct was the yardstick of approval, and his movement was the gauge of time. While we studied the classic books, our eyes had to be set on him. If we did not set our eyes on him or if he was not there, there was no rule, and we would not know what to do and not do. We had to be related to him day after day. Whatever he liked was the norm. If he wanted you to come, you had to come. If he wanted you to go, you had to go. You had to be related to him. Now schools are different. There are school rules, laid out in thirty or fifty items. If the principal of a school has a detailed mind, he may lay down even a hundred rules. There is a set time for the school to begin and a set time for the school to dismiss.

There are certain books that one has to read, certain uniforms that one has to wear, and certain clothes that one cannot wear. There are certain things that one can do and certain things that one cannot do. Those who set the rules, whether the principal or the directors, are the lawmakers. You may never see them in your life and still be a good student. This is because the rules are on the walls and in the books. If you are properly related to the rules on the walls and in the books, that is good enough. You do not have to be related to the teachers, the principal, the directors, or any of the lawmakers. As long as the rules and the laws are in your hand, you can take the teachers away. As long as you abide by the rules, you are a good student.

This is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is like our present-day schools. God laid down a few rules. In the Old Testament, men did not need to draw near to God. In the Old Testament, as long as men kept the laws, and as long as they knew what they ought to do and what they ought not to do, they could be a good disciple of Judaism. They could become righteous without coming to God. Zachariah was a very righteous man in the Old Testament, or at least we can say that he was a very good disciple of Judaism. In today's term, he would be considered a good "Christian." But a man as righteous as Zachariah did not receive any answer to his prayers. According to the law he was a righteous man. According to the ordinances, he was a perfect man. But he did not know God Himself; he did not know God's face. What then is the law? It is regulations which exist apart from God. It is moral standards which exist apart from God. It is standards of right and wrong which exist apart from God. The law is anything which exists apart from God. Anything which exists apart from God is the law. Regulations which are apart from God are the law. Hence, in the Old Testament, men did not have to come before God or be related to God. Throughout their lifetime they just abided by the dead laws.

What is the New Testament? The New Testament is a return to the private tutorial school. We have a perfect Teacher. The failure of the traditional private tutorial school was not that the system was bad, but that the teachers were not qualified. If a sage would come and be the teacher, that school would be better than the present-day schools. What is the New Testament? The New Testament

takes away the law and allows Christ to be the Master; the law is no longer the master. Today we do not go to the Bible to find out what is right and what is wrong. Today it is a matter of the Son of God being glorified. God's Son is glorified not only on the heavenly throne, but in our hearts as well. On the Mount of Transfiguration, He received honor and glory. Peter said that he beheld the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus with his eyes (2 Pet. 1:16-17). God has bestowed honor and glory on the Lord Jesus. Today should there be one tent, two tents, or three tents? Tents are man-made. In other words the tents are our hearts. On the throne in heaven, there is only Christ. But are there three places in our hearts, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Christ? Or is there only a place for Christ? God's requirement is that we receive Christ. But within us, not only do we have Christ, we also have outward things such as the law and the prophets. (We will speak on the prophets in a minute.) The guidance we receive today should come from the indwelling Christ, and not from any outward dead regulations or lifeless laws. I do not despise the Bible. Some of you have been meeting with us for many years; you know that we pay much attention to this Book. But I say that we can even make this Book a book of regulations and laws. Today I dare not say and I will not say that the Bible does not contain regulations and laws. I am saying that it does not contain just regulations and laws. The question today is not what the Bible says, but what Christ within us says. The question today is not what the law written by Christ says, but what the Christ within us says. This is the difference between living in the New Testament age and the Old Testament age. In the Old Testament age, one looked up the Scripture and tried to find out what the laws said. The New Testament age is different. Besides the Bible, what is the Lord Jesus saying within us? If we care only for outward things, God will interrupt our speaking. The question today is whether or not we have something within us.

Brothers often come to me and ask, "Mr. Nee, in your opinion, should we do this?" I ask why they have asked, and they say, "When I read the Bible, I found that one person expounded this passage one way, and another person expounded it another way. I am confused." Do you see my point? The principle of their living is the law. When others present them an interpretation of the law,

they become confused. Is our emphasis merely the outward laws? If our emphasis is merely the outward laws, we will not be clear about the inward guidance. We are not clear, because we are already assured of the outward laws. I often hold my brother's hand and point to his heart, saying, "Forget about what your head thinks and what your ears hear. Listen to what your heart has to say." Many times theologians who have a very good knowledge of the Bible and who are very educated make judgments that are worse than those of illiterate, simple people who cannot read the Bible and who have no knowledge of the Bible. A simple person can tell you that he does not have the peace or that his conscience bothers him. The judgments of simple people and those without Bible knowledge are often better than those of famous, knowledgeable, and educated theologians. The issue today has nothing to do with outward matters. It is not what men say. Please be clear that it is not only a question of what the Bible says, but absolutely a question of what the Christ within us says. If Christianity were not built upon this, we would have to say, "Blessed are the clever," "Blessed are the literate," or, "Blessed are those who have Bible knowledge." Thank the Lord that Christianity is not built upon knowledge or literacy. Christianity is built upon the fact that Christ lives within us. A clever person will receive God's guidance if he obeys the inner voice. A simple person will also receive God's guidance if he obeys the inner voice. Recently, I met a seventy-year-old lady who could not read anything, and who had not read the Bible before. Yet I have never met another person who had received as much guidance as she had. She had been a believer for only four months; she could not read and did not have any Bible knowledge. If you had talked to her about the law, she would not have been able to tell you anything about it. She could not memorize any commandment. But her inner being was very clear. Her inner being directed her in everything. Our rights and wrongs should come from within us and not from anything outside of us.

However, man prefers the law, because he does not need a personal relationship with Christ. To follow the law, there is no need to face a teacher. There is no price to pay, and one can get by easily. One does not have to be related to Christ in any way. As long as there are the outward qualifications and

the knowledge, everything is all right. But in the New Testament, unless a person waits at the door of Wisdom and listens to His voice, he will not know what to do and where to go. Many brothers have come to me to ask me what the Bible says about Christian conduct. Friends, if you do this, you do not know Christianity at all. The revelation of Christianity comes from this Book, but personal revelations do not come from this Book, but from within. If you want to know general revelations, you can find them in the Bible. But if you have only a general revelation, without personal revelation, you still do not understand Christianity, and you are still in the Old Testament. Christianity is not a matter of what the Bible says or what the law says. Christianity is what the One within you says. One day a brother came to me and said, "Some say there is no difference between the soul and the spirit. When I read the Bible, I also do not find any difference between the soul and the spirit. It seems that the two are indistinguishable. I don't know if this is right or not." I held his hand and said, "What is important is not how the Bible distinguishes them, but whether or not there is a distinction within you." The Christianity that many speak about only has the Bible; it does not have Christ. Many people only have a Bible, without the living Christ. We have the living Christ dwelling within us to be our life and our right and wrong. He is our moral standard. Whatever He likes is right; whatever He does not like is wrong. If He says it is right, it is right. If He says it is wrong, it is wrong. Inner guidance is all that matters.

But Peter, as well as many modern Peters, thought that the law needed to be added to Christ. He said that there should be three tents, one of which should be for Moses. This is why God had to come in to interrupt. God was saying that Christ is important, not the law. I am not saying that this Book is useless. In the future, when there is the opportunity, I will tell you how useful this Book is. But I am saying that Christianity is not just this Book. Christianity is absolutely Christ, the Christ who lives within us.

What then are the prophets? The law can decide only certain things for us; it cannot decide everything. The law can tell us what is right and wrong about many things; but it cannot tell us what is right and wrong about everything. The law can tell us not to covet, steal, or commit fornication. But it cannot tell us if we

should go to Nanking. The law can tell us what can be eaten and cannot be eaten, but it cannot tell us what we should eat when we go home tonight. Leviticus 11 tells us what food is clean and unclean. But the law cannot tell us what we should eat when we go home tonight. The law can tell us what we should do when we are sick, but it cannot tell us if our sickness will be healed, or if we will die of our sickness. This is why there are prophets in the Old Testament. The Old Testament not only has the law but the prophets as well. There is not only Moses, but Elijah as well. What is a prophet? A prophet fills up the lack of the law. The law is dead, while a prophet is living. The law is written down, while a prophet speaks, guides, and tells men which way they should take. This is the main difference between the law and the prophets. The law tells us God's general principle of right and wrong, while the prophets tell us God's fine details concerning right and wrong. The law deals with right and wrong in principle, while the prophets deal with right and wrong in specific details. The prophets give us the guidance and the way for us to take personally. What is a prophet? A prophet is one who tells you if your sickness will be healed or if you will die. He is one who tells you if God will punish you or if He will bless you. In other words, the law is the abstract guidance, while the prophet is the specific guidance. I believe it is right to say it this way. One is abstract, while the other is specific. The law merely shows us the moral principle before God. But the prophet shows us what we should do today and where we should go. This is absolutely something specific and personal. This is the prophet. We can go to the Bible to find out if God has commissioned us to preach the gospel; it is easy to find the basis and principles for matters like these. This is the aspect of the law. But there is also the aspect of the prophet, which is personal and specific. Does God want me to go to Yungnan or Annan? Does God want me to go to Tibet or Siam? How should we go, and when should we go? These are specific; they are not abstract principles. This is why there is not only the law but also the prophets in the Old Testament. When the two things were present, God's children were guided on the proper path. The prophets are a special class of people who help others to know God's will. Do not think that the prophets only foretell. In the Old Testament the prophets find out God's will on behalf of others.

Peter felt that Moses and Elijah were very important. He felt that a tent should be made for Elijah also. He thought that it was important to have the prophets, and that a place should be reserved for the prophets. God interrupted his speaking. In God's eyes, the prophets could not be allowed; there could no longer be any prophets. What is the new covenant? The new covenant is one in which the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth and the sea. In the new covenant no one needs to teach his neighbor or his brother to know the Lord. In other words, the class of neighbors and brothers is annulled. There is no need for such a class of people in the new covenant. A brother once asked me to pray for him so that I would know God's will concerning him and tell him. He thought that I was not just a teacher, but a prophet as well. "Mr. Nee, please pray for me. If God tells you anything concerning me, please come and tell me." You have to realize that this fundamentally overturns the New Testament. In the New Testament, not only must the law go, but the prophets have to go as well. Not only should there be no ordinances, but there should be no persons as well. No one should tell you what is right and what is wrong. No one should tell you that he has a message from God for you, and that God's will is for you to go to Nanking or Soochow. This is impossible. This oversteps the Lord Jesus' work. These directions should come as a result of the Lord's work within us. Today the Lord is within us; He is showing us what is right and what is wrong. The Lord is telling us if we should go to Nanking or Soochow. Now we can understand why Paul went to Jerusalem against the advice of a few saints. He went to Jerusalem because they wanted to be his prophets. Whether or not something is from God, or whether or not something is right is not what is important. It was a matter of how Paul felt within. We cannot choose our pathway based on what others feel. Today there is no longer a class of prophets. It is over; it has forever passed away. Today the Lord Jesus is exclusively in charge. It is not a question of asking others what to do. We should not go to others to ask them what we should do concerning the affairs of our lives. A Bible teacher can teach others the principles. We can teach the principles, but we have to be careful when it comes to telling others what to do; we should be careful not to get involved in these matters. There is no such thing as a special class of men. Every person must be guided

inwardly by God alone. We cannot allow dead laws or living persons to replace Christ. What then is Christianity? Christianity is Christ living within us, telling us what is right and what is wrong. Christ living within us is Christianity. Nothing else counts.

This was Peter's mistake. He thought that there should be Moses, Elijah, and Christ, but God said that there is only Christ; Moses and Elijah should go. What kind of Christianity do we have today? We cannot say that we do not need Christ, because only unbelievers would say this. We say that we need Christ, but we also say that we sometimes need Moses and Elijah as well. This was Peter. He surely put Christ in the first place, but he also wanted the law and the prophets. I am afraid we have not seen this clearly. But we must see this. I am afraid that some do not just want Christ; they also want the law and the prophets. They want three tents. These people need a voice from heaven to tell them, "This is My Son, the Beloved...Hear Him!" Now is not the time to hear Christ, the law, and the prophets. Now is the time to hear Him.

Let us go on a little faster. In Matthew 17 something else happened. Peter answered the question concerning paying the temple tax. We know that the Jews had to pay the temple tax. This is not the kind of tax that we Chinese pay today. The question was not whether the Lord Jesus would pay the tax, but whether He should pay the tax. Some Bible scholars tell us that there are two meanings to the tax in this verse. The first meaning is that of a kind of poll tax, and the second meaning is that of ransom money, like that used in the Old Testament for the redemption of souls. Exodus and Numbers speak of this matter a few times. There were two issues. The tax was levied upon the strangers, and not on the sons. If the Lord Jesus paid the tax, it would mean that He was a stranger and not a Son. If He paid the tax, it would mean that He had denied that He was the Son. But what is the foundation of Christianity? Is Jesus of Nazareth just a man, or is He the Son of God? If Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, there is Christianity. If He is not the Son of God, we can give up this meeting hall tonight and go away to take care of our own business. The question today is whether or not Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God.

Perhaps some brothers and sisters have not seen how particular our faith is.

I am always reminded that every Christian in this world has a particular faith. I often feel that the community of Christians is indeed the household of faith. Within the family of believers, there is a particular faith. What is this particular faith? What is the faith? It is being able to pick out One from among the myriads of men throughout the world—in China, in other lands, and including the past and the —of whom we can say, "This man is not just a man, but God." This is Christianity. This is our faith. God is not just God alone. We do not just have a book, the Bible; we have the revelation of God. What is the revelation of God? In order for God to reveal Himself to man, He had to come to the world. We do not believe merely in a God, but in His revelation. We do not believe merely that there is a God, but that there is a revelation of God. Many people believe that there is an unapproachable God in heaven; they believe that God is unknown and mysterious. The God that many people believe in is like the god of the Athenians, whom one does not know, or whom one cannot know (Acts 17:23). If you ask those in the world today if they believe in God, and what kind of belief in God they have, they will tell you that they believe in a God that is unfathomable and untouchable. But this is absolutely not Christianity, and it is absolutely not the New Testament. We believe that there is a God and that we can know this God. We believe that God is a revealed God and not a mysterious God in heaven. God is a God who has manifested Himself among men. By what means can we know this knowable God? God became a man like us. After He became a man, it was possible for us to know Him and to know the kind of God He is. God has put on humanity and come among men to show men what He is like. The only Begotten of God, the only Begotten in the bosom of the Father, has manifested God. This is Christianity. Because God has manifested Himself on earth, it is now possible for us to identify One from among all men who is God. We can identify this man and say that He is God. We have found Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God. He is the same as we are, but at the same time, He is somewhat different from us. So what is Christianity? Christianity is built upon this foundation. Matthew 17 shows us the story about the paying of the tax, while chapter sixteen shows us the declaration of Peter. The Lord Jesus did not care for so many things; He did not ask many questions. He cared for only one thing, and He paid attention to

only one thing, which is: “Who do you say that I am?” He did not care if others said that He was good or bad, or if they liked or disliked Him. He did not care for these things. He paid attention to only one thing, and He asked only one question: “Who am I?” Whether or not Christianity stands depends on who we say Jesus of Nazareth is. If we do not resolve this issue, we do not have the proper foundation. If the Lord Jesus is merely an Elijah or a Jeremiah or one of the prophets, we do not have Christianity. But Peter declared in chapter sixteen that the Lord is the Son of the living God. How did the Lord respond? He said, “Peter, you are Peter. I will build My church upon this rock.” Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My church” (v. 18). Upon what is the church built? The church is built upon the foundation of “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The Lord said something wonderful after this: “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Why? Because the church is built upon this rock; it is built upon the words “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” I have often asked myself who Jesus of Nazareth is. There are many people here today. I cannot come to you and take your hand, or anyone else’s hand, and say, “You are the Son of God.” But I can take the hand of Jesus of Nazareth, and say, “You are the Son of the living God.” I feel that this is the greatest joy of my whole life. To discover that Jesus of Nazareth is my Savior is not a marvel. To discover that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God is a marvel. If Jesus of Nazareth was merely a man, a man from a nation far away, the church would fall, Christianity would fall, and the New Testament would fall. The whole issue rests on whether Jesus of Nazareth was man or God.

Peter saw the tax collectors coming, and he made up his mind to tell them, “Yes, yes. I can guarantee that we will pay the tax. I have been with the Lord for so many years. I know that He will pay it.” But the Lord would not allow him to speak. There was no reason to allow him to go on speaking in this way. If he had gone on speaking, the whole foundation of Christianity would have been shaken. The previous passage concerned a question about the content of Christianity. What was at stake now concerned the foundation of Christianity. The Mount of Transfiguration speaks of the content of Christianity, while in the house, we see the foundation of Christianity. The fact that He is the Son of the living God cannot

be challenged.

There is another significance to paying the temple tax. If He needed to pay this tax, it meant that Christ also required redemption. Therefore, this is not merely a question of paying or not paying the tax, but of whether or not He should pay the tax. If the Lord Jesus paid the tax, it would mean that the Son of God required redemption just as we do. I once met a Catholic who condemned me for not worshipping Mary. I told him that I do not worship Mary. He asked me why, and I told him that Mary was the same as us; she needed the Savior just as much as we do. On what can I base this? When she was pregnant, she said, "My spirit has exulted in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). She also needed a Savior. But the Lord Jesus did not need a Savior, because He had no sin. If the Lord Jesus wanted a Savior, it would not be humility but lying. The Lord Jesus is most humble, but He cannot be so humble as to say that He has sinned. If the Lord Jesus needed to pay tax, it would mean that He needed redemption also. What is Christianity? Christianity is built upon these two foundations. One is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and the other is that Jesus of Nazareth has no sin. Jesus of Nazareth not only is the Son of God, but is God's Beloved. The Son of God speaks of His position, while God's Beloved speaks of His morality. This is why the Lord would not allow Peter to continue. He could not say anything or open his mouth anymore. He did not have the position to speak. The Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Thank the Lord that He did not have to pay the tax. Peter should have known that the Lord did not have to pay the tax.

But then the Lord presented another principle. This principle should render us much help. "But that we do not stumble them." This means, "Lest we stumble them, lest we offend them, you should go and fish, and take the fish that you catch and open its mouth, and you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you." The Lord Jesus tried to make it clear to Peter that He did not pay the tax because He was a stranger. He paid the tax because He did not want to stumble them; He did not want to make them feel uncomfortable or unhappy. Peter did not realize this. He only knew to pay the tax. The Lord realized that the whole foundation rests on the fact of who He is. Never think that our foundation lies in something that we do. That is a fallen Christianity, a backslidden

Christianity. Christianity is not a religion in which we do something. It is not a matter of us doing something, but a matter of who He is. Is He man or is He God? Some have asked what they should do in order to be saved. The apostle answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus." He is the Lord. We have to see that He is the Lord. Man's eyes are blind. Consequently, he asks what he should do. But this is not the issue. The issue is Himself. Who was the One who was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago and grew up in Nazareth as a carpenter? The Jews said that He was a bastard. Some said that He was Elijah or one of the prophets. But who do you say that He is? If God gives you a little insight, you will see that Jesus of Nazareth is God coming to earth; He is the manifestation of God. If you see this, all problems will be solved. The problems of all those who believe that He is God are solved. Once we acknowledge Him as God, the issue of work is over. This is the main issue. However, although He is the Son of God, He paid the tax because He did not want to make others unhappy or uneasy.

This is a lesson for us. There are many things which we do not have to do, which we nevertheless do. We often have the right to not do certain things, but we give up that right anyway. We can maintain our right, but we often do not, because we do not want to stumble or offend others. We should obey His word, take out a stater from the fish we have caught, and use it as tax money. To be afraid of others' criticism is to follow a wrong principle; if we do something because we are afraid of others' criticisms, our way is too broad; it is no longer a narrow way. However, it is equally wrong for us to try to maintain our right or save our money. This is not an ordinary case of fear of criticism. We have the right not to do things, and we have every reason to protect ourselves. But we may do something because we are afraid of alarming or stumbling others. For the sake of others, not for the sake of ourselves or for the sake of upholding our own right, we cannot insist on our own right. Instead, we can learn to bear the cross and lay down our own right.

After a long time, perhaps half a year after Pentecost, Peter went down to Caesarea. Before he went, he had a prejudice against the Gentiles. He was a Christian, but he was a Jewish Christian. He was a Christian, but he was also a Jew, just as you are a Christian, but also Chinese. This is why God sent a sheet

from heaven. The sheet indicated to him that as long as he was in Christ, there was no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles; there is only one church, and everyone is a Christian. The Lord showed him a vision and pointed out that everything inside the sheet was clean. Peter thought that the Jews were a special, privileged group, that they received special grace from God, and that it was hard for the Gentiles to receive God's grace. But God showed him that only the inner man is related to God's grace; there is no difference between the Jews and Gentiles in this respect. Therefore, God sent him to the house of Cornelius. He found himself preaching in the house of Cornelius. Yet one thing still could not be erased from his mind. The middle wall of partition was still there. He considered the Gentiles as dogs. He thought that God had granted special privileges to the Jews, and that they were a special group of people. He could not believe that the Gentiles could receive the same grace that the privileged Jews had received. He had seen the principle and the vision, and he confessed with his mouth that God is no respecter of persons. But in practice, there was still some problem. This is the same with us today. We say with our mouth that there is no distinction between the Chinese and other nationalities. We know this as a principle, and we have seen the vision. But when it comes to practice, we act differently. Before Peter finished his words, while he was yet speaking and about to continue, the Holy Spirit came in and fell upon them all. All the Gentiles, with no exception, began to speak in tongues. The tongue-speaking interrupted Peter's word. Later, Peter realized that the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Gentiles in the same way that He had descended upon them. He testified that just as the Holy Spirit had fallen on them, the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Gentiles. He had no choice but to baptize them and recognize them as Christians.

We have seen three important matters. The Mount of Transfiguration involved the matter of the content of Christianity, the house involved the matter of the foundation of Christianity, and Caesarea involved the matter of the sphere of Christianity. The foundation of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth. The content of Christianity is just Christ. There is no Moses or Elijah. But for whom are these blessings? They are for all men. These blessings are for the whole human race.

We often think that it is possible for certain people to receive the gospel, but not possible for other people to receive the gospel. Some have thought that a person ought to be changed and adjusted before he can become a Christian, or that certain people have to make some adjustments before they can become a candidate for salvation. Thank the Lord. He has shown us that a Gentile does not need to become a Jew before he can be a Christian. Every Gentile can become a Christian immediately. Today no Gentile needs to be a Jew; he can be a Christian immediately. Some people think that a man must first be converted to Judaism before he can become a Christian, and that he cannot jump from being a Gentile to being a Christian. But thank the Lord that grace is always given to those who are standing on a lower ground. As long as we are standing on a lower ground, grace is for us. Hallelujah! As long as we are on the lower ground, we have it. Thank the Lord that we can all come to God just as we are. There is no difference between a Jew and a Gentile. There is no need to improve ourselves or to change for the better. We do not have to be a Jew before we can be a Christian. We can come today. After his experience Peter realized that a person can be saved as long as he is a sinner; no one has the privilege of receiving special grace. Peter thought that there was a special, privileged class and a class who was set aside. But Jews are sinners in the same way that Gentiles are sinners. Romans 3 says that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; they are all sinners. All have sinned. The Jews thought that they were privileged sinners, while Gentiles were unprivileged sinners. But thank the Lord, privileged or unprivileged, the Holy Spirit has fallen upon all the sinners. All have received the Holy Spirit, and there is no difference. Thank the Lord. If there is anyone here this morning who is not yet saved, and who thinks that you have to advance to a certain state or change to a certain condition before being saved, you are absolutely wrong. There is no need to change or improve at all. Just come as you are. This is all you have to do. This is indeed a great privilege.

Second, there is no distinction of nationality in the church. There is no separation of men into Jews and Gentiles. Yet today some are inventing something like the Chinese Christian Church. I once met a very good man who told me that he was organizing a Chinese Christian Church in his locality. I told

him that it was an antique. He said that what he was starting was not an antique, because they had just started it. I told him that it was not only an antique, but a museum piece, good only for the museum. If there is China, there is no Christian Church, and if there is the Christian Church, there is no China. Is not the Chinese Christian Church a monster? If we are in Christ, there is no China, and if we are in China, there is no Christian Church. How can there be a Chinese Christian Church? If the church is built upon Jesus Christ, there cannot be a Chinese Christian Church. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. How do you come to God today? How did you become saved? The only basis for you to come before God is that you have partaken of the life of the Lord Jesus. You have become God's children through the life of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, you are children of God before Him. It does not matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. You have become a child of God through the life of the Lord Jesus. No matter what color your skin is or what type your blood is, everyone who comes to God comes on the basis of the life of the Lord Jesus. Everyone's sins are washed through the blood of the Lord Jesus, and everyone comes to God by His life. We do not receive grace because we are Chinese, or because we are foreigners. We obtain grace because of Christ. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. If we come to God through a foreigner or a Chinese, perhaps that foreigner or Chinese can claim a share of the merit. But the Bible says that we all are what we are because of one Lord. There is only one Lord. We must say that some of the things that are in the church today are not necessarily the things that will be there in that day.

So what is the church? I have pointed out before that a Cyrenian was a black person, while Manaen was raised up with the king (Acts 13:1). In addition there was a good man, Barnabas, and a highly educated man, Paul. They were all in the church, and there was no distinction between them. If we see this, and if God's children today see this, that is, if we see our oneness in Christ, everything will be all right. When we speak of oneness or unity, is it a matter of me obeying you or you obeying me? Are you right or am I right? If we are left to ourselves, we can never be one. Thank the Lord that we are already one in Christ. I have to repeat this word already a thousand and even ten thousand times. We are already one

in Christ. We were one in Christ long ago. You are related to Christ before God, and I am also related to Christ before God. Therefore, we are one. This is why the Bible never exhorts Christians to be one. Is not this interesting? There is no place in the Bible which says that we should be one. Rather, it says that we should maintain the oneness. We do not need to create a oneness; we could never be one. But thank the Lord that we have received the same life in Christ. Therefore, we are already one.

Friends, there is not only a difference between the Chinese and the foreigners; there are also the differences between rich and poor, free and slaves, and wise and foolish. If there are such differences in the church, the church is no longer the church. I wish that among us the rich, poor, wise, foolish, free, and slaves could all say that we are brothers and that we all have the Lord's life. This is the church. Some time ago, I was working in one place, and some government officials were telling me that they could not go to the ordinary churches. I asked them why, and they said that others were common citizens, while they were officials. I asked them what they wanted to do, and they said that they intended to donate five or six thousand dollars to build a meeting hall and invite a pastor to come. I asked them what they would do with the name of the hall. They said that they had not thought about this yet. I asked if I could suggest a name for them, and they agreed. I then proposed to call it "The Church of the Officials." They said that this did not sound right. Then I said that if the name was not right, the people within were not right either. Today everyone who is in Christ is the same; there cannot be any distinction based on differences in the flesh. Thank the Lord that in the Bible there are only the churches in Judea; there are no Judean churches. These churches are in the land of Judea, but these churches do not belong to the Jews. Thank God that there are churches in China, but there is no church of China; there are churches in England, and there are churches in America, but there is no church of England or church of America. If there is, the sphere of Christianity will be damaged.

We thank the Lord that the foundation of Christianity is Christ, the Son of God. Without this, there is no Christianity. We thank the Lord that the content of Christianity is Christ Himself as our personal revelation and guidance. Without

this, there is no Christianity. We also thank the Lord that the sphere of Christianity includes all regenerated and saved persons. Tonight when we come together to break the bread, if we only see the group of people who are with us, we do not have the right to touch this bread. What we are touching is the whole church. If we only see our own group, we do not have the qualification to touch this bread. Our heart should be broad enough to include all of God's children, and we should declare that they all are our brothers and sisters. We cannot have any concept of differences in class, race, social status, or intelligence. There cannot be these things in our meetings. The Holy Spirit has descended upon us in the same way that He has descended upon others; there cannot be any distinction. All distinctions are in Adam. We cannot say that we are this way and others are that way. Please do not bring the things of Adam into the church. If we bring the things of Adam into the church, the church will not be helped, but will be damaged instead. May the Lord bless all of us.

## MESSAGE TWO

# THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND OF RECEIVING LIGHT FROM HIM— The Mercy Seat And The Cherubim

## •Outline

- **•Fellowship**
- **•The Receiving Of The Light**

## •Scripture Reading: Exo. 25:10-22

Exo. 25:10-22 "And they shall make an ark of acacia wood: two and a half cubits shall be its length; and one and a half cubits, its width; and one and a half cubits, its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold; inside and outside you shall overlay it; and you shall make a rim of gold upon it all around. And you shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them on its four feet; and two rings shall be on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. And you shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark to carry the Ark with them. The poles shall be in the rings of the Ark; they shall not be taken from it. And you shall put into the Ark the Testimony which I shall give you. And you shall make an expiation cover of pure gold: two and a half cubits shall be its length, and one and a half cubits, its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work you shall make them, at the two ends of the expiation cover. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the expiation cover you shall make the cherubim on its two ends. And the cherubim shall spread out their wings above the cover, covering the expiation cover with their wings, with their faces toward one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the expiation cover. And you shall put the expiation cover upon the Ark above it, and

into the Ark you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the expiation cover, from between the two cherubim which are upon the Ark of the Testimony, of everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel." (RCV)

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Exodus 25:22 says, "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." Here two things are clearly mentioned: fellowship and the receiving of light. "There I will meet with thee." This is fellowship. "I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." This is the receiving of light.

The one thing that occupied God's mind the most in the Old Testament was His tabernacle, which later became the temple. God has a great expectation, a great goal, which is to dwell with His people. God's desire is to tabernacle among men. The greatest item in God's eternal plan is God dwelling among men. God desires to have a meeting place between Himself and man. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus became flesh, He tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth. His purpose was to dwell among us (John 1:14). The word Emmanuel shows that God dwells among men. But the Lord Jesus was only one man. This could not satisfy God's heart. He desires to build us up through His own Spirit to be the dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:22).

The center of the tabernacle and the temple was the ark. Whenever the ark left the tabernacle, the tabernacle was rejected. Whenever the ark was captured and taken away from the temple, the temple could no longer be God's dwelling place. God dwelt with man upon the ark, and man fellowshipped with God through the ark. We will not cover everything about the ark, because that is too great a subject. We will only concentrate on the mercy seat upon the ark and the

two cherubim wrought of gold which were upon the mercy seat. God intended to speak and to commune with Moses from the midst of the two cherubim on the mercy seat. We need to realize that God fellowships with man from the midst of the two cherubim on the mercy seat; He speaks to man and man receives light from Him from the midst of the two cherubim on the mercy seat.

## FELLOWSHIP

The mercy seat is the place where God bestows His grace. On the day of propitiation, the tenth day of the seventh month, the blood of the sin offering was brought to the mercy seat (Lev. 16:14-15). The mercy seat is the place for the propitiation of sins. God's grace comes to man only after the propitiation of sin. If man is not propitiated for, he can never receive mercy from God. On the golden mercy seat, there must be the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offering before God can bestow grace to man. There is a human thought that since God has the authority to bestow grace, he can bestow grace any time He wants and grant mercy any time He wants. God does have the goal of bestowing grace. This is the reason He set up the mercy seat. But we must realize that without the day of propitiation every year, in which the high priest sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, God could not forgive anyone's sin.

On the two ends of the mercy seat were the cherubim, and God's glory was on the cherubim (Ezek. 9:3; Heb. 9:5). One touches God's mercy on the mercy seat, and one touches God's glory in the midst of the cherubim. God must bestow His grace in such a way that it matches His glory. God cannot have the mercy seat without the cherubim; He cannot bestow grace from the mercy seat without passing through the cherubim. God can be gracious to us, and He desires to deal with us in grace. However, He cannot deal with us through the mercy seat alone; He must also deal with us through the cherubim. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Man can no longer come up to the standard of God's glory. If God dealt with us according to His glory, none of us would be eligible to receive His grace. We would only be qualified to be cursed; we could not receive mercy. Therefore, the blood of propitiation must be the sprinkling of the blood of propitiation upon the mercy seat before God can deal with us in glory and upon

the mercy seat.

This shows us that our fellowship with God is based on our compatibility with His glory; it is based on our matching the glory of God. This compatibility comes from the blood. Because of the blood, God is able to bestow grace without sacrificing His glory. God's children need to remember that those who come to God must not fall short of His glory. If you come to God and what you bring in falls short of God's glory, you will not be able to fellowship with Him, and you will not be able to stand up before Him. Since the basis of fellowship is the glory of God, if anyone has a problem with God, it means that he has fallen short of the glory of God. Many brothers and sisters often say that the basis of fellowship is the blood. But we have to remember that the blood is the basis of fellowship because the basis of fellowship is God's glory. Without God's glory, there would be no need for the blood. We need the blood when we fellowship with God because He is a God of glory.

Romans 3 says that man has fallen short of the glory of God because of his sins (v. 23). At the same time, it says that the blood of Jesus justifies us (vv. 25-26). God is a God of glory. Therefore, all those who come to God must remember that their fellowship with God depends on their relationship with God's glory. Anything that does not give glory to God is a sin, and anything that falls short of God's glory is also sin. Sin takes away our fellowship with God. We do not have to sin consciously to lose our fellowship with God, and we do not have to commit gross sins before our fellowship with God is cut off. As long as we do not actively glorify God in a matter, our fellowship with God is damaged. We must remember that the basis of our fellowship with God is His glory. We must also note that man's fellowship with God is based on glory and also on the blood. God's glory demands that there be the blood. If we had not fallen short of God's glory, we would not need the blood. The reason we need the blood is because we have fallen short of God's glory. Glory is the basis of fellowship, and the blood is there to make up our lack.

We must realize that fellowship is frustrated when there is sin. But sin is still the negative reason; it has not touched the crux of the issue. The crux of the issue is the glory of God. Whenever we fall short of God's glory, and whenever we

cannot attain to God's glory, fellowship is frustrated. Thank the Lord that there is the blood of the cross upon God's mercy seat today. Through the blood, we can look up to God's glory and live in His glory. Thank the Lord that His propitiation has put us in a position where we can behold God's glory with unveiled face. This is the meaning of fellowship. Fellowship is not spending half an hour to an hour studying the Bible or praying. Fellowship is beholding God's glory through the blood and having a life that is totally for His glory.

## THE RECEIVING OF THE LIGHT

Second, we have God's speaking, His shining, or His revelation. God spoke to Moses from the midst of the two cherubim. In the matter of fellowship, God stressed the fact that fellowship and communion with Moses was based on the mercy seat. However, He has no intention that we forget the cherubim; He has no intention that we forget His glory. In His shining, God spoke with Moses from the midst of the two cherubim. His emphasis is on His glory. If man can fellowship with Him upon the mercy seat, he is able to hear God's word from the midst of the cherubim. Of course, God has no intention that we forget the mercy seat either.

God spoke to Moses from the midst of the two cherubim; He led His children according to His glory. Wherever God's glory resides, there is His leading also. God's leading came in the form of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Through the pillar of cloud, man sees God's glory, and through the pillar of fire, man also sees God's glory. The place of God's glory is the place of His leading.

God speaks and leads according to His glory. When God speaks to us personally concerning a certain matter, that is the time we know that we are glorifying Him. If we see God's glory in a certain matter, we know that we have His leading in that matter. With many of God's children, leading and glory are two different things. But before God, glorifying God and being led by God are not two things but one. Wherever we find God's glory, we find His leading concerning certain matters for us. As soon as we see God's glory, we know that we are in the right place.

God spoke from the midst of the two cherubim. All those who have seen God's glory have heard His speaking. We do not have to see His glory first and then wait for His speaking. Once we see God's glory in the way of life, this seeing will give us a more profound knowledge than we previously had. Whenever we see God's glory, we understand and know.

What is right? What is wrong? What is the right way? What is the wrong way? What has spiritual value, and what does not have spiritual value? It all depends on whether or not God's glory is there. Some matters may be small and may not be worth much in man's eyes, but the minute you touch it, you know that you have touched God's glory. Once you touch God's glory, you know that you have the leading, and there is no need to wait for more leading. With some work, the more you engage yourself in it, the more you feel that it is cheap and wrong. With some other work, the more you engage yourself in it, the more shining you become, and the more light there is. You feel that such work is worthwhile and right. It is not a question of a great or a small work but a question of whether or not God's glory is there. If God's glory is not there, it is worthless; if God's glory is there, it is worthwhile.

When Moses preached God's word, he became a minister of the word in the eyes of the Lord. He ministered to God's people with God's word. All the words which God spoke to Moses and which He commanded Moses to convey to the Israelites were given to him from the midst of the two cherubim. Hence, when Moses spoke for God, he touched the glory of God. In the same way, if we touch the glory of God and see His glory, we will have something to say. Sometimes we feel very good about what we have said, and the arguments seem sound. Yet we feel that it is very superficial and shallow. There is no testimony of the word in our speaking, and there is no ministry of the word. If a matter is of God, we will immediately sense that it comes from the midst of the two cherubim and will know that the glory of God is there. God's glory is not only something objective but something among us and something we can know.

Many times in our daily life, we touch the glory of God, and we find that there is something that glorifies God. Such a glory becomes our leading. In our work we often touch the glory of God; we find glory in our work. At these times

we can say that the glory brings us the leading. If we touch the glory of God while we are ministering a word to the church, we know that we have ministered God's word. Every time we receive a revelation from God, we touch the glory of God. When God speaks from the midst of the two cherubim, we do not merely have words, but we have glory as well. Whenever we have only words without glory, we know that we only have doctrine. Whenever there are words as well as glory, we know that we have revelation. It is strange that every time we see God's glory, our mouth may not be able to articulate it, but we know it deep within us. If anyone asks us how we see, we may not be able to tell him, but the result of the seeing is there. The greatest manifestation of glory is for us to prostrate ourselves on the ground. When we prostrate ourselves on the ground, we do not know what has happened, yet we know that we have touched God.

The basis of our fellowship with God and of receiving light from Him is this touch of God's glory. If we do not have this basis, everything we have is just doctrine and theory. May the Lord be gracious to us, so that day by day as we live on earth, we may touch God's glory.

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

## •Outline

- **•The Life Of The Altar**
- **•The Life Of The Tent**
- **•The Second Altar**
- **•The Recovery Of The Altar And The Tent**

## •Scripture Reading: Gen. 12:7-8, 13:3-4, 18

Gen. 12:7-8 "And Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, To your seed I will give this land. And there he built an altar to Jehovah who had appeared to him. And he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to Jehovah and called upon the name of Jehovah."

13:3-4 "And he continued on his journey from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, To the place of the altar, which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah."

18 "And Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to Jehovah."

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The life of a Christian is the life of the altar and the tent. The altar is toward God while the tent is toward the world. In His presence, God requires that His children have an altar and on the earth that they have a tent. An altar calls for a tent, and a tent in turn demands an altar. It is impossible to have an altar without a tent, and it is also impossible to have a tent without a return to the altar. The altar and the tent are interrelated; they cannot be separated.

## THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR

Genesis 12:7 says, “The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.” In this verse we see that the altar is based on God’s appearance. Where there is no divine appearance, there is no altar. No one can offer himself to God unless he has first met God. Unless God has appeared to a man, he cannot offer his all to God. Consecration is not the result of man’s exhortation or persuasion but of God’s revelation. No one can voluntarily offer up all he has on the altar if God has not first appeared to him. By nature, no one can offer himself to God. Even when a man does want to offer himself to God, he finds that he really has nothing to offer. Some have said, “I want to give my heart to the Lord, but my heart will not agree.” Man cannot come over to God’s side. However, when man meets God, consecration takes place spontaneously in his life. If you catch sight of God just once and touch God just once, you are no longer your own. God is Someone who cannot be touched lightly! Once a man touches God, he can no longer live for himself.

We need to realize that the power to offer oneself to God comes through His appearance; it comes from His revelation. Those who talk about consecration are not necessarily consecrated themselves. Not everyone who preaches consecration or understands the doctrine of consecration is a consecrated person. Only those who have seen God are consecrated persons. God appeared to Abraham, and the immediate issue was that Abraham built an altar to God. The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and Paul immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). A turning point in our spiritual life does not come through our decision to do something for God; it does not come as a result of our resolving to do this or that for God. It comes when we see Him. When we meet God, a radical change takes place in our life. We can no longer do what we did in the past. When we meet God Himself, we have the power to deny ourselves. The matter of denying one’s self ceases to be optional when we have met God. His appearance makes a person unable to go on by himself; it forces him to not live by himself anymore. God’s appearance brings with it inexhaustible power. Such an appearance will alter the whole course of a

person's life. For a Christian, the power to live for God is based on his vision of God. Oh! It is not our decision to serve the Lord that enables us to serve Him. It is not our will to build an altar that produces an altar. An altar is built when God comes to a man.

Thank the Lord that He does not have to say anything when He appears. Yet many times, He chooses to say something when He appears. When God appeared to Abraham, He said to him, "Unto thy seed have I given this land" (Gen. 15:18). God's appearance brings us into a new inheritance. It brings the realization that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as an earnest of the inheritance which we shall later possess in fullness. The part that we have received today in the Holy Spirit will be ours in full in the future. When God's plan is fulfilled, we will enter the full inheritance.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham built an altar. This altar was not for a sin offering but for a burnt offering. A sin offering is for redemption, while a burnt offering is an offering of ourselves to God. The altar here does not refer to the Lord Jesus' vicarious death for us; it refers to the consecration of ourselves to God. It was the kind of altar spoken of in Romans 12:1: "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service." The mercy of God caused the Lord Jesus to die for us. The mercy of God provided the cross on which we died with Him and on which the devil was dealt with. By the mercy of God we have His life within, and by His mercy, He will bring us into glory. It is on the ground of His mercies that God beseeches us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him.

In connection with the burnt offering, we should note that a person of ample resources may have offered a bullock, one with less resources may have offered a sheep, and one whose means were even more limited may have offered a turtledove or pigeon (Lev. 1:3, 10, 14). But whether one offered a bullock, a sheep, or a turtledove or pigeon, the offerer had to offer up the whole. One could not offer half a bullock or half a sheep. God wants everything whole; He does not want a half offering. He cannot accept anything less than utter consecration.

For what purpose was the burnt offering placed on the altar? It was to be

wholly burned. Many of us think that we offer ourselves to God to do this or that for Him, whereas what He wants of us is a burning. He does not need a bullock to plow the field for Him; He wants the bullock to be burned on the altar. God is not after our work, but ourselves. He wants us to offer ourselves to Him and be burned for Him. The altar does not signify doing something for God but living for God. The altar does not mean having busy activities but having a living for God. No activity or work can replace the altar. The altar is a life that is totally for God. Unlike the sacrifice of the Old Testament, which was utterly burned in one act, the sacrifice of the New Testament, as depicted in Romans 12, is the presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice. Daily we are consumed on the altar, yet daily we are living; we are ever living, yet ever consumed. This is the sacrifice of the New Testament.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham offered himself to God. Once a man sees God, he will offer himself up totally to God. It is impossible for a man to see God and yet be indifferent. The altar is present as soon as a person sees God. Once there is the taste of His grace, the result is the altar. Once a man sees God's mercy, he becomes a living sacrifice. When the Lord's light comes, he will say, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Abraham had not heard many doctrines about consecration, nor had he been urged by others to consecrate himself. But Abraham had seen God, and when he did, he immediately built an altar to God. Oh, brothers and sisters, consecration is a spontaneous thing. Anyone to whom God has manifested Himself cannot do anything other than live for Him. Once God appears to a person, he will live totally for God. So it was with Abraham, and so it has been with everyone who has met God throughout the two thousand years of church history.

## THE LIFE OF THE TENT

The altar has its issue in the tent. Genesis 12:8 says, "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent." From then on, Abraham lived in God's house—Bethel. From then on, he lived in a tent. Actually he lived in a tent before, but God did not mention it. Not until he had built the

altar does the Word of God bring the tent into view.

What is a tent? A tent is something movable; it does not take root anywhere. Through the altar God deals with us; through the tent God deals with our possessions. At the altar Abraham offered up his all to God. Was he thereafter stripped of everything, even his clothing and belongings? No! Abraham still possessed cattle and sheep and many other things, but he had become a tent dweller. What was not consumed on the altar could only be kept in the tent. Here we see a principle. Everything we have should be placed on the altar. But there is still something left. These are the things that are for our own use. However, they are not ours, they are to be left in the tent. We have to remember that anything that has not passed the altar cannot even be in the tent. But not everything that has passed the altar is consumed. Many things are burned away by the fire and are gone. When we consecrate many things to God, He takes them and nothing is left behind. But God leaves some of the things offered on the altar for our own use. The things that have passed through the altar and are for our use can only be kept in the tent.

Abraham's life was a life of the altar. A day came when even his only begotten son was offered upon it. But what did God do with Isaac? He did not take him away. What you place on the altar, God accepts. He cannot allow you to live for yourself, for your own pleasure, or by your own strength. The altar claims your all, yet not everything that is on the altar is burned. Many things that are placed on the altar are like Isaac; God gives them back to you. Yet these things in your hand can no longer be regarded as your own; they can only be kept in the tent.

Some people ask, "If I give my all to God, do I have to sell all my possessions and dispose of all my money? If I consecrate myself to God, how many chairs and tables may I have in my home and how many garments in my wardrobe?" Some people are truly perplexed over such questions. But we need to remember that we have two lives. We have a life to live before God, and we also have a life to live in the world. In our life before God everything must truly be on the altar, but for our life in the world we still have need of many material things. While we are living in the world, we need clothing, food, and a dwelling place. We ought to

consecrate our all to God and live for Him alone; but if He says we may retain a certain thing, then we may retain it. Nevertheless, we must apply the principle of the tent to all the physical things that He permits us to retain, because they have been given back to us to meet our need in the world. If we do not need them, we should dispose of them. We may use them, but we must not be touched by them. We can have them or let them go; they can be given, and they can be taken away. This is the life of the tent.

May we learn this lesson. We dare not use anything that has not been placed on the altar, we may not take anything back from the altar, and what God gives back must be kept according to the principle of the tent.

## THE SECOND ALTAR

Genesis 12:8 says, "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord." This is Abraham's second altar. The altar led to the tent, and then the tent led again to the altar. With the altar, nothing is ours any longer, and whatever is left from the altar is placed in the tent. Nothing can occupy our heart anymore; our conscience is at peace before God, and we can boldly say to Him, "I have not held back one thing from You." In this way, the tent leads us back to the altar. If our possessions have taken root and we cannot drop them or move them anymore, we become bound by these things, and there can never be a second altar.

When we offer ourselves upon the altar and consecrate our all to God, He leaves certain things for our use; but we have no choice as to what we can keep in the tent and what we have to take out of the tent back to the altar. Everything must first pass the altar. Whatever God leaves for our use, we can put in the tent. But we must still inquire of God concerning all the objects in the tent; we can only keep those that God allows us to keep. We cannot decide to keep anything for ourselves. Everything has to pass the altar first; we must first check with God about every one of them before we can put them into the tent. What has been placed in the tent may go to the altar again at any time. If at any time God says, "You do not need this thing," we should relinquish it immediately. If we cling to it

and say, “This is mine,” then in our heart we have forsaken the altar and are no longer consecrated. We cannot return to the second altar and say to God that our life is being lived for Him.

God demands that everything we have be placed on the altar and that we have placed what He has left for us in the tent. We can only have the second altar when everything is in the tent. The most precious experience is the experience of the second altar. It is easy for us to be stirred up, to become zealous, and to consecrate ourselves. But three or five years after this, we collect many things from the world again, and we cannot go back to the altar anymore. But it is very precious if we can always be tent dwellers and build a second altar. The problem is not with possessions. The problem is with how our consecration stands.

## THE RECOVERY OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

Abraham had his failures. In his history there was a forsaking of the altar and the tent; he went down to Egypt. But there was recovery. How did that recovery come about? Genesis 13:3-4 says, “He went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.” Recovery is a matter of returning to the altar and the tent. Have any of you failed? Have any of you slipped or betrayed your cause? Have any of you gone down into Egypt, so that now you have your own demands, your own hopes, your own interests, and your own aspirations? If you are seeking the way of recovery, you have to come back to the altar and the tent. God’s Word shows us that Abraham’s recovery involved his return “unto the place where his tent had been...unto the place of the altar, which he had made.” Recovery is to return to the tent and to the altar.

What happened to Abraham after his recovery? Genesis 13:18 says, “Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.” Hebron is the place of fellowship with God; it is the place of eternal and continuous fellowship. Abraham dwelt in Hebron, and in Hebron he built another altar for God. If we want to be in fellowship with God, we can never forsake the altar.

May He be gracious to us and cause us to see the importance of consecration so that we may live a life of the altar and the tent!

## MESSAGE FOUR

# THE CROSS AND THE WINE MINGLED WITH GALL

## •Outline

### •One—Three

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 27:34; Luke 23:33-34

Matt. 27:34 "They gave Him wine to drink, mingled with gall. And when He tasted it, He would not drink."

Luke 23:33-34 "And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And dividing His garments, they cast lots."

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When the Lord Jesus was led by man to Golgotha where he was about to be crucified, "They gave Him wine to drink, mingled with gall. And when He tasted it, He would not drink" (Matt. 27:34). At that time the punishment of the cross was the most agonizing kind of punishment; therefore, the law in those days permitted giving the one who was going to be crucified wine mingled with gall to drink. Although wine mingled with gall was not as good as the anesthetics that surgeons use today, at that time it was the substance that best alleviated the pain in one's senses.

## ONE

The Lord Jesus was very distinctive here in that He would not drink wine mingled with gall. When others were crucified, they all wanted to drink wine mingled with gall; only the Lord Jesus would not drink it when He was crucified. There was bitter feeling with the crosses of men, so they all needed wine mingled with gall to remove the pain in their senses. But in the cross of the Lord

Jesus, wine mingled with gall was refused. If one is crucified and also drinks wine mingled with gall, then it will be a cross of man and not the cross of our Lord. In the cross of our Lord, there is not such a thing as wine mingled with gall; there was no need for it. Man sent wine mingled with gall to His lips. After tasting it, He also knew that it was wine mingled with gall and that it could alleviate His pain, but He would not drink it.

At this point we should ask the reason for the Lord's refusal. The cross produced a bitter feeling in others, but it did not produce such a feeling in the Lord Jesus. (This does not refer to physical feeling; physically, He also had feeling.) Because others were full of feelings, there was a need for wine mingled with gall. But here was a person who, on the spiritual side, did not harbor any bitter feelings when He was crucified, so He did not need wine mingled with gall.

According to Luke, when the Lord was on the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (23:34). This is what is meant by having no need of wine mingled with gall. Here was a man who was wrongfully accused, afflicted, scourged, shamed, persecuted, rejected, judged, and even condemned by men. He was abused by men to the uttermost, but at this point He lifted up His head and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He had no feeling of bitterness within, nor the feeling of being wrongfully accused, nor the feeling of being persecuted; therefore, He needed no wine mingled with gall. A person who has no feeling of bitterness within does not need wine mingled with gall to alleviate his pain.

## TWO

Those who harbor a feeling of bitterness, who need wine mingled with gall, are those who will not bear the cross. Many children of God apparently seem to be bearing the cross but are not doing so in reality. Bearing the cross requires no consolation and joy outside of God. But when many bear the cross, the ones living next door know all about it. If those upstairs bear the cross, the ones living downstairs know about it. When it comes to many people, their countenance, expression, and voice tell people: "Look! I am here bearing the cross." We should realize that if the news of the existence of a cross leaks out, it is not a cross.

Whenever the news leaks out, there is no cross. The news that leaks out is wine mingled with gall. Human beings are prone to seek comfort, love, and sympathy from others upon suffering even a little pain. We do not know how innumerable are those who thirst for these things, but this is not the cross. A great problem among God's children is that God is not their joy. Therefore, they seek joy outside of God. God cannot satisfy their heart, and therefore, they need to seek comfort outside of God. This is wine mingled with gall. This is not something that belongs to the cross.

When God's children suffer, there are perhaps three different kinds of feelings. Some react outwardly toward men; some turn inward; and some suppress their feelings. Those who react toward men become angry with others, hate others, and do not forgive them. Those who turn their feelings inward become hurt and pity themselves, supposing that they are following the Lord and that they are suffering very much like the Lord. Those who suppress their feelings become passive. We easily become angry; we easily pity ourselves; and we easily become passive. Some of God's children think that being passive is being victorious. Little do they know that the passive ones, in their feelings, also expect wine mingled with gall. Passivity is another expression of being hurt. Because one is despairing within, he becomes passive; because he expects too much, he becomes passive. Passivity proves that there is no cross; it is only the forcible suppression of one's feelings.

Among God's children, some do suffer, but there are not many who really bear the cross. When they are suffering, they express themselves in a few different ways. Someone may think that since he is a Christian, he is supposed to suffer. Outwardly he says nothing, and he really looks like a cross-bearing Christian, but secretly he is murmuring. Such persons, who murmur a great deal after they have suffered, still do not know what the cross is because inwardly they are filled with bitter feelings; they need wine mingled with gall.

Some people do not murmur when they suffer. There is neither spoken nor silent murmuring. Yet they weep. We must realize that the cross is a place where the blood is shed and the body is sacrificed; the cross is not the place of weeping and self-pity. Those who pity themselves and weep are those who do not know

the cross. Weeping means that one is not willing to see himself suffer. Only those at the foot of the cross weep; those who are on the cross have no tears. If a person feels hurt after enduring a little pain or suffers after incurring a little loss, he still does not know what the cross is.

There is also another kind of person who is puffed up with pride and pretends to be an overcomer. This person is not a crucified person either because his kind of reaction is for gaining people's attention. He seems to be saying, "Though I suffer, I can still sing hymns and still give praise; I am a cross-bearer." The purpose of his behavior is to gain man's admiration. This is also wine mingled with gall; this is not bearing the cross either.

Some do not bear the cross in reality but are very capable of talking about the cross. They consider that this encounter is an experience of the cross, and that incidence is also an experience of the cross. This happening is a cross, and that happening is also a cross. What these persons expect is the pity of men. Their heart is grieved only because no one pities them. Their eyes are always looking around them for some to come and pity them. These persons crave wine mingled with gall; they are not crucified.

## THREE

Then what is the cross?

The cross is not turning one's feelings toward others; it is not turning one's feelings inward or suppressing one's feelings. The cross is a matter of joyful acceptance; it is for a person to thank God saying, "The path that God has chosen for me is all good. I can be glad, I can give thanks, and I have no problems because I receive from God's hand the cross that He has given me."

The cross forgives; it does not pity itself, and it is not passive. The only feeling the cross gives us is a feeling of thanksgiving to the Lord.

The cross is a matter of having a soft heart before God. Whatever God wishes, let it be so. It is a matter of knowing that God is great and that God is also love.

The real bearing of the cross will only result in others' respect; it will not seek man's pity. Whenever one seeks man's pity and whenever one seeks man's

comfort, that is only wine mingled with gall and not the cross. Our Lord was crucified on the cross, and therefore the cross becomes a place where we worship the Lord. The Lord's cross was at Golgotha, and therefore Golgotha becomes the center of our praises to the Lord. If a brother is suffering for the Lord on the cross, we will kiss his hands and his feet for the Lord. But he is not a cross-bearer if he expects this and that while enduring the pain of the cross.

Our Lord refused wine mingled with gall for the simple reason that He did not need man's help. He did not need man's help because He already had God's joy in Him. The cross means rejoicing within and being able to praise God within. Therefore, a cross-bearer can comfort others. Paul said, "Who comforts us in all our affliction that we may be able to comfort those who are in every affliction through the comforting with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:4). A person such as Paul is one who can comfort other people because no difficulty can touch him. We have seen that Paul and Silas could pray and sing hymns to praise God in their affliction in Philippi (Acts 16:25). These two men needed no wine mingled with gall; they were men who were really crucified on the cross. Stephen could still ask God to forgive the people when he was being stoned (Acts 7:59-60). He did not feel any pain for himself; he needed no wine mingled with gall. He was really a crucified person. The cross means that no matter what pain or difficulty befalls you, you are not touched by it; on the contrary, you can still praise God. If you are always considering how heavy or difficult a matter is, there is no cross.

May God show us daily what the cross is, and may we know how the cross does not need wine mingled with gall. May God save us from seeking wine mingled with gall and enable us to rejoice and praise on account of Him.

# MESSAGE FIVE

## AND PETER

Scriptural Messages (2)—Issue No. 29

## •Scripture Reading: Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:7

Mark 16:7 "But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him, even as He told you."

Matt. 28:7 "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has been raised from the dead, and behold, He goes before you into Galilee. There you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."

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Can you find the difference between these two passages after reading them? The Gospel of Matthew says that after the Lord's resurrection, an angel told the women to tell His disciples of His resurrection. The Gospel of Mark records that the angel asked the women to tell the Lord's disciples and Peter. Oh, the words "and Peter" cause tears to fall. All of the four Gospels record the story of the Lord's resurrection. But only the Gospel of Mark has the words "and Peter." Since John was the one whom the Lord loved, why does the Bible not say "and John"? Since Thomas was doubtful about the Lord's resurrection, why does it not say "and Thomas"? The angel did not mention the best disciples or the most needy disciples. He specifically mentioned Peter. Why? What made Peter different from the others?

What kind of person was Peter? Three days before the resurrection, Peter committed a great sin, a sin that would cause the Lord not to confess him before the Father's angels. Peter not only denied the Lord before men, he even denied the Lord before a maid who was despised by others at that time. But the Lord wanted the women to tell the disciples and Peter about His resurrection. The words "and Peter" have a very deep meaning! If any brother or sister had Peter's

experience, they might think:

"Oh! I have fallen. The sin which I have committed is not a common sin. I am afraid that I cannot draw close to the Lord anymore. The Lord might have already forsaken me. I am afraid that from now on, whenever the Lord has any important thing to do, He will not take me along. I will not be able to have special experiences like I had when I was with Him on the mount of transfiguration. I will not be able to accompany Him like I did in the garden of Gethsemane. I told the Lord that I would die for Him, and the Lord said that before the cock crowed twice, I would deny Him three times. I thought that the Lord misunderstood me. When He was taken, I even cut off a man's ear with a sword, thinking that I could love Him courageously. Yet I fell. I did not fall before the high priest or before the powerful Pilate, but before the questioning of a maid. I denied the Lord once, twice, and finally I even swore in my denial of the Lord. At one time I confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. At another time I said to Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.' But eventually, I fell just as the Lord was about to be crucified. I committed the great sin of denying Him. Although I cried with regret, I do not know how the Lord is going to treat me. It would have been better if He had not known that I denied Him. But when I denied Him, He turned His back and looked at me. He knew what I had done. What should I do? I dare not come close to Him anymore. Although He loves me, I dare not approach Him because there is a sin which separates me from Him. Perhaps from now on, I cannot be close to Him. Yet, after the Lord resurrected, several women brought back word that they were to specifically tell me about it. Oh, the Lord has not forsaken me, even though I denied Him three times. He does not hate me, nor is He angry with me. His heart was thinking of me. He did not mention anyone but me specifically. It is as though He was only thinking about me. 'And Peter!' 'And Peter!' These words are truly the most beautiful music in the world, the most wonderful tidings! If the Lord had only told the women to tell the disciples, I would have thought that I was no longer worthy of being His disciple and that I was no longer one of His disciples. I would not dare to go see Him. But since the Lord said, 'and Peter,' I know that He still wants me. Although I do not have the strength to go see Him, 'and Peter' encourages me to go. The

message brought back by the women is true. The Lord told the angel to mention my name specifically. The Lord did not forsake me. I can still draw near to Him. Let me rise up and go see Him!"

Here was a fallen, sinful Peter, a Peter who had denied the Lord. Yet the Lord specifically mentioned him. This is the gospel! Brothers and sisters, do you know that once the Lord saves you, He saves you eternally? Although you may be discouraged, the Lord will never be discouraged. A sinful person like you may feel shame in turning back to Him, but the One you have sinned against considers that there is nothing wrong in returning to Him. Why should you keep thinking of your failure when He is not concerned with it? If the Lord can remove the veil from your face today, you will not fear Him or be afraid to come near to Him. Peter might have remembered that he said to the Lord, "If all will be stumbled because of You, I will never be stumbled" (Matt. 26:33). He might have also remembered what he said at the lake of Gennesaret, when he saw the glory of the Lord: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord" (Luke 5:8). After Peter realized his true condition, how could he dare see the Lord again? He might have remembered the Lord's pleading: "So were you not able to watch with Me for one hour?" He might have heard the Lord's command in his ear: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Matt. 26:40-41). His condition was far below the Lord's requirements. How could he dare to go see Him? But he went to meet the Lord anyway. He dared to go because of the words "and Peter." Brothers and sisters, if you know the Lord's intention behind the words "and Peter," will you still turn away from Him, instead of turning toward Him? If you realize the profound significance of the words "and Peter," you have to come near to the Lord.

Among the four Gospels, only the Gospel of Mark records this matter. Mark was a young man who followed and learned from Peter. The Gospel of Mark was dictated by Peter and written down by Mark. The words "tell His disciples and Peter" were specifically dictated by Peter. These words might not have been important to other people, but they were very important in Peter's heart. When the Holy Spirit was writing the Bible, He specifically wanted to show us that, even though these few words were considered unimportant by Matthew, Luke,

and John, they were very unforgettable and important to Peter who dictated the Gospel of Mark. "And Peter" had special meaning for him. Each remembrance of these words was sweet. Words of grace are especially memorable to the person who receives the grace.

Brothers and sisters, when you are at the Lord's table meeting remembering the Lord, are you still afraid of God in your heart? Is there any sin separating you from God? You may have deeply wept, repented, and admitted that you disappointed the Lord. But do you dare say to the Lord, "Lord, I come to You"? Please consider this: If He was willing to go to the cross because He loved you, would He stop loving you just because you failed, fell, and backslid? Would the love He had on the cross decrease? It may be very easy for you not to love Him, draw near to Him, or return to Him; but it is impossible for Him to forget you, forsake you, or not love you. During the three days after the Lord was crucified, Peter was silent because he had fallen. But the Lord did not forget him. Therefore, if you do not have the strength to come to the Lord, as long as you are willing to believe in His words, He will give you the strength to draw near to Him. If you fall, He can make you rise up again. Although it seems that you will not be able to draw near to Him anymore, remember in faith the words "and Peter," and you will be able to draw near to Him. When you want to come close to the Lord, but feel that you are very far from Him and have no strength to come near to Him, you need to remember the words "and Peter." The more Peter fell, the more the Lord wanted to remember him. Although Peter dared not come too close to the Lord, the Lord's heart attracted him and kept him from running away from Him. May you not misunderstand the Lord's heart. If you ever hear the words "and Peter," you should know that the Lord has not forsaken you. The Lord did not desert Peter, and neither has He forsaken you. "And Peter" means "and you"—"you" who have failed like Peter. May you see the Lord's heart for you. If you see the Lord's heart, you will run toward Him.

# MESSAGE SIX

## THE WASHING OF FEET

## •Outline

- **•The Need Of The Foot-Washing**
- **•Washing One Another's Feet**

## •Scripture Reading: John 13:1-14

John 13:1-14 "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost. And while supper was taking place, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, that he should betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going to God, Rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself; Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. He came then to Simon Peter. Peter said to Him, Lord, do You wash my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not know now, but you will know after these things. Peter said to Him, You shall by no means wash my feet forever. Jesus answered him, Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me. Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is wholly clean; and you are clean, but not all of you. For He knew the one betraying Him; for this reason He said, Not all of you are clean. Then when He had washed their feet and taken His outer garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me the Teacher and the Lord, and you say rightly, for I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

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The Gospel of John shows us clearly that water signifies life. John 4 tells us how, after we have received life, it will become a spring in us welling up into eternal life. Chapter seven, in addition, shows us how this water will be like rivers of living water flowing out of man's innermost being. In chapter thirteen water has another function. Water is not just a spring welling up from within us to satisfy us; it does not just add strength to us to flow into others as rivers of living waters; it can also give us refreshment, new feeling, and new help. According to man's mind there seems to be no need for chapter thirteen. Chapters four and seven seem to be sufficient. There are springs within and rivers without. What else do we need? It seems that there is no other need. But let us stop and think for a moment. We have been born again, but do we sometimes still feel as if we were not born again? In theory we know that the water the Lord gives us will become in us a spring welling up into eternal life, but have we not felt that this spring of living water is not welling up constantly? Are we saying with our mouth that we are satisfied and have no more need, yet at times feeling dissatisfied within? Have we not felt some lack, some need, and some dissatisfaction within, and nothing seemed to be welling up or flowing into others? Brothers and sisters, because our spiritual condition inevitably becomes dry and depressed at times, there is need for the water of chapter thirteen.

## THE NEED OF THE FOOT-WASHING

John 13:1 says, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost." Verse 5 then says that the Lord washed the disciples' feet with water. It is clear that the motivation of the Lord Jesus' washing the disciples' feet was not because of their sin but because He loved His own, and this love was not an initial love but a consummate love. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost." Eventually, with the addition of washing, this love was made perfect. Therefore, foot-washing is necessary. If we want to have a proper walk before the Lord, we must know how to receive foot-washing from others and how to wash others' feet. Foot-washing is the

expression of the Lord's consummate love and the work of the Lord's lasting love; it is related to the consummation of our Christian life. In other words, we must have the experience of receiving foot-washing from others as well as the experience of washing others' feet.

The Lord said to Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." Does this mean that if the Lord had not washed Peter's feet that day, He would have had nothing to do with Peter at all? No. Peter had taken his bath already; the Lord already had something to do with Peter. For eternity the Lord will have something to do with Peter. But if the Lord had not washed Peter's feet, Peter would have had no part with Him in His fellowship and would have been detached from Him. We should remember that the foot-washing in John 13 has nothing to do with sin but with life and power; it is a question of freshness of life. In Asia Minor, people rarely wore socks; they wore sandals. Whenever they walked, they would inevitably collect some dust on their feet. After they finished their work and went home to rest, they would go and wash their feet. Their feet became dirty not because of sin but because they had touched the ground; it was inevitable that their feet would be defiled by the dust. The Lord Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for having defiled their feet. On the contrary, He washed their feet because He loved them to the uttermost. The defiling of their feet was not a question of sin. If it had been a question of sin, the Lord Jesus would not have dealt with them this way. He cannot deal with sin so loosely. Those who know God know that Christians should not sin. Yet they also admit that it is impossible for Christians not to defile their feet while walking on this earth. Until we can walk on the golden street in the New Jerusalem, our feet will always be defiled by the dust no matter how carefully we walk or how hard we try to remain undefiled. When our feet are defiled, our spiritual condition becomes dim and not so fresh. Therefore, our feet need to be washed in order for our spiritual condition to be restored. The Lord's washing of the disciples' feet was just to deal with their dimness and lack of freshness; it was not to deal with the problem of sin. In order to deal with sin, it takes the washing by the blood. We must have the blood before we can have the boldness to go before God. But the blood alone is not enough. Although we are under the cleansing of the blood, we

do not necessarily have the spiritual freshness; we still need the cleansing of the water. After we are washed with water, we feel refreshed and pleasant, and spontaneously our being is restored. The washing of the blood enables us to stand before God, but the washing of the water refreshes us and makes us feel pleasant and energized.

Satan's power is based on sin and death. Hebrews 2 shows us that Satan's power is with death. Satan attacks God's children by causing them either to sin or feel deadened. Therefore, we must not only be kept clean but must also be full of life. This does not mean that the life we received at regeneration will die and that we need another one. It means that the life in us may become deadened, as if it were not there. One of our common but serious mistakes is to think that keeping ourselves from sin on the negative side is sufficient. Little do we realize that we fall far short if we have not manifested life on the positive side. Satan's work is either to make us sin or to make us gloomy. He will make us feel as if nothing is meaningful, as if we are cold, far from God, and have a separating veil between us and God. Sometimes we may feel that we have not committed any specific sin, yet inwardly we feel cold, stale, and debilitated. This is death. Many Christians lack spiritual vitality. They do not have any particular weakness or sin, but they always feel apathetic, cold, and debilitated.

We need to remember that no gloomy Christian can fight against Satan. Not only will sin disable us from the battle, but gloom will also disable us. Therefore, we need to keep ourselves not only from sin but also from gloom. We can mention some concrete examples of this gloom. How many times do we come to the meetings with life, and how many times are we void of spiritual vitality? In other words, how many times do we come in an active way, and how many times do we come in a passive way? Anything that is not active is death. In the meetings, the listeners as well as the speakers need life. Many people come to the meetings in a gloomy, tired, and weary mood; they have no spiritual vitality at all. If too many people are this way in the meetings, the burden of the meeting will become heavy, and no one will be able to bear it. Hence, whenever there is a meeting, everyone who comes to the meeting should supply the church with life, not just the speaking ones. We cannot be passive for one day. Whenever we are

passive in the meeting, we burden the church. Satan's special tool in the church is death. His purpose is just to consume our life and to infect us with death. But the Lord will preserve us and keep us from death.

Once our spiritual condition becomes sullen, we need to be washed with water. Therefore, the Lord Jesus not only wants us bathed, but He also wants our feet washed again and again. The one-time "bath" enables us to have life. The foot-washing recovers the freshness of life. Once a man is bathed, he has life. Hallelujah! We have all been bathed. If we have not been bathed, we are not Christians yet. One day, the Lord washed me not only with the blood but also with water. I received God's life, I touched God, and I touched the Lord. At that time, a spiritual world opened to me, and I touched spiritual reality. I felt that the Lord's death was not something that happened two thousand years ago; it was something for today. I felt that the Lord's death did not take place only at Golgotha but right where I was. The limitations of time and space were broken, and spiritual reality was present. This is what it means to be bathed. But how many Christians have a continual sense of the freshness of this bathing? Many people say that they will be content as long as they can keep their first love. Many people aspire to return to the condition of their initial salvation. This means that they are not as fresh as when they were first bathed. This is the reason there is the need of foot-washing. Foot-washing brings us back to the condition of being bathed. Foot-washing brings us the freshness of life; it brings us new feelings, new strength, and spiritual revival. These are the things foot-washing brings us. Foot-washing not only cleanses a person but also refreshes him. After a man has his feet washed, he is refreshed and revived. Foot-washing recovers our spiritual freshness and causes us to be full of life. Brothers and sisters, foot-washing is a crucial thing. It is crucial to be recovered in life and in spiritual vitality.

## WASHING ONE ANOTHER'S FEET

After the Lord Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He also commanded them, "You also ought to wash one another's feet." This shows us that the church needs to continue the work of foot-washing. We have to wash each other's feet.

Let me ask if you have had the following kind of experience. On a certain day you felt that your spiritual vitality was completely sapped and you were depressed. You checked with yourself and did not discover any particular weakness or sin within. The only thing you felt was tiredness and a lack of energy. You went to a brother's home. He was a good teacher, and he gave you a good message. But the more he spoke, the colder you became. You left and went to another brother's house. You prayed with him and nothing seemed to have changed. After you left his house, you met another brother who did not preach to you or pray with you; he merely chatted with you a little. However, that little, unintentional time of talking and listening gave you strength and energy. After those few words, you could sing again. When you met him, you were grim. But after you talked with him, you began to say hallelujah. Before you met him, you could talk, but only reluctantly. After you talked with him, the whole situation changed, and you touched life. That brother supplied you with life. He washed your feet. Foot-washing is to supply other members in the church with life.

After a day's work in a factory or in a school, you often feel very tired and spiritually debilitated. There is not much desire for reading the Bible or for prayer. While you are in this condition, you may meet a brother in a meeting or at your home who knows the Lord. The minute you touch him, energy comes and you feel that you have touched God. He has supplied you with life and has washed your feet. Once you touch life, your spiritual energy is recovered, and you brighten up once more. This is washing one another's feet.

Among all the things that Christians can do to help one another, there is nothing more precious than washing one another's feet, and nothing is more important than to supply life to another member of the Body. If a Christian with spiritual weariness and weakness comes to a meeting and leaves as tired as he was before, the meeting is a failure. Every time we come to a meeting, we must bring life to it; otherwise, we will increase the burden of the meeting. Everyone should come to the meeting with life so that other brothers and sisters may touch life. As soon as they touch life, their spiritual gloom will be over. They will be shining, and they will be fresh.

A brother once attended a preaching meeting. When he came in, he felt very

dejected. He checked with himself and asked if there was any particular sin in himself. He could not find any. Were there any particularly bothersome matters? No. Yet he could not lift up his spirit. He began to pray, "Lord, I need the supply of life!" Later, another brother prayed, and his prayer supplied the dejected brother, who then brightened up. This is washing one another's feet.

If anyone comes to the meeting in a passive way and does not care for anything but simply sits there without expecting anything to happen or helping anyone, he is not washing others' feet. To wash one another's feet means that we want to help others when we come to a meeting and that we want others to receive benefit. We do not need to consciously try to do anything; all we need is a heart to help the brothers. Most importantly, we must not burden the meeting. Sometimes we really feel we are short of strength, and our spirit can hardly be lifted up. At these times, we can open ourselves to the brothers and sisters to wash our feet, cause us to touch God, and render us spiritual help. But we must be careful not to always bring a burden to the meeting. If four hundred out of five hundred brothers bring their burdens to the meeting, this is too heavy for the meeting to bear. Whether or not a meeting is worthwhile before the Lord and whether or not one touches life depends on whether there is more life or more burden. This responsibility rests on every brother and sister. If many spirits are open, the meeting will have no problem at all, and many will spontaneously be revitalized spiritually. But if too many people sit back in a cold way, the meeting will become too hard to bear. Passivity is the heaviest burden to a church. No one can come to the meeting without praying or preparing for it. Everyone should pray and spend time before the Lord. Everyone should render help to the meeting with life. In the church meetings we should help one another, and then we will all be helped. To help one another is to wash one another's feet.

The Lord said, "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." We must remember that the work of foot-washing has been committed to the church. This does not mean that one cannot obtain freshness by coming to the Lord, but it means that the Lord has commanded that we wash one another's feet. If we want to wash others' feet, we ourselves must be fresh first. If the Lord constantly does a new work in us, we

always will have a new supply for others. It is a pity if others contact us and find us to be the same as we were five years ago, without anything new to offer. It is a pity if others have to wait a few years or even a few months before they can find something new in us. We need to be aggressive and active before the Lord and not stay still.

A certain sister, who had received special dealings from the Lord, bore a particular characteristic. Every time others touched her, they could sense God's new work in her and touch the newness of life in her. When others were out of touch with the presence of the Lord and felt spiritually tired, all they had to do was go to her and sit in front of her for a few minutes, and the tiredness would disappear. Something would come out from her, and one would sense the supply of life.

Brothers and sisters, you need to aspire to be ministers of life to others. Do not ever be disappointed that you are not as eloquent as others, or that you do not have as much Bible knowledge as others. As long as you live in life, you will be able to supply life to other members. Some people begin to pray in the prayer meeting right after they are saved. Their prayers may be very awkward, but when others touch them, they receive light and supply. Yet after these ones have been Christians for a period of time, the life supply in them becomes less and less. Having lived the Christian life for a few years, they pick up much knowledge and many doctrines, yet there is a lack of the supply of life. The supply of life is not a matter of knowledge but a matter of freshness. It is better to have less knowledge and less doctrine than it is to lose the supply of life. We should ask the Lord to deliver us from our inability to supply life and should pray that we live before Him in a genuine way. If we live before the Lord and are in touch with life, we will supply others with life and wash their feet every time we contact them. They will receive the freshness of life and be recovered spiritually.

We must also remember that foot-washing is a mutual matter. We should learn before the Lord to supply others, and we should also learn to receive the supply from others. The reason we need to be humble is so that we can receive help from others. We need to wash others' dark spots, and we should be willing to let others wash our dark spots. Through this mutual foot-washing, mutual

serving, and mutual supplying we can be built up, helped along, and run the race before us.

Acts 18:5 is a very precious word, "And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word." This shows us that Silas and Timothy supplied life to Paul. Silas and Timothy did not preach to Paul. Their coming was sufficient to cause Paul to be constrained by the word. Paul had been preaching and reasoning in the synagogue and laboring for the work, but upon the arrival of Silas and Timothy, Paul began to be constrained by the word. He was energized because he had received new supply from the two. Indeed, when we contact some people, the mere touch will bring life to us.

Brothers and sisters, before God we should pursue being used by Him as a minister of life to others. The basic requirement of one who always ministers life to others is to be one who always receives the dealing of the cross. Our natural life must be broken by the Lord. If we do not have the inner working of the cross, we can only minister knowledge or eloquence to others; we cannot minister the Spirit or the life of Christ to them. If our knowledge and eloquence are greater than our spirit, the impression we give to others will be of our knowledge and eloquence rather than of our spirit. We must continually live before the Lord, contacting Him and fellowshipping with Him, before we can minister life to others. We must remember that the supply of life is spontaneous rather than artificial. It is true that we need to wash with water, but this water is not pumped up by human efforts; rather, it flows from the source of life. If we live in life, we will spontaneously have the supply of life and will automatically wash others' feet with life. Others will touch the Lord just by one contact with us; they will feel the Lord's presence and will become more intimate with Him. We need to pray that the Lord grants us grace to reach this goal.

Note: This chapter is on the spiritual significance of foot-washing. There is, of course, the literal application of foot-washing as an act as mentioned in Genesis 18:4, 19:2, and 1 Timothy 5:10. The latter is an expression of love and humility.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## THE MIND OF CHRIST

Scriptural Messages (2)—Issue No. 35

## •Scripture Reading: Phil. 2:1-11

Phil. 2:1-11 "If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any tenderheartedness and compassions, Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing, Doing nothing by way of selfish ambition nor by way of vainglory, but in lowliness of mind considering one another more excellent than yourselves; Not regarding each his own virtues, but each the virtues of others also. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, But emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

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During the past few weeks, this passage of Scripture has often been in my heart. As Christians, we should pay close attention to this portion of the Bible.

Verse 1 says, "If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any tenderheartedness and compassions." If we look at the words of this verse, there does not seem to be anything that we can get out of it. Apparently it does not say much. But what does this verse really mean? After reading this verse, many people think that it is

insignificant, but I must tell you that it has a very deep significance. If we can understand the significance of this verse, we can fulfill what is mentioned in the following verses. We may say that verse 1 is the "soil" of the succeeding verses. A seed cannot be sown in the air because the air had no ground in which the seed can be rooted. A seed has to be sown in a soil rich and deep enough to give it opportunity to grow. This verse is the soil, the nutrition, and the source of water for the next ten verses. Without this verse, it is hard for the next ten verses to be carried out.

The words "if there is...in Christ" are very important. According to Paul, if there is encouragement in Christ, then thinking the same thing, as mentioned in the next verse, could be achieved. If there is any consolation of love in Christ, then the love mentioned in the next verse can also be achieved. Furthermore, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, any tenderheartedness and compassions in Christ, then joining together in soul and thinking the one thing mentioned in the next verse can also be achieved. If there is no encouragement in Christ, we cannot think the same thing. If there is no consolation of love in Christ, we cannot have the same love. If there is no fellowship of the Spirit, and no tenderheartedness and compassions in Christ, we cannot be joined in soul or think the one thing. In short, we must have these things in Christ in order to have the result spoken of in the next verse. If we do not have these things in Christ, we cannot have the result in verse 2.

Brothers and sisters, do you have any encouragement and any consolation of love in Christ? Do you have any fellowship of Spirit, any tenderheartedness and compassions in Christ? If you do not have these things in Christ, how can you carry out what is mentioned in the subsequent verses? If you are in Christ and have encouragement, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit, and tenderheartedness and compassions, then it is very easy for you to think the same thing, have the same love, be joined in soul, think the one thing, and make the Lord's joy full.

Paul applies verse 1 as the source, foundation, fertilizer and nutrient. If there were no such verse, how could Paul advise the Philippian brothers and sisters to think the same thing, have the same love, be joined in soul, think the

one thing, do nothing by way of selfish ambition, nor by way of vainglory, but to be lowly in mind and regard the virtues of others? How would the Philippian brothers and sisters answer him? They might say, “Sir, although these things are good, we cannot do them. Christ can do them but we do not have His strength. As long as we belong to the world, how can we accomplish this? To love those who are lovable is all right but to love those who are unlovable is hard. I have my mind and others have theirs. I have my thoughts and they have theirs. How can we be of one mind?” Therefore, Paul took care of this concern from the very beginning by telling them that all these things will become easy, “If there is...in Christ.” In order to be satisfied and full, we need to be fed first. In order to be filled, we need to be fed first. In order to be strengthened, one needs to be supplied with strength first. One brother made a very good point. He said everyone exhorts others to “put out with more strength,” but he would rather advise people to “put in more strength.” If one does not put in strength, how can he put out strength? This is what verse 1 means. Paul shows us that there is strength in Christ. How very important are the words “in Christ”! Because I am in Christ, I am able. Outside of Christ I am a sinner, but in Christ I am saved. Outside of Christ I am a failure, but in Christ I am an overcomer.

Verse 2 says, “Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing.” Because of the supply in verse 1, we have verse 2. Since we are “in Christ,” we can do the things in verse 2. If we have taken a meal and are still hungry, we have taken our meal in vain. If we have something in Christ, we should be able to do many things.

Why do we need to “think the same thing”? Is this possible? Can we have “the same love”? Can we be “joined in soul, thinking the one thing”? While in Foochow I spoke with a brother about thinking the same thing. He said, “Does it mean that I have to change my mind to agree with yours or you have to change your mind to agree with mine? This might be easy to do with two people, but it would be hard with three people. Which of the two minds needs to be changed in order to agree with the third? It is even harder to be of one mind among four or five hundred or even one thousand. How can we think the same thing among so many minds?” According to Paul, it is easy to think the same thing. The answer is

in verse 5, which says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” This does not mean that I lay aside my mind to be one with yours or that you lay aside your mind to be one with mine, but that we receive the mind of Christ into us. Your mind is one with His, and my mind is also one with His. If every one of us is one mind with Him, even though we are many, it is easy to be likeminded. When we set out to do something, you have your tune, and I have my song; you have your decision, and I have my opinion. At that time should you submit to me or should I submit to you? One might think that you should submit to me and another might think that I should submit to you. Neither is God’s way. God’s way is in verse 5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Oh, what a loss to God if one brother or sister walks on the wrong path, unwilling to submit to Him! What a loss God will suffer! Being likeminded will not only make God joyful but make His joy full. Paul, in these verses, represents the Lord. God’s heart and the Lord’s heart can be made full of joy only when the believers are in the situation in verse 1! There are many things that can make the Lord joyful. But Christians with the same mind make Him not only joyful, but also make His joy full. To save people will make the Lord happy. To overcome will make the Lord happy too. But to be likeminded will make the Lord’s joy full. We have to be likeminded to such an extent that whatever our mouth says, our hearts agree, and we practice accordingly. The words in this verse the heart. The Chinese character for the word mind has as its root the word heart. To be one is an inward and not an outward matter. God can make us one to the point that we are one not only in word but also in our heart.

The like-mindedness of some people is only in word but not in their hearts; their hearts are not one. Their attitude reveals this. People around them can tell the difference. Of course, these ones may still say with their lips that they are likeminded. This kind of like-mindedness is not what we mean. The like-mindedness that we mean is according to being “in Christ” in verse 1.

Verse 3 says, “Doing nothing by way of selfish ambition nor by way of vainglory, but in lowliness of mind considering one another more excellent than yourselves.” This verse is still based on the fact that one is in Christ. Therefore, one who is in Christ should not do something and should do something. What

does selfish ambition mean? It means that one has his own preference. Besides Christ he has his own aim. For example, if there is a problem between two persons and you take sides with one of them, you are wrong. You must stand only on the Lord's side for the Lord's sake; otherwise, you have selfish ambition.

What kind of glory is vainglory? There is a verse in the Bible which says, "More and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Glory has a weight; it is not floating about but it is weighty. This kind of weighty glory can only be seen by God. The obvious glory—that which is easily seen by men—is vainglory. But man cannot secure this kind of glory. He can long for it but never obtain it. Who can secure anything that is vain and floating about? All man can do is constantly long for it.

Unfortunately, sometimes arguments occur among the brothers and sisters. They are either caused by selfish ambition or by some who are seeking for vainglory. One wants to be greater than the other. Both of them insist and neither will give in. In fact whoever who wants to be great cannot really become great because there are always those who are greater!

When a person is flattered and highly praised, it seems that he has received much glory. Actually, his feet are walking in vanity and emptiness. Brothers and sisters, please remember that all glory from man is vainglory. There is a story of a renowned English novelist who wrote a very famous novel. One day he was invited to a banquet by an English lord. There he met a lady who continued to praise his novel. He rose up and said to her, "You are not worthy to praise my writing." He considered the lady's compliment as shameful. Oh, who is worthy to compliment us? Apart from the Lord, no one is worthy! Whenever someone praises us, we become degraded. Should we then covet praise? If your heart is for the future, aspiring to the Lord's word of "good and faithful servant," and if you desire the crown in that day, how can you receive and seek after someone's praises today? Moreover, no one is worthy to praise us.

We should not only shun vainglory on the negative side but, on the positive side, we should in lowliness of mind consider one another more excellent than ourselves. What is lowliness? Lowliness means to leave no ground for oneself. Whoever gives ground to himself can never be lowly. All those who say that they

have some kind of authority, and that they should receive something will never be lowly. To be lowly is to leave no ground for oneself. One may speak words of lowliness with his lips, but may not be lowly in his mind. Many things that pass through the lips may not necessarily pass through the heart.

How is an attitude of lowliness of mind expressed? It is expressed through "considering one another more excellent than yourselves." Considering others more excellent than yourselves is a sign or trademark of lowliness. How difficult it is to consider others more excellent than yourselves! Once I met an elderly Christian who had served the Lord many years. A brother asked him, "Of all the Christian virtues, which is the most difficult to attain?" He replied, "The most difficult thing to attain is Philippians 2:3, which says, 'in lowliness of mind considering one another more excellent than yourselves.'" Indeed, being lowly in mind is most difficult! What sin caused Satan to become Satan? It was pride. He fell because he wanted to be equal with the Most High. What sin caused man to become a sinner? It was also pride. Adam thought that after eating the fruit he would be like God, discerning good and evil, so he ate and fell. Lowliness of mind is the most difficult of all the virtues to attain. Perhaps no one on earth can genuinely achieve it. It is possible to find some who have ability, eloquence, or talent. But it is very difficult to find a genuinely humble person.

How can we consider others more excellent than ourselves? One believer put it well by saying, "When I look at myself, I look at my old man; when I look at others, I look at their new man." If we recognize our nature and corruption, and we consider God's grace upon others and His transformation of others, we cannot help but consider others more excellent than ourselves. The believers in Rome should have received help from Paul, but Paul wanted to receive help from them because their faith had spread abroad. Paul wanted to receive help from the recent work God had done among them.

I once brought a problem to a Western missionary. I asked, "Does God demand more from the believers, or do the believers demand more from their fellow believers? My thought was that perhaps God demanded more. I considered that because we are so low and the Lord is so high, He would demand more. She replied, "No." I asked her for the reason, and she said, "What we can

see are men's obvious failures; but what the Lord sees are men's hidden victories." Indeed, this word comes from deep experiences. What we see is a person's obvious failures—once, twice or even tens of times. But the Lord sees his hidden victories—once, twice or hundreds of times. Perhaps you were tempted five times and failed five times, while someone else was tempted three times but failed only once. Perhaps he has many hidden victories which you have not yet seen. You may have had ten battles and were defeated only once; he may have had hundreds of battles and been defeated only once. If we understand this, we cannot but consider others more excellent than ourselves.

Verse 4 says, "Not regarding each his own virtues, but each the virtues of others also." This is not an easy matter. Due to my bad health in recent years, I have often been unable to take care of the things of others. Oftentimes it seems that we cannot even take care of our own things. How can we then regard the virtues of others? Regarding the virtues of others requires a life of self-denial. Recently I met a lady missionary from the China Inland Mission. I asked if she had met Mr. Hudson Taylor and whether she had seen anything special about him. She said, "According to what I know, he has a special characteristic: whenever you visit him, it seems that he is not busy. He considers your matter to be the most important. Actually his day is filled with writing many letters and seeing many people. He cares for others as though he has no other cares." This is self-denial. Oh, if the Lord were as cold as we are, not caring for anyone, where would you or I be today? The Lord cared for the things of men. He died because of our sins. We must learn to be a person who cares for the things of others.

Verse 5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." This verse is a conclusion of verses 1 through 4. If one seeks for encouragement in Christ, much more can be said. If we have the mind of Christ Jesus, everything will be fine with us, and we can do all things. Since some may ask, "what is the mind of Christ?", Paul gave his answer in verses 6 through 8.

Verses 6 through 7 say, "Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, But emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men." Christ was entitled to lawfully hold His existence in the form of God; He is worthy to hold this as His right.

Therefore, He "did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped." He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men." What kind of mind is the mind of Christ? The mind of Christ involves Him giving up His legal right. Perhaps you wish that certain ones would treat you a certain way. But Christ did not even claim what He was entitled to. He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped; rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave. This is the mind of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I often feel that legal rights are not a good thing because we all think that we are entitled to certain legal rights. But our Lord said, "You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and the great exercise authority over them. It is not so among you" (Matt. 20:25-26). The teaching of Matthew 5 through 7 can be summarized in two phrases: give up what you deserve and, instead, receive joyfully what you do not deserve. Others can demand an eye for any eye, a tooth for a tooth, but the Lord said to pray for those who persecute you. Lay aside what you deserve and receive what you do not deserve. On these hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40). Whether at home or abroad, no Christian should voice his right. If the Lord had said, "Can the Father send me?", the Father could not have sent Him. On the one hand, the Lord said, "I and my Father are one." At the same time, He also said, "My Father is greater than I." Is there a difference of great and small within the Triune God? No. The matter of greatness and smallness is not based on existence but on willingness. The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit; this is the humility within the Godhead.

The form of a slave indicates the lowliness of Christ; the likeness of men indicates the human limitations suffered by the Lord. The form of a slave is in apposition to the form of God as man is in apposition to God. God is unlimited. But man is limited by time and space; he is limited in his eating, drinking, and sleeping. The form of God is glorious whereas the form of a slave is lowly. The mind of Christ is in His being willing to humble and restrict Himself.

Verse 8 says, "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross." Christ's obedience is to obey One who is equal to Him, not One who is greater than He.

Christ's obedience is an obedience even unto death, and that the death of a cross.

Brothers and sisters, Christians should be more in oneness and love. The way of verses 6 through 8 is truly the way of the cross! If a brother has not yet learned to deny the self, is still unwilling to lay down his legal right, and who does not know how to humble himself among his peers, then he has never walked the way of the cross. There was a Western missionary who said, "A certain person always encourages others to walk the way of the cross, the narrow way of the cross. However, I see him as one who has never entered into this way." Indeed, if we have never denied ourselves, we have never taken the way of the cross. We often say that we want to choose the way of the cross but we do not realize that we need to deny ourselves in daily matters that is, to die. This is the way of the cross.

Once a sister met a doctor who was an active believer in the Brethren group. He was well-educated, knowledgeable about the Bible, and quite eloquent in his preaching. This sister said to him, "Sir, what you preach is not wrong; but the way you take is wrong." He argued that what he preached was the denial of the self and the bearing of the cross. The sister said, "That is right; but what I see is that you have never died." He humbly sought for her advice, and she spoke frankly to him according to the Bible. Later he wrote her a letter, saying, "After you left, I told God that I did not know what the cross was, or what the way of the cross was, or what it was to deny oneself? I told Him, 'God, in the midst of all my ignorance, I consecrate myself to You. I pray that You will enable me to deny myself.' After this, difficulties came. My wife opposed me. When I could no longer bear it, a voice reminded me, 'In these matters you should deny yourself and die.' Formerly I preached about the cross and the denial of the self. Yet I did not realize in what things I should die and how to die? Now I know that it is carried out in the practical matters. When I speak in his way, many people are provoked to oppose me. My medical practice has also been affected. Now I know that I must die among those who are with me."

Brothers and sisters, many people know the truth and the necessity of denying the self, but how does one die? One dies among those he is with, among the people he can see and touch. May God bless us so that we can think the same

thing, have the same love, be joined in soul, and think the one thing, so that the Lord's joy may be full.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## RUNNING THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US

## •Outline

### •One—Eight

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 12:1-3

Heb. 12:1-3 "Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us, Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God. For compare Him who has endured such contradiction by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary, fainting in your souls."

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### ONE

Hebrews 11 mentions Abel, Enoch, and many other men of old and tells us how they did many things "by faith." What does this mean? Here we are shown one very important thing that is indispensable to every Christian. This is faith. In 2:3, it mentions "so great a salvation." This salvation is not the initial salvation; it refers to the entrance into Canaan, which is the entrance into the kingdom with the Son of God. In this kingdom we reign with Christ. This is the gospel of the kingdom.

God puts two things before man. First, He puts eternal life before the sinner. Second, He puts the kingdom before the man who has obtained eternal life. He who believes has eternal life. However, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:20). "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will

enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 7:21). From these two verses we can see that obtaining eternal life only requires our believing, but there are other qualifications for entering into the kingdom.

Once a man is saved, God puts him into a race. The entire Christian life is a race. This race is not for obtaining eternal life. On the contrary, only those who already have eternal life are qualified to run the race. At the end of the race, some will receive a crown, while others will not receive a crown (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

What is a crown? A crown represents a kingdom. A crown is the symbol of kingship, reigning, and glory. Receiving the crown means to obtain the kingdom, which is to become kings to reign and receive glory with the Lord Jesus. Not receiving the crown means missing the kingdom, and failing to reign, rule, and receive glory with the Lord Jesus. The crown is the symbol of the kingdom. There is no problem with a Christian obtaining eternal life. However, his obtaining of the kingdom depends on how he runs the race.

After a man is saved, God puts him in a race which is aimed directly at the kingdom. All his words, conduct, thoughts, living, and everything about him have to do with whether or not he will obtain the kingdom in the future. Those who do not join the race have judged themselves unworthy of obtaining the kingdom. Those who do not run the race properly have delayed their obtaining of the kingdom. God has already put every Christian on this way. Whether or not we will obtain the kingdom depends on us. Our abandon, consecration, faithfulness, and victory will make us those that receive the crown. But those who desire the world and walk according to their flesh will see that although they have eternal life through the Lord Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is still not theirs.

## TWO

What are the "witnesses" mentioned in Hebrews 12:1? Apparently, it refers to those who have great faith as mentioned in chapter eleven. Actually, it does not refer to the people themselves but to the things they did. The word witness is the same in the original language as in Acts 1:8 and 2:32. The Word of God tells us that the witnesses of the things done by those people are like a great cloud

surrounding us.

What do these many witnesses witness? They witness to God's "great salvation" (Heb. 2:3-4). This great salvation is not only the forgiveness of sins but obtaining the kingdom. The kingdom is the goal of our race. God gave us so many witnesses for the purpose of encouraging us to live a life of faith so that we can run the race and receive the glory of the kingdom. Although the great men of faith in chapter eleven did not have the kingdom directly as their object of faith, their faith was nevertheless their race. For them to believe so recklessly was a kind of laying aside of everything for the running of the race. Apparently, they obtained what they believed in; some were raptured, some obtained the land, some were resurrected, and some were saved from perishing. But these things are not God's ultimate promise to them. What they had obtained through faith was only their earnest, proving that they would obtain the promised kingdom of God. "And these all, having obtained a good testimony through their faith, did not obtain the promise, because God has provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40). What is this talking about? It is about the kingdom. They had obtained the earnest, and this earnest is God's assurance to them that they would obtain the kingdom in the future.

"So great a cloud of witnesses," is the grace given by God through the faith of many people. God answered their prayers and worked miracles; He proved that their running of the race was well-pleasing to Him and that they would possess the kingdom. Since we have all these witnesses, we should run the race of faith.

God has put the kingdom before us, and He has given us a race to run. At the end of the race, we will see if we have failed or won. The winner will reign with the Lord, while the loser, though saved, will have nothing to do with the glory of the kingdom.

## THREE

The race is already set, and those who want to run have to "put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us." There are two crucial things in running a race. First, we have to lay aside every weight, and second, we

have to put away our sin.

Let us consider first the putting away of sin. Sin is the greatest hindrance to our progress. Sin causes a runner to lose his qualification. Sin is a violation. A violator will not be allowed to run the race but will be taken out of the race.

We should put aside and reject all the known sins. Envy, pride, filthiness in the heart, lies in the mouth, impatience in our disposition, and debauchery of lusts will all disqualify us from being a runner. Disqualified runners will not be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven or to reign with the Lord Jesus. Believers must stand upon Romans 6:6 and 6:11 and must reckon themselves to be dead to sin. At the same time, we must also reject sin and not allow it to have dominion over us; we should present our members as weapons of righteousness unto God. We have to thoroughly confess, repent, and renounce all our offenses before God and seek His forgiveness. We cannot run the race set before us with an accusing conscience. We should not have any sin that has not been denied and that leaves a prolonged guilty conscience within us. If we have offended anyone, we should confess to him properly. If we owe someone any material thing, we should repay him according to our ability. We should not have any offense against anyone that has not been dealt with. Do not be afraid of losses and do not be afraid of losing face. Otherwise, we will not be able to run the race. Moreover, we have to realize that the appearance of some sins is not bad, and they easily beguile us. Moses chose "rather to be ill-treated with the people of God than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin" (Heb. 11:25). This shows us that sin has its enjoyment. Many sins make people feel happy. Man's flesh likes to sin because sin is something enjoyable. But we who have a true faith would rather suffer affliction and insult than have the enjoyment of sin. We should reject sin; otherwise, we will judge ourselves unworthy of the kingdom.

Consider again the words, "put away every encumbrance [weight]." What is a weight? A weight is not necessarily a sin nor something very bad. But it is something which easily besets us. If we do not remove the sin, we will lose our qualification in the race. However, if we do not lay aside our weight, even if we are qualified to run, we will not run fast. Have we ever seen a person running with his leather coat and his jacket on? Anything that hinders us from running

fast or advancing forward is a weight.

In the nineteenth century there was a man who was greatly used by the Lord, who spent a great deal of time compiling a dictionary of Hebrew words. When it was completed, he sent it to his friends for review. His friends praised him much for his effort and considered that once this dictionary was published, he would become a well-known scholar. But, this brother eventually burned up the manuscript of the dictionary. He said, "The time of compiling [the dictionary] has decreased my love for the Lord and my love for the soul of man. Proofreading and printing will take up more time. I would rather burn it up." The proofreading and printing were not a sin, but to him they were a weight, and he chose to lay aside his weight. Although something is not sin, is it a weight to us? Will these things help us go on? Anything that frustrates our progress is a weight. Even a piece of clothing or a meal may become our weight. If we are going to run a race, and someone invites us for a bowl of noodles, or asks us to put on an overcoat, will we still be able to run the race? Therefore, we should not only remove our sin but should also lay aside every weight. If there is any weight upon us, we will never be able to run properly.

Lot failed because of the weight upon him. Lot himself was not a bad man but a righteous man who was oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless (2 Pet. 2:7). But his living was different from that of Abraham. Abraham was living in the wilderness, and Lot was in the city. Abraham was living in a tent, and Lot was in a house. This was their difference—one was light and the other had a weight. Although he could run with a weight, eventually he failed because he could not run well.

We have to pay attention to what was said in Mark 4:19. The Lord did not say that we are fruitless because of sin, but "the anxieties of the age and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts for other things" cause us to bear no fruit. We do not need to sin; only a little care of the world will cause us to bear no fruit. Riches are not sin, but riches will surely not help us to fly away with two wings. Whoever intends to be a rich man will never run a good race. We have to fulfill all our God-given duties. But if our heart is entangled by anything, we will not be able to run well.

Weight is not sin; in many cases, it may even be something legal. But it is still a weight and will reduce our speed in going forward. Perhaps our weight is a friendship which we cannot give up, a position which we are pursuing, a little bit of worldly ambition, a pleasant house, a bowl of delicious food, or a beautiful dress. Although these things and thousands of other things are not sin, they will hinder us from running in a fast way.

Therefore, we should check ourselves. Is there any sin that disables us from running? What is the weight that hinders us from running in a fast way? Sin disqualifies us from being a runner and drives us out of the race. Weight causes us to run badly, even to labor in vain. What is our special sin? What is our particular weight? We have to search out these sins and weights and remove them.

## FOUR

Those who run the race should not only lay aside the sin which so easily entangles them and every weight but should also run the race that is set before them with endurance. Why with endurance? Because the prize is not given at the beginning of the race, nor is it given in the middle of the race. Rather, it is given at the end—the very last step—of the race. We may run well at the start, and we may even run well at the mid-point, but we will not necessarily run well at the end. A victory involves winning at the beginning, at the mid-point, and at the end. Before reaching the end, we cannot guarantee that we will win the prize. We may fail in the last five steps. Once in a two hundred meter running race, a man was ahead of the other competitors by twenty meters at first. No one expected that he would fall down just two meters before the finish line. If we want to win the race, we have to be careful. We cannot say that we will surely win the prize before reaching the end. Even Paul said, “Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue” (Phil. 3:12). How about us?

What is to “run”? To “run” means to not stand still, it means to not walk slowly. It means to run forward fast and finish the longest distance within the shortest time. In other words, it means to run fast. Since there are many competitors, one has to be ahead of others if he wants to win the crown.

Whether or not we win depends on how fast we run. If we waste our time and linger about, we will surely fail.

We are running the race which is set before us. There is only one race, which is the race set before us. We cannot choose the race we want to run. We have to run what God sets before us. In a race, who would dare run outside of the track? Everyone must run inside the track that is drawn for him. This is what 2 Timothy 2:5 says, "Also if anyone contends in the games, he is not crowned unless he contends lawfully." Unfortunately, many Christians, though running zealously, are not running the race set by God. All our own zeal, labor, and activities can never replace God's will. All the running outside of God's will eventually results in loss. God has set the race before us. We must run this race in order to gain the prize.

## FIVE

Our feet have to run right inside the track drawn by God. Our eyes have to be "looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). That means we have to look away from all other things and look to Jesus. We should not look at anything else but should look only at Jesus. Only when we look unto Jesus can we run straight. Many things around us may affect our vision and change our goal. Only by looking unto Jesus will we run the race from beginning to end.

He is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Our faith is initiated by Him and perfected by Him. What we believe in is only Himself. Once we are in the Lord, we have to always abide in Him. We should set our mind only on the Lord Jesus. Even things like holiness, victory, perfect love, baptism in the Spirit, zeal in rescuing the perishing ones, spiritual warfare, and so on should not capture our hearts. All the "beginnings" and "endings" should depend on the Lord Jesus. Our faith should begin in Him and finish in Him. We must not look unto anything other than Christ. If we look unto Jesus only, things such as holiness and victory will spontaneously be manifested in our lives. But if we seek for anything apart from Christ, those things will only make our path crooked. In this spiritual journey, we must pray for revelation from God, so that we see that everything is in Christ. Forgiveness, justification, and regeneration are in Christ. Holiness,

victory, the filling of the Spirit, and so on are also in Christ. Everything is Christ. He is the very beginning of the beginning, the very end of the end. He is the Alpha; He is the Omega. Everything of us depends on Him. Apart from Him, we cannot run the race set before us.

"Looking away" is the precondition of looking unto the Lord. Unless we look away from all other things, we can never look unto the Lord. Those who look around while running the race will never run well. They will either run into a wrong track or will stop altogether. Therefore, God does not want us to look unto anything else but Him. Furthermore, even looking back inside ourselves is a harmful thing in our spiritual journey. All kinds of introspection, self-analysis of our own feeling, self-consideration of our own progress, or even excessive concern about our own spirituality will hinder our progress. One of the greatest dangers in running the race lies in a subconscious introspection in the runners due to their anxiety over progress. The result is that we cannot look away unto Jesus. What is looking unto Jesus? Looking unto Jesus is not looking at ourselves. Looking unto Jesus is being drawn by Jesus from our inside world and joining ourselves to the One whom we are looking unto. Who is the Jesus we are looking unto? We look unto the Jesus who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith; He is the all-inclusive Jesus. The key to spiritual progress is to know in a proper way how to not look back on our own situation. Blessed are those who do not look at themselves. May the Spirit of God reveal to us what looking away means and what an improper looking back is.

## SIX

Let us see how the Lord Jesus ran the race. He, "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God." The Lord Jesus ran straight by looking unto the joy set before Him. What kind of joy is this? He Himself had said, "Good and faithful slave...enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). This refers to the joy of His millennial reign. According to His holy nature, our Lord is submissive to God. But the Bible also reveals another side of the truth: God's reward and approval, especially the kingdom, exercised some influence on Him. Our Lord went

through all the shame and the cross and never drew back because of the joy set before Him.

Why does the Bible say, "Jesus," the Author and Perfecter of our faith rather than saying "Christ" or "Lord Jesus" (the address after His resurrection)? We know Jesus is His name as a man. God wants us to look unto Jesus so that we will look unto His human aspect. He is submissive to God by His nature; this refers to His divine aspect. He despised all the shame, enduring the cross for the joy set before Him; this refers to His human aspect. This is why the Spirit specifically mentions "Jesus," to show us that the prize also had considerable effect on Him as a man. It is right for us to obey God out of love for Him. But on the other hand, since God wants to motivate us to serve Him faithfully by means of the prize, it is not wrong for us to serve Him faithfully for the sake of the prize before us.

Why did Paul "forget...the things which are behind and stretch...forward to the things which are before," and "pursue toward the goal"? His own answer was "for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward" (Phil. 3:13-14). The prize was the high calling of God, and Paul left all that he had for it. God is pleased when we serve Him faithfully for the sake of the prize.

Our Lord "endured" and "despised" because of the joy of the kingdom. How about us? Brothers and sisters, have we ever left anything for the glory of the kingdom? Have we ever quit doing what we wanted to do or done what we did not want to do for the sake of the prize from God? If this joy captured our Lord, can it not capture us? Many saints, in ancient times as well as today, left all they had for the sake of the kingdom's glory and followed Jesus. How about us?

## SEVEN

Jesus, the One we look unto, is such a Jesus. He "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). This is His case. In principle, the process should be the same for us too.

Shame was given to Him by men, and He despised it. The cross was given to Him by God, and He endured it. He was misunderstood, expelled, accused, forsaken, and condemned by people, but He did not care. It was not that the

shame was never very severe; the shame He encountered was something ordinary men have never encountered. It was not that His holy emotion did not feel shame when He was insulted; His feeling was probably keener than that of anyone else. However, He despised it; He did not pay attention to the shame. The cross God gave Him was not light. What He went through before men, demons, and angels was not something easy. However, our Lord endured the cross. He took it. He endured it. What was the result? He was victorious to the end and "has sat down on the right hand of the throne," waiting for the appearance of glory.

How we like to save our face! We are afraid of being shamed, misunderstood, criticized, and opposed. We try our best to be a nice person. We avoid being shamed. We are not willing to deny ourselves or to be shamed for the Lord's sake. Even when we take the shame, we take it reluctantly. We are not willing to take such shame (which decreases our soul-life) silently, without any self-defense, and without trying to escape.

We are not willing to bear the cross which God gives to us. We are not walking on the way of the cross. We do not even know what the way of the cross is. We do not know that whatever happens to us is permitted by God. Everything that is contrary to our intention, that puts false charges against us, causes us painful feelings, frustrates us in our environment, and evaporates our hope, are crosses from God. How do we treat these things? Does our heart resist them? Do we complain to others? Do we wish that these things would go away? Any rebellious attitude within us will cause us not to run well in the race.

God allows each cross to come upon us with a special purpose. Each cross has its own special mission and its own special accomplishment in us. If we endure it according to God's will, just as the Lord Jesus endured His cross (note that His cross was for redemption, while ours is not), our natural life will be dealt with one more time. We will become more enlarged to be filled with the resurrection life of the Son of God. Our resistance and rebellion, as well as our strength in struggling to escape, will frustrate God's purpose and cause the cross to come upon us in vain. They will cause us to fail in what God wants to accomplish.

## EIGHT

God set the Lord Jesus before us so that we may imitate Him. In closing, this passage tells us, "compare Him who has endured such contradiction by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary, fainting in your souls" (Heb. 12:3). "Such" here indicates the way that He was disgraced, insulted, mistreated, forsaken, scourged, hurt, crucified (the cross also having its aspect from men), and so on. We should compare with care and compare these things one by one. In this way, we will not be weary and faint in our souls. When the Lord mentioned His persecution on earth to His disciples, He said, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above his master." We cannot expect to be treated any better than the Lord Jesus was treated. "It is sufficient for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master." It is good that we are not treated worse than the Lord Jesus. For "if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of His household!" (Matt. 10:24-25). Since He suffered all this ill-treatment on earth, how about us? If we consider these things, we will not be weary or faint in our souls even though we suffer and are disgraced and opposed.

One of the most dreadful things in the race toward the kingdom is being weary and faint in the soul. The soul is the organ of the emotion, mind, and will. Growing "weary, fainting in your souls" means being without strength in the soul. The will becomes paralyzed, the feeling cools down, and the mind loses interest. Everything seems to be vain, and we allow everything to take its natural course. "Whether or not I will receive a crown in the future is up to fate." One of the greatest temptations in running the race is that when all the things against us have swamped us, and we are unable to resist them, we simply give in to them and refuse to run seriously any more in order to gain the heavenly crown.

If we are willing to consider the Lord Jesus and examine His experience, we will not give in in this way. Gideon and his three hundred men were "faint, yet pursuing" (Judg. 8:4). We ought to be "faint, yet running."

May we all be persons who run the race. May we all be running until the end. Even if we are hurt, offended, misunderstood, and rejected while running, we still have to cheer up and run the race unwearily for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Who receives the most praises in a race? It is the one who is hurt, who rises up again, and who finally wins the first place. This person will surely receive unceasing praises. Therefore, being hurt and suffering are not a problem; even failing is not a problem. The one who falls down and rises up again is still the best runner. Brothers and sisters, today we are all in the race. Nothing counts today; everything will receive its final judgment at the end of the race. We should not give up, become weary, or faint in our soul for any reason. We ought to look unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith and run the race set before us!

# MESSAGE NINE

## IN NOTHING BE ANXIOUS

### •Scripture Reading: Phil. 4:4-7

Phil. 4:4-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is near. In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

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Everyone likes to rejoice. No one likes to be sorrowful. For man to rejoice and not be sorrowful, he must not have any burden. Otherwise, he will not be able to rejoice. According to the Bible, there are two kinds of burdens: one is the burden of sin, and the other is the burden of anxiety. If the burden of sin is not resolved, there is no joy; if the burden of anxiety is not resolved, there is also no joy. If the burden of sin is resolved but the burden of anxiety is not, the joy is not complete. At the same time, if the burden of anxiety is resolved but the burden of sin is not, the joy cannot be complete either. The burdens of sin and anxiety must be resolved together in order for one to rejoice.

Today what we will speak is for Christians. We will consider how a Christian can have joy. Since all Christians are saved, the burden of sin has already been resolved! However, if their burden of anxiety is not resolved, they still cannot rejoice. If Christians are not joyful, they put the Lord and His name to shame. This means that they do not trust in Him and that they doubt Him. Christians know that their sins are forgiven and that they are saved; they know that they are children of God. But many Christians are not joyful. This lack of joy is surely not God's portion for Christians. The verses we will read show us how to have joy. When we are free from anxiety, we can rejoice.

But how many Christians can always rejoice? Christians today are putting the Lord's name to shame. The Lord's will is that we know our sins and come to Him for forgiveness so that we can have the authority to become children of God through the redemption of the Lord's blood. All these things are good, but He also wants us to always rejoice. If we do not have joy, we do not have the proper living and attitude of a Christian. Christians must always rejoice. If we read the Bible, we will find out that believers ought to live in joy and without anxiety. Let us now look into Philippians 4:4-7 phrase by phrase.

Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." The first thing we have to know is that rejoicing is a commandment of God. God never commands us to do what we cannot do. Every command of God to man can be done by man. The Bible commands us not to be happy, but to rejoice in the Lord. We should not only rejoice in the Lord, but rejoice in Him always. If a man worships idols, we know that this violates God's commandment. But we may not realize that if a Christian is not rejoicing, he is also breaking God's commandment. We may think that if we worship idols we are breaking the commandments but if we do not rejoice, we are not breaking the commandments. Actually, in both cases we are breaking His commandments. Since rejoicing is a command of God, we must practice accordingly; otherwise, we are breaking God's commandment. Perhaps you may think, "I have such and such a problem. How can I rejoice? I am a laborer and have to support a family. Even though I toil and sweat, I do not earn much in wages, and living expenses are so high. How can I rejoice?" As a result, you may become anxious. Perhaps you are a mother and a widow. You have many children and a meager income which does not adequately cover your expenses. Since you live from hand to mouth, you may think, "How can a person like me rejoice?" Perhaps you are a student, doctor, master, or servant, and you feel that it is difficult to deal with other people in the world. You cannot rejoice. Indeed, many things can make you unable to rejoice. But please note that the rejoicing in verse 4 is not to rejoice in yourself, but to "rejoice in the Lord always."

A widow who has just lost her husband, whose possessions are about to be pawned, and whose landlord is about to drive her out of the house is suffering

greatly under these circumstances. Yet she can still play with her little baby. She cannot rejoice in the house, her deceased husband, or her surroundings. But she can rejoice. She can rejoice in her baby. In the same way, God has not asked us to rejoice in our environment, in things going our way, or in any kind of happiness. God tells us to "rejoice in the Lord." The world may oppose us, misunderstand us, reject us, and trap us, but no one can cover the heavens from us. The Lord never changes. The world could put Paul into prison and lock him up, but it could not keep the Lord within Paul away from him. Therefore, Paul and Silas were able to sing and praise God within the prison cell. We should be clear about one thing: do not rejoice in the environment; rather, rejoice in our Lord. When friends and relatives are away and the heart is aching and weeping, we can be comforted and rejoice if we look to the Lord who loves us and whom we love. He is enough to satisfy our heart. But Christians are very forgetful! We may hear about this today but forget about it tomorrow! This is why Paul followed by saying, "Again I will say, rejoice." God's intention is that we rejoice. Therefore, whatever happens, we must rejoice.

"Let your forbearance be known to all men." "Forbearance" in the original text has a meaning of moderation. It means to not incline to the left or the right, to not be too much or too little. If a Christian feels crushed under a great mountain as soon as he encounters some problems, he is not moderate. The world may press us, but the Lord gives us joy. This joy is great, and it enables us to pass our days joyfully in the midst of difficulties. This is the principle of moderation according to the Bible. It is not the moderation the world teaches.

Verse 5 says, "The Lord is near." Please consider this word. Some have said that this refers to the coming of the Lord. But this is not reliable for two reasons: (1) In the phrase "the Lord is near," the word "near" is not an adverb but an adjective; and (2) according to the original text, the word "near" occurs only four times in the New Testament. These include Romans 10:8, Ephesians 2:13 and 17, and Philippians 4:5. The meaning in the fourth instance should be the same as the first three instances. Whatever is referred to in the first three instances should be what is referred to in the fourth instance as well. In the first three instances, "near" refers to location. Therefore, in the fourth instance, it must also

refer to location. Romans 10:8 says, “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of the faith which we proclaim.” This refers to location. Ephesians 2:13 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ.” This also refers to location. Ephesians 2:17 says, “And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near.” This also refers to location. Therefore, “the Lord is near” in Philippians 4:5 must also refer to location. This means that the Lord is near to us; it does not mean that the Lord is coming soon. It is wonderful to know that the Lord is near us and can help us. We should rejoice always because He is beside us. We should rejoice because He has drawn near to us.

Verse 6 says, “In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” We must rejoice because the Lord is near; we must also not be anxious because He is near. The preceding verse says that we should rejoice, and this verse says that we should be anxious in nothing. Do we realize that other than sin, nothing harms man more than anxiety? Indeed, anxiety is a sin.

There are many excuses for us to be anxious. There are many good reasons in this world for us to be anxious every day. It is not difficult to find these reasons. We argue that it is unavoidable for us to be anxious when we are faced with these circumstances. But God considers that we have no excuse to be anxious. All the anxieties are without a reason. Therefore, God tells us, “In nothing be anxious.” We think the problems of our living, family affairs, and personal difficulties are matters for us to be anxious about. But the Bible says, “In nothing be anxious.” Not a single anxiety is legitimate, nor is it allowed by God. Every anxiety is forbidden by Him.

I read in a book that a pastor once told a woman to be anxious in nothing because it was a sin to be anxious. The woman said that the only thing she was anxious about was her nine sons. The pastor repeated that in nothing should she be anxious. The woman argued that God’s word concerning being anxious in nothing did not include such an anxiety. The pastor answered that when God says to be anxious in nothing, He means to be anxious in nothing. The woman

insisted that a mother ought to be anxious for her sons. She said, “My anxiety has followed four of my sons to heaven already. Now I still have to be anxious for the other five.” Some people think that they should worry about this and about that, as if it is their duty to worry. Others ask, “Should not one be anxious about one or two things in a year?” No. Why? It is because “the Lord is near.” Your anxiety indicates that you do not trust in His heart or in His promise. You are shaming the Lord. The Lord is near, but you are anxious; you doubt the power of His hand and the kindness of His heart. The reason you are anxious is because you do not know that the Lord is near.

Verse 6 continues, “But in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” How can you be without anxiety? “But”! As long as you follow this “but,” everything will be fine. Whether you are sitting, lying down, or walking, you can make everything known to God in three ways: (1) by prayer—ordinary prayer, (2) by petition—definite and specific prayer (through prayer and petition you can tell God the requests in your heart), and (3) with thanksgiving—thanking God for everything. Through giving thanks, you also tell God your needs. You should make known everything to God by prayer, petition, and thanksgiving. But you do not; therefore, you are full of anxiety and short of joy. You have disobeyed God’s commandment, and you cannot be free from anxiety.

It would be wonderful if we would commit the things we encounter into God’s hand item by item. Otherwise, when the first thing comes up, we lay it upon ourselves. Then when the second and third things come up, we also lay them upon ourselves. In this way, we are pressed and lose our joy. Once I saw builders moving tiles to the roof of a house. Three men stood on a ladder, one at the top, the second in the middle, and the third at the bottom. The one at the bottom would hand the tiles over to the one in the middle. After the one in the middle received the tiles, he would hand them to the one at the top. They continued this way unceasingly. When I saw this I thought, “What if the man in the middle did not pass on the tiles he received, or what if the man on the top refused to take the tiles passed to him?” If that happened, the one in the middle would eventually be crushed to death by the tiles that were continuously coming

to him. We deal with anxiety in this manner. If we do not send all the anxieties to God to let Him bear them, all the anxieties of this world will crush us to death. We must not allow the anxieties of the world to keep pressing upon us; we must place them on God's side. The moment we have anxiety, we must immediately entrust it to the Lord. We do not have to tolerantly accumulate anxieties upon ourselves item by item. There is a way out. The way is, "In everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." This is something that the world and sinners cannot do. Only Christians can do this because we have the Lord, and the Lord is near. Not only can we pray for great things, but for small things as well. We can pray for everything that we have a reason to be anxious about. Everything which affords an opportunity to worry about can be prayed for. The reason we can be anxious in nothing is not that we are naturally optimistic or that we try to be mindless in everything like foolish ones. Such conduct is indeed foolish. Rather, we can be anxious in nothing because we have One to talk to, One whom we can trust, and One who will be responsible. We can rejoice and be free from anxiety because we have God and because we can entrust all things to God through prayers. Prayer is our way out. God is our way out.

Is it enough to have prayer and petition alone? No. The Bible mentions not only prayer and petition but also thanksgiving. We must remember that everything that comes upon us has been placed in our hand by the nail-pierced hands; everything that comes upon us has been arranged by the Lord who died for us. Therefore, we can thank God ahead of time, saying, "God, You can never be wrong." There are many today who can preach and many today who can pray. But there are few who can give thanks. Preaching is giving something of God to man, while prayer is acquiring something from God. Thanksgiving is consecrating ourselves to God and offering our sacrifice of thanks. The Bible not only says that we should pray and petition; it also says that we should give thanks. In what things do we give thanks to God? We should not only give thanks to Him when we are happy; we should also give thanks when we are sorrowful. In everything we give thanks to God. We should thank God not only for the things that we consider as good, but also for the things that we consider to be bad.

There was a university professor in the western part of the United States who was always sad and liked to utter dejected words. This turned his colleagues away from him. One day the weather was very good, and a number of his younger colleagues said to him, “The sun is so bright today. The birds’ chirping sounds are so sweet, and the grass looks so fresh. You ought to have no complaint about this scene.” Looking around he was somewhat convinced that there was nothing to complain about. But did he stop his grievance? No. After a further glance he said, “This scene will not last.” Oh, many Christians are like this man. They never have a heart of gratitude toward God. They only have sighings, murmurings, sorrows, and burdens; they never have a heart of gratitude.

There was a Christian who worked in a railroad station. He always gave thanks to God whether in sickness or in health and whether or not his circumstances were smooth. All of his co-workers said he was an optimist. One day while he was repairing the track of the railroad, a train ran over his leg and he fainted. After he regained consciousness, people heard him thanking God again! They were angry and wondered how he could still thank God when one of his legs was cut off. He said, “I thank God because I still have one good leg!” Brothers and sisters, you may be sick, but you are still alive. You may be poor, but you are not destitute. You may have coarse clothing, but you still have something to put on. Your house may be small, but you still have a place to lay your head. You should learn to seek for opportunities to thank God. If you do this, you may have reasons to be anxious, but you will not have opportunity to be anxious. Every time you give your anxiety and burden to God, you cannot help but rejoice. If you say that you have burdens and anxieties, you have to realize that the Lord has borne your sins on the cross. Will He not bear your sorrows, difficulties, and anxieties as well?

First Peter 5:7 says, “Casting all your anxiety on Him because it matters to Him concerning you.” God wants us to cast all our anxiety on Him because it matters to Him concerning us. He wants to bear our burden. The word “matters” in the original language belongs to the same root as the word “anxiety” in the same verse; the two are different only in their grammatical forms. This means that God bears our anxieties; He takes up our anxiety for us. Therefore, we do

not have to be anxious! Many people extend invitations to others with the purpose of receiving joy, gifts, friendship, and other things; they expect gain from others. But our God has not invited us to give Him joy, goodness, or friendship. He has invited us to come before Him and cast our anxieties on Him. God is a God who bears our anxiety. He beckons us to lay our anxiety on Him. To Him this is no hardship. Isaiah 53:4 said that the Lord Jesus has "borne our sicknesses and carried our sorrows."

If you worry about your immediate problems, the break up of your family, the moral degradation of your children and their waywardness from the Lord, the failure of your business, the frictions between in-laws, the salvation of others, or the backward and fallen spiritual condition of God's children, you should realize that God wants you to cast your anxiety on Him. In the midst of all these problems, God is asking you to come to Him. God is asking you to come not with your good things, but with your anxieties and worries. He will bear your anxieties. All of you who have a broken heart, a heavy heart, and a pained heart, come unto God! Today you need not be anxious anymore! This is the gospel.

What will be the result if we let our requests be made known to God in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving? There will be the best result. Philippians 4:7 says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." The word "guard" in the original language is a special military term. We can translate it as "garrison" or "patrol." The same word is used in 2 Corinthians 11:32: "In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me." The governor of Damascus wanted to seize Paul, and he put garrisons of soldiers around the city. In the same way, God's peace is patrolling our heart like the soldiers garrisoning the city, and His peace is keeping our heart in peace. No anxiety can break through this line and come into our heart. God's peace is patrolling, garrisoning, and guarding our heart from the invasion of all anxieties. How amazing this is! What else could "the peace of God" possibly mean?

Originally, all of God's creation was wonderful and beautiful. But the archangel (who later became the devil) sinned, and one third of the angels

followed him and also sinned. The earth became waste and void. Was God anxious about this? No. He finished His recovery work within six days and created a couple to live on the earth. Then they too committed sin. Was God anxious about this? No. Although the angels fell and man fell, God was not anxious. God sent forth the Savior to save men. According to our concept, as soon as man sinned, God should have sent forth the Savior. But God was not anxious. When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman (Gal. 4:4). He waited several thousand years; He was not in a hurry. Even today, according to our concept, the best thing to do is to shuffle everybody into the church. But God is not in a hurry. This is the peace of God. Even if men attack Him, oppose Him, and deny Him, He does not send thunder and lightning to kill them. He is at peace. This is the peace of God. Although He encounters many adversities, He is still very much at peace. If we have such a peace of God to garrison our heart and mind, can anxiety invade us? Is there anything that can take away our peace?

God has commanded that we should let our requests be made known to Him in everything through prayer and petition with thanksgiving. He has promised that He will send us His own peace like soldiers guarding our hearts, keeping out all worries, sufferings, and discomforts. The peace of God indeed is the peace which passes all understanding; it is the peace which man cannot understand and cannot otherwise have. The phrase "surpasses every man's understanding" means beyond human expectation. If we commit everything to Him, we will have the peace which is beyond human understanding and which man cannot otherwise possess. This peace will guard our hearts and thoughts and enable us to safely pass through every storm in the worldly sea. Dear brothers, have you experienced the peace of God? Are you aware of the garrison of His peace? Do you know what it means for God's peace to guard your hearts and your thoughts? Thank God! Many times it seems that the pressure is too great and that there is no way of escape. It seems that anxiety and grief is your sole obligation. But when you tell God what you want, in prayer and petition, on the one hand, and with thanksgiving, on the other, you will feel as if you do not even know how to be anxious anymore. You will be surprised, and others will

marvel at your peace. This is the peace which passes all understanding. This is the garrison of the peace of God.

Verse 7 also says, “Guard your hearts and your thoughts.” This does not mean to guard your environment or keep your environment in peace. It means to keep your heart in peace. This sentence can also be translated as “making your hearts and thoughts belong to Jesus Christ.” This means to turn your hearts and thoughts to the Lord. If you have any difficulty or pain which you cannot bear, you can say, “God, I commit this to Your hand.” If you have obeyed His commandment, He will fulfill His promise.

Once, I encountered a difficulty which seemed to afford me no way out. At that time I remembered this verse, and I went to a deserted field to pray. I prayed more than ten times, but there was still no peace within. I thought, “Can it be that this verse is only good for others and cannot be put into practice by me?” At that point God told me, “I have said be anxious in nothing and you will have peace. But now you say that you have no peace!” I jumped up and said, “O God, You said that I have peace. I will surely have peace; I will not say anything anymore.” When I believed God’s words, I immediately had the peace. Therefore, brothers and sisters, if you do not believe God’s Word, you will have no peace. Believe and you will have peace. If you want to wait for the peace before believing, you will never have it. If there is any difficulty or suffering beyond what you can bear, tell God, “O God, I commit them into Your hand.” If you do this, you will have peace. “Rejoice in the Lord always” and “In nothing be anxious” are God’s commandments. “And the peace of God, which surpasses every man’s understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” is His promise. If you obey His command, He will fulfill His promise.

# MESSAGE TEN

## IN REST SHALL BE YOUR STRENGTH

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Luke 10:38-42; Isa. 30:15; Phil. 4:6-7; Matt. 11:29

Luke 10:38-42 "Now as they went, He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to His word. But Martha was being drawn about with much serving, and she came up to Him and said, Lord, does it not matter to You that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to do her part with me. But the Lord answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; But there is need of one thing, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Isa. 30:15 "For thus says the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, / In returning and rest you will be saved; / In quietness and in trust will be your strength; / But you were not willing,"

Phil. 4:6-7 "In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Matt. 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

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### ONE

One day as our Lord came to a certain village, a sister named Martha received Him into her home. She loved our Lord and wanted to do many things for Him in order to please Him. She did this and that; she prepared this thing and that thing. She did many things, but then she became disturbed. Not only was she disturbed, she also worried about many things, and her mind was troubled. Martha, like those who are ill at ease, sought to blame others by going to the Lord and saying, "Lord, does it not matter to You that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to do her part with me" (Luke 10:40). But the Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but there is need of one thing, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (vv. 41-42). Oh, the Lord said that only one thing is needed! Martha did many things, but the Lord said that there was need of only one thing. We plan one thing after another and do one thing after another. It seems that we have planned many things and done much, yet there is need of only one thing! There are not many needful things; there is only one thing which is needful!

Brothers and sisters, what is the one thing that is needful? It is nothing other than Christ Himself—this is what Mary chose. We can have this needful thing only by sitting quietly before the Lord as Mary did. Every Christian should work, and it is wrong if anyone does not work. The Bible tells us that the man who will not work should not eat (2 Thes. 3:10). We should work diligently. However, we often find no rest within when we work; we may even feel that we have forgotten the Lord. Sometimes we are so busy from morning till evening that we do not find time for prayer or Bible reading before the Lord. When we labor, do some spiritual work, or give assistance to a brother or sister, our motive is for the Lord, yet eventually we become distracted; our heart is disturbed. The problem is that there are too many things that cause us to forget the Lord and let Him go. Let us listen to the Lord, who is telling us that only one thing is needful! This very thing is to have rest in the Lord and to be content in Him.

## TWO

How can we live a peaceful and unperturbed life? Let us see what the Lord

said. He did not say that one should not work, nor did He say that one should spend half of his time working and the other half dealing with spiritual things. He did not say to Martha that it was wrong to do many things, but He reminded Martha not to let these things enter into her and disturb her. The Lord Jesus did not say that she had done too much; He said that she had considered too much. He did not say that she had taken up too many tasks; He said that she had taken up too many worries. You may work from morning until evening, but you should not be disturbed by it. Many people do not have much to do outwardly, yet they are very busy inwardly. Some people have already spent five sleepless nights worrying about work that needs to be done five days from now. For instance, you only need one hour to visit a friend tomorrow, yet you spend four hours thinking about it in your bed. This kind of thinking is too much! The Lord did not tell us not to work. He said that we can work as much as we need, but that our heart should not be disturbed about it. The Lord will not say that we have done too much; but He will say that our heart should not be disturbed.

Brothers and sisters, this is the Christian life. We should work and not be lazy. It is necessary to work and to be occupied, but we should be at peace within. There should only be one thing within us—Christ. This is what the Lord shows us. The Lord asks only one thing of us—that we remain untouched by whatever circumstance we are in. Outwardly, we may be very busy doing many things, but inwardly there should be only one thing that we do not let go of by any means. Although we may be busy outwardly, we should maintain our fellowship with God. Thank God that there was not only a Martha but also a Mary. Mary chose the best portion—fellowship with the Lord. The Lord wanted Martha to learn the way of inward rest from her sister, not the way of work. It is all right for us to be a Martha outwardly, but inwardly we should be like Mary, who was in complete union with the Lord. Although outwardly we can be very busy, inwardly we should fellowship with God and be at rest. This is a most precious experience.

Brother Lawrence had to prepare meals for many people each day. If we were in his place, we might become so busy that we would lose contact with God. However, Brother Lawrence's inner fellowship with the Lord was not disturbed by external things at all. He was indeed a man who knew the presence of God!

Although he was outwardly very busy all the time, inwardly he was sitting at the feet of the Lord all the time. Despite the many outward things he did, he was not distracted by them at all.

This is a most blessed way of life. Every one of us can live this kind of life, which is not in the physical realm or in our feeling but in the depth of our being. Then we will be in constant fellowship with the Lord, living a peaceful and serene life in His presence. We must remember that God has not asked us to be lazy and do nothing. Rather, the Lord wants us to shoulder outward activities on the strength of His indwelling. Although we may be busy from morning until evening, no person or thing should deprive us of our inner peace and rest. We should be busy outwardly but peaceful inwardly. Brothers and sisters, we must not allow the outward things to come and touch us; we have to resist these outward things and not allow them to affect us. However many things there are, we should not let any of them enter into our being. Within us there should be only one person—Christ. Inwardly, our only occupation is to have fellowship with Christ; if we allow other things to come into us, our inner peace will flee away.

## THREE

The tabernacle in the Old Testament was divided into the outer court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. Within the Holy of Holies was the ark in which God dwelt. In the Holy Place, there was the showbread, the golden lampstand, and the golden censer. In the outer court, there was the altar and the laver. Between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, there was a separating veil; between the Holy Place and the outer court, a curtain. Only the priests and the Levites could enter into the outer court, and only the priests could go into the Holy Place. Finally, only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood.

In the New Testament, God speaks through His servant declaring that we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). The Christian life is likened to God's tabernacle or temple. The outer court was very busy indeed; thousands of Israelites made their offering there, and many Levites spent their days slaying

thousands of oxen and sheep. While there were many in the outer court from morning to evening, there was no one in the Holy of Holies. The curtain outside the outer court could be lifted again and again; many people could go in again and again, but the veil over the Holy of Holies remained undisturbed, and no one could enter in. It might have been noisy in the outer court, but the Holy of Holies remained serene and quiet; it might have been very busy in the outer court, but the Holy of Holies was not affected at all. This is the life of a Christian. We may be in contact with thousands of people, but inwardly we should remain undisturbed. Although we may be busy outwardly, we can be undisturbed in spirit and have uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord inwardly. This is what it means to have peace and rest in our human spirit.

Christians should live in a state of continuous prayer. This is not a matter of praying ten minutes or half an hour, or a brief prayer in the morning which ceases as we go to work. As we live before the Lord, we must maintain our fellowship with Him even though we are outwardly busy. We should have a regular time for prayer and Bible reading, but apart from this time, our inner life should continue to have fellowship with the Lord.

Remember that the strength of our life depends upon the fellowship of our innermost life with God. Our innermost part should not be controlled or affected by outside factors. When we are quiet inwardly, our outward actions can be made subject to our inward being. Although there is no lampstand, censer, or showbread in the Holy of Holies, it guides all the action of the tabernacle. Therefore, if we live a life of peace and rest in the Holy of Holies, external things cannot touch us; neither can the environment shake us. When we live in the Holy of Holies, we will see that God saturates everything; we will have an intimate and uninterrupted fellowship with God which no outside forces can sever.

## FOUR

Brothers and sisters, the one failure in our life is inward disturbance whenever we have outward activities. Many times, even before outward activities come, we are already disturbed within, and this disturbance deprives us of the strength to deal with outward activities. We should know that the

strength of our living comes from rest, quietness, and trust. God's Word says, "In returning and rest you will be saved;/In quietness and in trust will be your strength" (Isa. 30:15). Anyone who is easily irritated cannot have strength before God; the same is true for anyone who is disturbed in heart. We should remember that our strength depends upon inner quietness and trust.

There is an eye in every hurricane. Although the wind turns furiously around the eye, the eye itself is very quiet. Our strength lies in a life that revolves around a stable center. Outward activities may be blowing like furious winds, yet within we can be most peaceful. "In quietness and in trust will be your strength." Our thoughts must not be disturbed because of the multitude of outward activities. If we were disturbed, we would not be able to control our environment. Consider the sea. Although there are high waves, strong winds, and the surface of the sea may be in great turmoil, the depths of the sea have no movement at all; everything is very peaceful below. Those who study marine life on the ocean floors are convinced that there has not been movement for years. The life of a Christian should be characterized by quietness and trust. We cannot expect to be idle, but we can expect peace and quietness in the midst of a busy daily life. There can be much activity outwardly, yet there is peace and quietness inwardly. The peace that we seek is inner peace. When there is inner peace, we will not fail. No matter how circumstances change, we should live before the Lord as if nothing has happened. We should realize that the Lord within wants us to live a peaceful life.

Our Lord was never affected by the outward circumstances. On one occasion, the people in the synagogue persecuted Him and wanted to push Him over a precipice. If it had been us, we would have run away. But the Bible says that the Lord Jesus went His way, passing through the midst of them. These people wanted to kill Him, but He was not concerned and went His way (Luke 4:28-30). When a storm raged, the Lord was fast asleep, but the disciples cried, "We are perishing!" Why did they cry? They had no rest. But the Lord remained unaffected (Matt. 8:23-27). When the band of soldiers and officers came to arrest Him, He asked them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus said to them, "I am." When they heard this, they drew back and

fell to the ground. Those who tried to make an arrest were scared by the One they sought to arrest (John 18:2-6). Oh, the Lord deserves our continuous praise. He was never moved by outward events but lived according to His inner being.

## FIVE

How can we have this inner peace? The following Scriptures tell us two conditions.

First, Philippians 4:6-7 says, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." The first thing that enables us to have peace is to bring all our matters and requests to God. Our work, our need, and the difficulties we encounter should all be committed to the Lord. We should say to the Lord, "Lord, I commit all these things to Your hand." We can commit to the Lord whatever we encounter through prayer, petition, and thanksgiving, and the peace of God will keep our heart and mind. God will keep us. All we need to do is make our request known through prayer and petition with thanksgiving. As soon as we encounter any matter, we have to commit that matter to God immediately. Once we have made such a commitment, God's peace keeps us. Whenever we make our commitment to God, His peace will come. As a result, we will be free from outside influence all the time. Regardless of how great the difficulty or how numerous the activities, the peace of God in us will guard our hearts.

Second, Matthew 11:29 says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." The first condition is faith, and the second condition is obedience. God allows many things to come upon us. If we reject what God wants for us, if we do not accept His will, or if we have other desires, we will lose our rest within. We should realize that rest comes from consecration. Therefore, when any difficulty arises, we need to take His yoke and learn from Him. Although we may not be able to act according to our own wish and may have to suffer, we will have rest. We will have rest if we say to the Lord, "Lord, whatever You want me to do, I am willing." However, if we

are not willing to obey, if we choose our own pathway or our own way of life, or if we cherish our own desire, we will lose the rest. All of our personal desires and dissatisfactions will deprive us of our peace within. Peace will fill our heart when we say to the Lord, "Lord, everything that You give me is the best. I am willing to take Your way, choose Your will, and set aside my own wish."

May the Lord grant us grace to believe that He can bear all our burdens and difficulties and make us willing to yield to His will for us. May we be able to respond to all of God's demands on us by saying, "I am willing." Oh, may the Lord show us that rest only comes from faith and obedience in Him. Rest cannot come as long as unbelief and self-will exist. If we believe in God and obey Him, no outward event can disturb us any longer. Our constant fellowship with the Lord will enable us to bear all outward things. May we all see that in rest shall be our strength.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## THE CONTINUATION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

### •Scripture Reading: Acts 28:30-31; Rev. 1:11-12, 20

Acts 28:30-31 "And he remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling and welcomed all those who came to him, Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered."

Rev. 1:11-12 "Saying, What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands,"

20 "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

* * * *

There are sixty-six books in the Bible. When we come to the end of many of these books, we can say that the book is finished. There are fifty chapters in Genesis, and when we come to the end, we sense that we have come to the end. The Gospel of Matthew has twenty-eight chapters. When we come to chapter twenty-eight, we feel that we have come to the end. When we come to the Romans 16, we also feel that this is the end. When we read Revelation 22, we also feel that this is the end.

But there is one book in the Bible which does not have an end. All the other sixty-five books have an end. But one book does not have an end. This book is the Acts of the Apostles. Why does Acts 28 end the way it does? When you read Acts 28, you feel as if the book has not yet concluded. This book does not have an ending. The Acts of the Apostles is a book without an ending because this book is

still being continued. Perhaps the acts of the first century apostles have ended, but the book of Acts as a whole has not yet ended. Until now we still have the Acts of the Apostles with us. This book has not yet ended.

The Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17). This shows that since the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man, God has been working until now, and the Lord is also working. What is the book of Acts? The book of Acts is not a record of the work of Paul or a record of the work of Peter or John. The book of Acts is a record of the work of God. Who can say that God has done no work after Acts 28? Who can say that God's work stopped after Acts 28?

The book of Acts does not have an ending. After chapter twenty-eight, many of God's vessels are still carrying on with His work. His work is continuing and has not stopped. Everything was not over after Paul worked in Rome for two years. Paul lived in Rome and was later martyred. None of these things are recorded in the book of Acts. Peter, Paul, and John are three important persons, yet none of their endings were recorded. How can we say that the book of Acts has ended? God's testimony can never be finished. We could say the same thing even if there was a twenty-ninth chapter, or a thirtieth chapter, or even a hundredth chapter. If one wanted to write more, new things could always be added. This is why Acts stops at chapter twenty-eight. Although the written record no longer continued after chapter twenty-eight, God's work has been going on. The work in the first century was not the peak. For four thousand years, God has been working. If we say that Acts 28 was the peak, we must be at the bottom of the hill; we must have come down from the peak. This is not true because the Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working." We should not assume that God's work reached its peak at the time of Paul, and we should not consider that God's work reached its peak at the time of Martin Luther either. No, the first century was not the end of God's work, nor was the sixteenth century the end of His work. Even last century was not the end of God's work. His work will go on until the kingdom and even until the new heaven and the new earth. God is always advancing; He never stops. If we know this and believe in this, we will praise our Lord.

Man always has a misconception that his age is the worst age of the church. At the time of Martin Luther some thought this way. At the time of John Wesley some thought this way. We consider Martin Luther's time a marvelous age and John Wesley's time a marvelous age also. While we consider their ages marvelous, some who come fifty years after us will say that we were at a marvelous age. We are afraid that man will stop. But God never stops. Every year, He knows what He is doing, and He knows how much He will work. Every year, He does what He wants to do. He is a God who goes on day by day; He is always advancing. Hallelujah! God is a God who keeps on advancing!

Every time God advances, He finds some vessels. In the book of Acts, God found some vessels. At the time of Martin Luther, God found a vessel, and at the time of John Wesley, He also found a vessel. Every time there is a spiritual revival, God finds some vessels. Where is God's vessel today? It is true that the Father is working until now. But who is continuing to work together with Him? Who can say, "I also am working"? This is the crucial question.

Brothers and sisters, if God grants us light and if we see God's truth, we will admit that God is after the same vessel today that He ordained at the beginning. This vessel is the church. In other words, God is not after an individual vessel today, but a corporate one. Since God is after a corporate vessel, His children must be brought to the awareness of the Body of Christ and the Body life. Otherwise, they are useless in His hand and can never fulfill His goal.

Revelation 1 tells us that the churches are golden lampstands. God does not simply say that the churches are golden; He says that the churches are golden lampstands. If the churches are just golden, they cannot satisfy God. God says that the churches are golden lampstands because golden lampstands shine and enlighten. God desires the church to be a shining vessel, a vessel of testimony. From the beginning God has ordained that the church be a lampstand. The church, not individuals, is a lampstand before the Lord. It is not enough just to be golden, and it is not enough just to be of God. There must be the shining for God and the testimony for Him before the church can be considered the lampstand.

Hence, the church exists for God's testimony. Anything that is not golden is not the church, and anything that is not a lampstand is not the church. Anything

that does not have life within is not the church, and anything that does not have the testimony within is also not the church. The church must realize what God is doing and what He is after in this age; it must realize what God's testimony on the earth today is. Only then can the church be considered the golden lampstand.

Simply put, God's work is always advancing. He is still seeking this vessel. His vessel today is the same vessel He intended to have at the beginning; the church is this vessel, not single individuals.

Some may ask: What does it mean that the overcomers come out of the church? It is true that there needs to be overcomers that come out of the church. But even the testimony of the overcomers is maintained on behalf of the corporate whole; it is not for individuals alone. The overcomers are not men who consider themselves extraordinary, better than others, and who put everyone else aside. The overcomers work on behalf of the whole church. They do the work, while the whole church gains the benefit. The overcomers are not for themselves; they stand on the ground of the church, and they are there to bring the whole church to perfection. They stand on the ground of the church and maintain their stand on behalf of the church. Even the victories of the overcomers are corporate victories.

The vessel God is after is a corporate one. Therefore, we have to learn to live the Body life. In order to live the Body life, we have to deny the natural life and be judged and dealt with by God in a deep way. We must learn obedience, and we must also learn fellowship. In this way, we will have the chance of becoming God's vessel.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## THE SEED OF GOD

## •Outline

### •One—Three

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:3, 19, 24, 37; John 12:24-26

Matt. 13:3 "And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, Behold, the sower went out to sow.

19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil one comes and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is the one sown beside the way."

24 "Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens has become like a man sowing good seed in his field."

37 "And He answered and said, He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;"

John 12:24-26 Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

*  *  *  *

### ONE

Of the seven parables in Matthew 13, the first two are the parable of the sower and the parable of the good seed and the tares. In the first parable, the Lord told the disciples that the seed sown by the sower is the word of God, which is the word of the kingdom. In the second parable, He told the disciples that the sower is the Son of Man, and the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. In the

first parable, the seed is the word of the kingdom, which is the word of God. In the second parable, the seeds are the sons of the kingdom, who are the ones begotten of God. When the Lord sowed the seed, He was sowing not only the word but also men. When the Lord came to the earth, He did not just preach the word, He also sought a group of people and sowed this group of people as seeds. What He sowed was people.

In the Bible, the words that come out of God's mouth are called God's word, but the Son sent by God is also called God's Word. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We know that this refers to the Lord Jesus. The word of God as revealed in the Bible sometimes refers to the words which God has spoken and sometimes to the Word whom God has begotten, that is, the Son of God. He is the Word, the living Word, the Word of life. When you hear Him, you hear the Word. When you see Him, you see the Word. When you touch Him, you touch the Word. This is what 1 John 1:1 tells us.

Our Lord Jesus is the Word of God. He is also the seed of God. John 12:24 says, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This refers to the Lord Jesus. He is the one grain of wheat, and from this grain, many grains have been produced. First Peter 1:23 says, "Having been regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God." The Lord Jesus is the Word, and He is also the seed.

We have to praise Him because He is not just the Word but also the seed. Our God sent His Son to the earth and sowed Him as a seed. The Lord Jesus did not come to preach but to be the Word. The Lord was not just the One speaking the word; He was the Word itself. The Lord was not just the sower; He was the very seed. God did not just sow a few words; He sowed a man. The Lord Jesus was truly the seed, the real seed.

## TWO

Suppose someone comes from a far country and invites us to go to preach

the gospel. If we have zeal and are for the gospel, we would surely be very willing to go. But we have to realize that it is not enough just to have someone speak the word and preach the gospel. God has to sow us, the person, as a seed among them. Do we see this? God is sowing us; we are the seed that is being sown. God works through His own words within man. When we preach the word to others, we are sowing the word of God into them, and we expect to have a harvest. But if we only see the seed as the words of God, and not as people, we cannot work for God. If we only care for the words we preach and if we presume that as long as we are right in our fundamental belief and pure in our biblical exegesis, we can go forth to sow, we are wrong. God's work often suffers loss because the seed in our hand is merely objective truths. These truths have not brought about a subjective change in our being yet; they have not made us sons of the kingdom yet. The great question is what kind of person are we? God's seed is not just words but also us as people. The good seed is not just the word of the kingdom; it is people, that is, the sons of the kingdom. I would like to ask how many of us can be God's seed? What a pity that most of our seeds are objective; we lack subjective seeds! Brothers and sisters, whether or not we can be seeds of God is a big question. The Lord has no intention of sending out a group of evangelists or a group of people to teach the Bible. His intention is that some become seeds. The Lord wants to sow those who are His as seeds. If the Lord sows us as seeds, what will be the result of this sowing? Whatever a man sows, he will reap. Those to whom we render some help often become like us. Putting it the other way around, our reaping proves what we sow; it proves the kind of people we are.

Therefore, we should never bemoan the fact that no one has listened to our preaching or say that we cannot do anything just because others' ears are dull of hearing God's pure word. The question is: Who are we? The good seed is not only the word of the kingdom but also the sons of the kingdom. God is sowing us, but what will come out? Do we preach something that is far away from us in another world, or is it a fact that is present in us? Do we speak directly from a passage of the Scripture, or do we first touch a spiritual reality and then confirm it with a passage from the Scripture? We have to realize that there is a great difference between these two things. Many words are only opinions. Only the

words of those who know God are seeds. It is not a matter of coming up with all kinds of things and doctrines through our own wisdom and then telling others about them. When we know something and see something before the Lord, we sow it into others with our words. In conveying God's word, it is not a question of how much we can say with our mouth but how much constitution is in our life. Are we merely preaching an objective doctrine, or are we speaking something because we have first acquired the subjective experience of it? Many people can only preach objective doctrines; however, objective doctrines will not produce any effect in others. If, in addition to speaking God's word, we have become the very word ourselves, others will receive help from us. It is not enough just to understand God's word with our mind. If it were just a question of understanding doctrine, wise Christians would have an advantage over foolish ones, and wise ones would be better Christians, while foolish ones would not be such good Christians. But God does not classify men according to whether they are wise or foolish. When God's word comes to us, it must be tested. When a potter paints a picture on porcelain-ware, it must pass through fire before the picture becomes non-erasable by hand. The porcelain must pass through fire before it will withstand any washing by water. Many have doctrines that are erasable by hand. But if God is gracious to us and if He works in us and does some burning work in us through the environment and through revelation, the result will be something firm and permanent. God may do this once, ten times, dozens of times, and even a few hundred times. One day the words will become words that have passed through the fire; they will be wrought into us. Then our person will become the word. The discipline and revelation of the Holy Spirit will sear a word into a person one, ten, or even a hundred times. In the end, the person will become the word. When others see him, they will not say that this person is capable of speaking the word; they will say that this person is the word itself. He will become the seed of God, and God will be able to propagate such a word. Otherwise, the word will merely be passed on from head to head, and the church will become more and more superficial, lifeless, and void of spiritual reality. The question then is whether or not we can be the seed of God. Which part in us can be the seed of God? If God sows us, what will grow up? Whatever a

man sows, he will reap. There can be no exception to this. If the only fruit we bear for others is a greater understanding of doctrine, without any touch of the Lord's life, what we have will be very poor.

## THREE

God sows with the purpose of reaping a harvest. Let us now consider the principle of God's harvesting.

John 12:24 says, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This word refers to the Lord dying for us and dispensing His life into us. The pathway to a harvest is through death. One must pass through the cross. God sows with the goal of gaining some fruit; His goal is for the one grain of wheat to bear many grains. God did not send one prophet or many prophets to men to expound the word clearly. In sending His Son, God made Him the one grain. Only when this one grain fell into the ground did many grains come forth. Fruit-bearing does not come through a clear exposition of the word or through the hard memorization of the Scriptures. When the seed falls into the ground many grains are brought forth. This is the work of the cross.

The cross is a fact; it is not a doctrine. If there is indeed death, there will indeed be fruit. If there is no death, there will be no fruit. The measure of death determines the measure of life. The number of blows one suffers determines the measure of the outflow of life.

No doubt verse 24 refers to the Lord Himself. But in verse 25, He gives us a word of explanation. His word speaks of a principle that not only applies to Himself but also applies in general. "He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life." This word is for everyone. Verse 26 says, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me." This makes it more clear; everyone who serves Him has to go through the same experience. The falling of the grain into the ground to die does not refer to redemption (in which we can never have a part) but to the removal of the self-life. The principle is that death brings in life. This is what Paul meant when he said that death operated in him and life in others (2 Cor. 4:12).

Hence, it is not enough for us to be a seed; we must know the way to bear fruit. The way to bear fruit is not by preaching or teaching; the way to bear fruit is by sowing. God did not send His Son to the earth to preach the word; He sowed His Son as a seed into the ground. Today He is also sowing us here and there as seeds.

A seed must fall into the ground to die before it can bear much fruit. Before a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it has an outward shell. This shell protects the grain from any harm, yet it also frustrates it from bringing forth many grains. If the outward shell is not broken, the life within will not be released. When the grain is put into the ground and the water and the soil act on it organically, the shell soon breaks and decays, and the life within is released. The Lord is the one grain that fell into the ground and died. When this grain died, it brought forth many grains. From death unto life—this is the way with the Lord, and this is the way with us. Fruit-bearing through death—this is the way with the Lord, and this is the way with us. Hence, the principle of fruit-bearing is not preaching but death. Once we touch a person, we immediately know whether or not he has fallen into the ground to die. In order to know whether or not a person has died, we only have to find out whether the shell still remains. Much of our hardness is natural hardness, and much of our softness is natural softness. Whether it is hard or soft, as long as it is a shell, it frustrates the outflow of life and prevents men from touching the life within. Only the work of the cross will remove the outer shell from us. It is very difficult to touch a person who has not been broken. After one speaks to such a person for an hour, he still feels that there is a great distance between them. With him, there is a shell. But a person who has been smitten, stricken, and broken by God will have his natural and soulish elements shattered. When others touch him, they will touch life. Only those who have fallen into the ground and died will bear fruit! Only those who have passed through death will bear fruit before the Lord. Without passing through death, there cannot be fruit. There may be hundreds and thousands of people following you, but you may still have no fruit before the Lord. The principle of fruit-bearing is to die and then to bring forth many grains. If one does not die, he remains one grain. If a grain of seed has not passed through death, it will not bring forth any

fruit.

May the Lord be merciful to us so that we can become the seed of God and fall into the ground and die, and so that He can gain fruit in us.

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# Twelve Baskets
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# MESSAGE ONE

## HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS

### •Outline

**•One—Five**

### •Scripture Reading: Luke 1:53; Matt. 5:6; 2 Kings 4:1-6

Luke 1:53 "The hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."

Matt. 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

2 Kings 4:1-6 "Now a certain woman from among the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared Jehovah. And the creditor has come to take my two children to himself as servants. And Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in your house? And she said, Your servant has nothing at all in the house, except a jar of oil. And he said, Go and borrow vessels outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, and not just a few. Then go in and shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour out into all those vessels; and each one you fill set aside. So she went away from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons; and they brought the vessels to her, and she poured out into them. And when she had filled the vessels, she said to her son, Bring me another vessel. But he said to her, There is no other vessel. And the oil stopped."

*  *  *  *

Christians have two great deficiencies before God. One is the failure to know themselves, and the other is the failure to know the riches of the Lord. It would be wonderful if a Christian knew himself and knew the riches of the Lord. If he does not know himself or the Lord's riches, he is doomed to failure. All

shortcomings, failures, and things that do not glorify God in the Christian life can be traced to one of these two deficiencies. These two matters are the roots of all our failures. On the one hand, the Lord's work on us shows us what we are and, on the other hand, what He is. If we knew ourselves and if we knew Him, all spiritual problems would be solved.

## ONE

At this point I would like to bring one thing to our attention. What is the necessary condition for experiencing the Lord's riches? In other words, what is the necessary condition for receiving God's blessing or the working of the Holy Spirit? This is something we must see; it is a condition which we must fulfill. If we do not meet this condition, we cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord. This necessary condition is being empty before God. If we want to be filled with the Lord's riches continually, we have to be emptied continually. The emptying experience is an ever-deepening experience. Therefore, we can never say that we are completely empty or that we cannot be emptied any further. Brothers and sisters, we need to be emptied day after day, month after month, and year after year. We may be empty now, but after some time we will need a further emptying work. We should not think that once we are emptied, we will be empty forever. We also should not think that once we are filled, we will be filled forever. We should have an ever-deepening knowledge of ourselves, and we should have an ever-deepening knowledge of the riches of the Lord.

Luke 1:53 says, "The hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." This verse shows us that God's grace is reserved for one type of person—a hungry one. If a person comes to the meeting only for the purpose of observing and listening, he will not see anything or hear anything. If all that a person wants is some Bible knowledge, his real spiritual problems will not be solved. Only those with a pressing inward need and those who are determined to meet God will receive His blessing. We must realize that spiritual progress is based on our hunger. Matthew 5:6 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Those who hunger and thirst will be filled; they are the ones who are blessed.

According to the Word of God and the experience of many saints, the first thing the Holy Spirit does within a person (which is the same work He does within everyone) is to create a longing heart in him. All spiritual progress begins when God initiates a good work in a person through the Holy Spirit by creating a longing within. Every time there is any spiritual progress, the Holy Spirit has initiated it. The Holy Spirit makes us feel dissatisfied with our present condition; the Holy Spirit makes us feel that our present condition is wrong and that our spiritual life is too shallow. The first work of the Holy Spirit is to give us a sense of dissatisfaction and to create in us a desire to be better. Brothers and sisters, if we want to have any spiritual progress, we must first become dissatisfied with our present spiritual condition, and we must seek for something better. This is the beginning of spiritual progress. Putting it another way, all failure and decadence is the result of self-complacency. The beginning of failure is self-complacency. Our feelings of dissatisfaction with ourselves indicates the Holy Spirit has begun His work in us and that is the time for us to go forward. Whenever we are ignorant of our poverty and deficiency, we have come to a standstill. Decadence comes from self-complacency, whereas progress comes from hunger. This is a fact, and it is true throughout our Christian life. Invariably the Holy Spirit first creates a desire in us for more, and then God comes in to satisfy us and fill us. In order to perform His filling work, He must first carry out His emptying work. When we are empty, God will fill us.

Some brothers and sisters have a genuine desire before the Lord and are genuinely conscious of their deficiencies and shortcomings. They earnestly hope to live a better and fuller life. However, they do not know how they can achieve this, and they do not know how they can have an abundant life. Brothers and sisters, if we have such a feeling, we can rest assured that this life will be ours. This is because the desire does not originate from ourselves but from the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We should realize that God Himself fills up whatever He has emptied. God will not leave us empty forever; His purpose is to fill us. Since God has emptied us, He will surely fill us. If He did not want to fill us, He would not have emptied us in the first place. Emptying is merely the means; filling is the goal. Therefore, God never empties anyone without filling him again. If there

is a longing heart in us, it proves that we are already under the operating power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never engages Himself in a fruitless work. The only question is whether or not there is some hindrance within us. If there is a genuine desire within us, we will certainly receive what we desire. Please bear in mind and be deeply impressed that once the Holy Spirit begins His work, He always finishes it. He will never stop until the job is done. Therefore, we may rest assured that when we are empty, He will fill us.

## TWO

It is an amazing thing that in our experience the Holy Spirit can empty us. Many genuine Christians have passed through such an experience. When we first became a Christian, we considered ourselves to be rather good and capable in everything. But after some time we noticed that the life we were living was short of the Christian standard; we realized that we had failed and could not go on anymore. Consequently, we felt dissatisfied, and we prayed for God to fill us up and make us obedient. God then ordered some unbearable and distasteful circumstances to come upon us. Yet by the grace of God, we eventually overcame them. Then we had something to testify about, and we were be able to say that we overcame. We were able to say that we overcame a certain particular matter and that, at a certain point in time, God filled us. We may have even thought that we would be an overcomer from that point on. But surprisingly, after some time, the victory was lost, and failure came back again. We thought that it was very easy to overcome, but it seemed as if all strength was gone, and new obstacles were before us again. There seemed to be a wall in front of us; we could not find any way out, and there did not seem to be any way to bypass it. Consequently, we said that our previous victory was lost, and we were no longer filled with God.

Brothers and sisters, have you ever had such an experience? What is the significance of this kind of experience? You should bear in mind that in God's eyes the Christian life should be an ever-deepening life. A Christian should become emptier and emptier, and the Lord's riches to him should become fuller and fuller. After passing the first hurdle, you may think that there can be no higher life than what you have experienced; you may think that you can advance

no further and that you have reached the summit. The Lord knows your condition. He does not want you to think that you have abundant life already. Therefore, He allows new difficulties to come upon you, and He places impossible things before you. Based on your past experiences, you may think that you will overcome again. But you fail at your first attempt. You may attribute your failure to the lack of vigilance and effort, and you may take greater care and exert more energy in tackling the situation the second time. Yet you fail again. You may think that your vigilance and effort is still too short and that you ought to exercise greater care and exert more energy. Yet the result again falls short of your expectation, and you fail once more. Eventually, you will find that you cannot overcome this hurdle; there is no way to handle the matter. You will be at a loss as to why you cannot overcome. You will wonder why you still fail and why the initial power of obedience is gone. At the same time, you will realize that it is not right that you repeatedly fail, and you will agonize over these failures.

But God has only one reason for doing this—to lead you on further and to dig more deeply into you so that you may receive more filling. This is why new difficulties are in front of you all the time. Unless you have fresh filling, you will not be able to overcome these fresh difficulties. You should bear in mind that the further you go forward, the more difficulties there will be. All your difficulties are ordered by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of creating a stronger craving and hunger in you for Him.

## THREE

The victory at Jericho can never be applied to Ai. Although Ai is very small and Jericho, which is huge, has been taken, if we attack Ai by applying our past experience, we will fail. This means we cannot apply our past victory to tackle our spiritual difficulties today. The past has become history, and new power is needed to deal with new spiritual difficulties. God puts new difficulties before us in order to make us sense new needs. We must never expect to have a once-for-all victory. Our eyes must be opened before God, and we must realize that the only way to have a continual filling is to have the continual working of the cross. Unless the Holy Spirit continues His work in us, we cannot continue to

overcome. When any trial confronts us or any difficulty is placed before us, no past history or experience will do any good; we need new strength to go on.

Let us bear in mind that everything ordered by the Lord in our circumstances is intended to create a need in us and make us realize that we cannot overcome by past experience. Past victories remain unchanged, but trying to overcome new difficulties by means of past victories never works. Many people look at their past victories and wonder why they cannot overcome now. Brothers and sisters, we have to realize that God does not want us to have yesterday's manna. With each new difficulty there comes a new need which we have never realized before. Brothers and sisters, we cannot go on without new knowledge of the Lord and a new vision of Him. Whenever He brings us to our end and whenever we find ourselves crying, "I cannot make it!", our progress has begun. Then God is able to easily create a desire for Him in us. Is it not clear to us that our hunger begins from this kind of experience?

Thank God that everything we have is the result of His work; even the heart that seeks after Him comes from Him. If it were up to us, I wonder how long we would have to wait before we would seek after Him? Of course, there is a condition: we must be conscious of our weakness and inability as well as the hindrance and pride of the flesh. If we persist in our self-reliance, presume that we are already rich, and do not forget our Jericho victory, it will be impossible for God to give us a seeking heart even if He wants to. If we cannot forget our past victory, we will never make any progress. If we think that we can overcome with our first experience, we have been defeated already. Past victory can never be our present strength. We should remember that God gives difficulties to us in order to dig more deeply in us so that He can fill us more with Himself.

## FOUR

Living faith never imitates past deeds. The Bible never tells us to imitate the deeds of others' faith even though it tells us to imitate others' faith (Heb. 6:12; 13:7). To imitate faith and to imitate the deeds of faith are two entirely different things. We should imitate the faith of the apostles, but we should not imitate the deeds of their faith. Their shadows, handkerchiefs, and aprons were capable of

healing the sick (Acts 5:15; 19:12), but this does not mean that we can do the same. Even if we do the same thing, the sick will not be healed because we would only be imitating the deeds of the apostles' faith and not their faith. Sometimes a person suffers from a certain illness and God heals him. But this does mean that we can be sick with the same illness and expect God to heal us. God never allows us to imitate the deeds of others' faith.

We often travel a long way before we find out that we are imitating the deeds of others' faith instead of imitating their faith. We often have to pass through many difficulties before we find out that imitating the deeds of faith is a dead end. When we cannot make it and realize that we have come to the end of the road, our prayer will become real and genuine. Only then will we really seek after God. Up to that point, our prayer will merely be mindless words, habitual and unintended. But when we reach that point, our prayer will become genuine. We will become genuinely empty, and we will confess, "I am useless. Even the victory I had before cannot help me now." When we compare the difficulty God has given us with the strength we now have, we will realize that there is no way we can overcome. Then we will genuinely seek after the Lord and be conscious of our uselessness. We will not need someone to tell us to be humble; we will spontaneously be humble. Our humility will not be a thing taught by others but something that swells up within us spontaneously. Then we will truly know that everything we have is vanity, and we will understand the meaning of "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Brothers and sisters, God desires to see you seeking after Him in a genuine way. Therefore, He places trials and difficulties before you. When these things are before you, you should honestly seek after Him. When you really need His power, you will realize that you can do nothing apart from Him. It is true that when you do things according to your own design, you apparently can do quite a bit. But when you have to do something according to God's design, you will find out that you need His power. Without His power we cannot do anything. Brothers and sisters, we must realize that God has ruled us out on the cross already! We have often overestimated ourselves. In reality, we have been ruled out by God on the cross already. Golgotha is where we were ruled out. We

ourselves no longer exist.

Brothers and sisters, whenever we become empty, the Lord will fill us up. The Word of God plainly promises: "The hungry He has filled with good things" (Luke 1:53a). Therefore, He will certainly make the hungry satisfied with good things. Brothers and sisters, has God brought us to this point? Have we ever felt that we cannot make it? Those who feel that they have nothing at all are blessed because they will certainly be filled. Only these persons can receive God's blessing; only these ones will be filled. If you think that you are rich and feel that you are good in everything, you can only expect to be sent away empty. Only one class of people will be filled before God: those who are empty in hand and empty in spirit. Brothers and sisters, are you truly empty? Have you really reached the point where God can bless you? Can you say, "I am useless in the service of God, and I can do nothing at all"? If you are truly empty and if you are truly seeking after God's word, He will work and operate in you.

## FIVE

The story in 2 Kings 4 shows us an important spiritual principle.

What did the woman and her sons have? They only had a pot of oil. This same pot of oil was later poured into many empty vessels. The little bit of oil that she had at the beginning was crucial. In the Bible oil represents the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works only on those who already have the Spirit abiding in them.

The widow's problem was that she had too few vessels. Elisha told her, "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full" (2 Kings 4:3-4). What did the woman do? "So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed" (vv. 5-6). She had to borrow empty vessels—this speaks of the need for empty room within us for the Holy Spirit. She was to borrow not a few—this means the more the better. There should not be only one

empty room but many empty rooms. One empty space is not enough; there needs to be many empty spaces. The more empty spaces there are, the more fullness there will be. This is a principle which the Lord has shown us: spiritual progress is a matter of being continually emptied out and continually filled up. The work of the Holy Spirit is not "once empty then forever full" but "always empty and always full." Therefore, brothers and sisters, do not think that as long as we have been emptied once, we will not need any more emptying. The work of the cross in us is ever-increasing and ever-deepening.

Another very important thing is the place where the oil was to be poured. It was to be poured in the house and with the door shut. To shut the door means to confine the woman, her sons, and the oil within the door. This indicates that we have to deal with the Holy Spirit directly ourselves. Everything should be between us and the Lord. Difficulties and victories are all personal. If there is something wrong with us, we must not bear a grudge against anyone nor blame anyone. We should shut the door, which means we should deal with the Holy Spirit within us alone. Our relationship is with the Holy Spirit alone. It is up to us and the Holy Spirit to decide whether we should live a rich spiritual life or a poor one. As long as we have settled everything with the Holy Spirit, all will go well.

We should consider another very precious thing: "And he [the son] said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed." The Holy Spirit will fill every empty vessel, even the very last one. If there had been more empty vessels, there would have been more oil. We must bear in mind that the reason the oil stayed was because there were no more vessels. It was not the oil that first stayed, but the empty vessels that were first exhausted. When there were no more empty vessels, the oil stayed. The oil did not exhaust itself; it was the empty vessels that were exhausted. Brothers and sisters, God is waiting for us to empty ourselves. If there is an infinite emptiness in us, the Holy Spirit will grant us an infinite filling. Whether or not we will receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit depends on whether we have empty vessels. It depends on whether or not we have reserved room for the Holy Spirit and whether or not we have provided Him a place to work in us.

We need to pray and ask the Lord to dig more deeply in us and make more

room in us so that the Holy Spirit can fill us. The filling of the Holy Spirit depends on our emptiness. I will repeat: our emptiness ought to be a continuous state. If we cannot empty ourselves, God cannot fill us. The Holy Spirit is waiting for empty rooms within us. The more empty rooms we give to Him, the more He will fill us. If there is empty room, it means there is more filling by the Holy Spirit to come. Therefore, we need not seek for the filling; all we have to do is to empty ourselves. The Holy Spirit alone is responsible for the filling; our responsibility is to empty ourselves. If we can empty ourselves, we will have the filling. We may not be conscious of the filling, but the fact of the filling will certainly be with us.

Brothers and sisters, God wants to fill the hungry with good things. If God has already created a seeking heart within us and if He is digging and emptying us, we ought to believe that He will certainly fill us. God will only send away empty those who think they are rich.

# MESSAGE TWO

## SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

### •Scripture Reading: Luke 14:26-27, 33

Luke 14:26-27 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and moreover, even his own soul-life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

33 "In the same way therefore everyone of you who does not forsake all his own possessions cannot be My disciple."

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Every Christian should have spiritual progress, but what is spiritual progress? How can one progress spiritually? What are the manifestations of a Christian making good spiritual progress? This is a big question, and we cannot cover everything here. We can merely treat it very briefly. According to the record of the Bible and the experience of the saints, spiritual progress is the increase of the element of God in us. God is Spirit, and if the Spirit of God dwells in us, we are in the spirit (Rom. 8:9). Spiritual progress is the increase of the element of God in us. Suppose the element of God was a hundred units at the time we were saved. If we have made any progress in spiritual matters, then the element of God has increased in us. If the element of God in us becomes two or three hundred units, it means that we have made some spiritual progress.

In the beginning when God created man, He made man His vessel. The eternal purpose of God is to enter into man, to mingle Himself with man so that man may be full of Him. The failure of Adam and Eve was that they did not allow God to fulfill this purpose. On the contrary, they were alienated from God. What does it mean to be alienated from God? It means that man does not yield the proper place within himself to God. What does it mean to not yield the proper

place to God? It means certain things within have occupied a person's being. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God's command did not occupy them; rather, they were occupied with how the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food, how it was pleasing to the eyes, and how it enabled man to have wisdom. These usurped the place of God in them. As a result they fell. As long as there is one thing, one event, or one person that takes possession of you, you have fallen from the presence of God.

We should ask ourselves what our condition today is. From the day we were saved until now, how many things, events, and people are still occupying us and depriving God of His rightful place? We need to consider ourselves. Dear brothers and sisters, if God's Spirit opens our eyes a little from within, we will immediately see that many items within our whole being are occupying the place that belongs to God alone.

A brother once said that man's heart is like sticky gum; it sticks to anything that comes across its way, whether it is clothing or a table. Sometimes we are stuck to an easy life, and at other times, we are attached to personal ambition. Once we are attached to something, we cannot love God properly anymore. We attach ourselves not only to what we have, but also to what we do not have. We can become attached to our difficulty, imagination, or vainglory. No matter what our heart is attached to, as long as there is one thing usurping God's place in us, we have fallen. Whenever God's place in us is usurped, we become fallen people. A person may have been saved for ten years. During the first five years he may have done well, but during the next five years there was something in his heart usurping the place of God, and he became fallen. Although he continued to come to meetings, pray, and serve God, inwardly he has fallen. Brothers and sisters, God's goal is for man to become His vessel. As long as we are occupied by something other than God, and as long as we do not yield the proper place to God, we are fallen.

A brother may say that another brother loves his son too much and that his son has usurped God's place, but that his own son has not usurped God's place because his son is not that lovable. Actually, both are wrong. If your son is too

lovable, he may usurp God's place. If he is not very lovable, he can also usurp God's place. You may fail to love God because your son is too lovable, and you may not love God because your son is not lovable. Whether or not something is occupying God's place in you is judged by whether you love God.

Therefore, it is very easy to find the meaning of spiritual progress and the ways and means to spiritual progress. We have mentioned the positive aspect of spiritual progress, which is the increase of the element of God in us. Now let us look at the negative aspect of spiritual progress. Spiritual progress on the negative side is the shedding of certain things from us, that is, from our inner being. As soon as something is shed from us, we have spiritual progress. When something that usurps God's place is shed from us, we have spiritual progress.

Suppose a person is preoccupied by his excessive talking. Every time you meet him, he incessantly talks like a chatter box that never shuts its lid. He never stops talking. If this man wants to make any spiritual progress, his excessive talking must be removed. Real progress for him will occur when his excessive talking stops. Spiritual progress is the increase of the element of God in us. It is also the removal of things other than God within us. We must not think that we can make progress by simply attending a meeting, hearing a message, or understanding a message. Spiritual progress for us is not only addition but also subtraction. Having eight or ten messages in us is not progress; it can well be a hindrance. Spiritual progress is the increase of the element of God and the removal of everything else. Brothers and sisters, what is spiritual progress? Is it listening to a few messages? No. When we listen to a message, the message reaches our mind, but this is not progress. When something is removed from us there is progress. If something is removed from us, we have progress. If God's element increases in us, we have progress.

Many Christians are delivered from the pleasures of sin as soon as they are saved. Yet it is not enough to be free from sin alone. Spiritual progress is being free from everything that usurps the place of God. Brothers and sisters, we must not only be clean but also pure; we should not be occupied by anything other than God. Whenever God's work removes something from us other than God, we have spiritual progress. We must continually ask ourselves whether we are

shedding things. We must remember that if nothing is removed from us, we have no spiritual progress. If nothing has been cast off from us for a month or a year, we have had no progress during that month or year.

Brothers and sisters, spiritual progress on the positive side means the increase of the element of God, and on the negative side, it means the decrease of ourselves. A Christian who makes great progress is one who decreases daily. Today he may see that vanity has no place in him, and he decreases. Two days later, he may see that pride has no place in him, and he decreases some more. After the fifth day, he may see that gossip has no place in him, and he decreases still more. After seven days, he may see that his impatience should not have any place in him, and he will decrease some more. Some people find it very difficult to remove the love of money from themselves. Others find it very difficult to remove their temper. Still others find it very difficult to remove their lethargy. Some things can only be dropped a little at a time. They may need ten years before they are completely dropped. This dropping is a kind of dying. Dying to money means dropping money; dying to temper means dropping our temper. On the positive side, spiritual progress means the increase of God's element within us. On the negative side, it means the dropping of many things from within us little by little.

How can these things be dropped? Simply put, the love of God first operates within a saved person. When this person is constrained by God's love, his heart turns towards God, and the Spirit of God is then given a chance to work and operate within him. When this happens, he is enlightened and sees something. Once he sees something, the Holy Spirit intensifies His work. The believer will obey the Spirit, and something will drop from him. One day God's love will inexplicably constrain you, and your heart will be turned to God, and you will say, "O God, I love You." When this happens, the Holy Spirit enlightens you. Once the Holy Spirit enlightens you, something is seen. Once you see something, the Holy Spirit intensifies His work, and you will immediately obey and say amen. This obedience results in something falling off. The degree to which things fall off will be the degree of your spiritual progress. The Lord said to the disciples, "Everyone of you who does not forsake all his own possessions cannot be My

disciple" (Luke 14:33). Some people forsake all things, only to pick them up again shortly. When the Lord Jesus spoke of forsaking all, He meant for it to be accomplished by the Spirit in us. Consequently, the work of the cross can only be executed by the Holy Spirit in us, and only then will things drop off. How does the Holy Spirit execute the work of the cross? As long as our heart is open towards the Lord, the Spirit will execute the work of the cross in us. On the cross the Lord Jesus stripped away everything for us already. Now the execution of this stripping work by the Holy Spirit is based on the degree to which our heart is turned towards God.

We must reiterate that spiritual progress on the positive side is the increase of the element of God, and on the negative side it is the decrease of things usurping God's place. The extent of this decrease depends on the degree to which our heart is turned towards God. How we wish that something would be removed from us daily! This is dying daily. Whenever we do not find anything dropping off, our progress has stopped.

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

## •Outline

- **•Truth Setting Us Free**
- **•Truth And Light**
- **•The Spirit Of Truth And The Word Of Truth**

## •Scripture Reading: John 8:32

John 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

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Nineteen hundred years ago, Pilate asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Many people have also asked this question. We cannot explain the biblical meaning of truth according to our concept. We have to consider what truth is according to God's Word.

The word truth in Greek means "absolute reality." Hence, truth is not a theory but a reality. We do not know the theory behind many real things, yet we can touch the fact and the reality of them.

According to John 1:17, the law was given through Moses, while grace and reality came by Jesus Christ. Grace is not an attitude of God, but a work of God. Grace is the work that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, has accomplished for us. God's Son has been crucified on the cross and shed His blood to accomplish God's work of redemption. There is no need for us to do anything by ourselves. By trusting in Him, we are saved. Without the work of the cross, God had no way to dispense His grace to man. Through Moses, He was only able to give man the law. Grace comes to us only because of the work of the cross. Therefore, grace is the work of God. Both grace and reality are in the same verse. Grace came through Jesus Christ, and reality also came through Jesus Christ. When God gave

the world His only begotten Son, He intended that He be reality as much as grace. Through the work of His Son, there was grace. Through the work of His Son, there was also reality. Without the work of the Lord Jesus, there could not be grace today. The Lord Jesus had to accomplish grace before this grace could be dispensed to man; millions of Christians believe this. The Lord Jesus also had to accomplish the reality before this reality could be dispensed to man. Ephesians 4:21 says, "The reality is in Jesus." God has accomplished the truth in the Lord Jesus. The truth is in Him; it is His work.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am...the reality" (John 14:6). The truth mentioned in the Bible refers to nothing other than the reality. What is reality? It is what we really are before God as a result of the Lord Jesus' accomplished work. This is truth, and this is reality. The Lord Jesus has shed His blood to redeem all those who belong to Him. This is a fact. Because of Him, I am a redeemed person before the Lord. This is the truth. The truth is what I am as a result of the facts accomplished in the Lord Jesus. I can only have the truth through the work that the Lord Jesus has accomplished. If the Lord Jesus had not worked, I would not have any truth or any reality before the Lord. I was a dead man and a sinner before God; I did not have any standing or anything before Him. But now, thank the Lord, through the work of the Lord Jesus, I have the reality before God; I have gained something solid and real. This real and solid thing is the fact that I am now a redeemed person.

We must remember that the truth mentioned in the Bible is not doctrines preached on a platform, but a fact before the Lord. A doctrine is man's explanation of something, while the truth is what we have become in the eyes of God through the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus. Through the work of the Lord Jesus, God has made me another person. This is a truth; it is a reality. We must remember that in God's eyes, the work of Jesus Christ is finished. The truth is what we have become as a result of this work. Truth is Christ; it is the Lord Jesus Himself because all the realities are in Christ. All the facts that we have been speaking of are in Christ. We can say that two plus two equaling four is a truth, but it is not the truth that we are speaking of here. The truth that we are speaking of here is just Christ Himself.

## TRUTH SETTING US FREE

Do we not have the truth already? Yes, but a question immediately arises. Why is there a vast difference in what we are before the Lord and what we are in the world? The work of the cross is finished, but we are still not victorious. The Lord Jesus has changed us into one kind of person, yet on earth we still appear as another kind of person. This means that our condition does not match the truth that we hold onto before God. This is our problem. We often do not know what the truth is. We come to God according to our own feelings and experiences rather than according to God's truth. We must realize that God's truth is contrary to our feelings and experiences. The one issue we have to resolve is which of the two is real. Is the Lord's accomplishment for us before God more real, or are our own feelings and experiences more real? Which of the two is more real? This is the question.

We are often bound because we do not see what is real, what is reality. Once we see the truth, the truth sets us free; it liberates us. Let us mention a few things to illustrate what it means for the truth to set us free.

We will begin with salvation. Suppose someone hears the gospel and realizes that the Lord Jesus has died on the cross and shed His blood to forgive his sins. He believes in the Son of God for the forgiveness of his sins, and he receives the Lord into him. When others ask whether he belongs to the Lord, he says, "Yes." He is bursting with joy within. However, three or five months later, he may feel a little sick, and troubles and difficulties may arise in his family. Then his joy is gone; it seems as if joy has departed far from him. He feels as if he is no longer saved and is no longer a child of God. If others ask him whether he is a Christian and whether he is saved, he may answer, "I am quite bothered. I have lost my former joy. I do not know where the Lord Jesus is anymore. I do not know what to say about this." What would you say to him at this time? If you know God's truth, you would tell him, "You may feel that you are not saved, but in fact you are saved. In reality you are saved."

From what side are you looking at the matter? If you look at it from his side, you may feel that he is not yet saved. But if you look at it from the side of the Lord's work, you will say, "Brother, there is no change; you are still saved. You are

saved when you feel hot, and you are still saved when you feel cold. Your feeling may change, but the work the Lord has accomplished for you and what God has given you will never change. You have to look at it from His end." The Lord says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." When a man's eyes are opened to see that he has obtained reality and truth before God through the work of the Lord, he will be free and he will be liberated. We must remember that we are not freed according to our feeling. Only one thing frees us: the reality which is before God.

There was a brother who had definitely repented to the Lord and was a regenerated believer. After a while, however, his inward feelings became different; he felt quite grievous, and he thought that he would surely perish. Another brother came along and said to him, "How do you know that you are going to perish?" He said, "I am not the same as before. I feel cold within. Neither my prayer nor my reading of the Bible is doing me any good." The other brother said, "That is the condition on your side, but let us consider a few questions from God's side. Has the work of the Lord Jesus been discounted?" "No." "Has the Lord's work changed from what it was before?" "No." "Has His work been annulled before God as if the new covenant were dissolved?" "No." "All right, we are sure that there is no change on His side. Therefore, according to truth and according to reality, you have not become unsaved before God. What has changed is your own feeling. You may feel that you are saved, and you may feel that you are not saved, but when God says that you are saved, will He change? You have to remember that salvation is a question of truth; it is not a question of feeling." When he heard this, he responded with tears, "It does not matter how confident I am; whatever I say or feel means nothing. If God says that I am saved, then I am saved." This is the truth setting us free. Spiritual reality liberates a man from his own feelings; it frees him.

Let us go one step further to see how the truth sets us free. God's Word shows us that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He bore our sins, regenerated us, and saved us. God's Word also shows us that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He put us into the Lord Jesus, and our old man was crucified with Him. The Lord's death was not the death of an individual; it was a

corporate death. When He died on the cross, we died in Him also. Through His accomplishment, we became dead. This is truth, and this is reality.

However, before we see this truth, we are bound. When we look at ourselves, we still find our temper. When we touch our feelings, we still find our weaknesses. All the undesirable things we have from head to toe are still with us. The question now is: Are our experiences and feelings more real, or is the Lord's work more real? Many people are weeping as if nothing is more real than their bondage. But God's Word shows us that only one thing is real, that is, the accomplishments of His Son Jesus. Our old man is crucified with the Lord. This is truth. If we do not see this truth, we will become a slave to our temper and will be bound by our experience and feelings. What can set us free? Only the truth can set us free. Only reality can set us free. If we live by our feelings and experiences, we will fail again and again. But if we see the fact of our crucifixion with the Lord, we will be set free.

Let us consider another matter: the victory of the Lord Jesus. There was a brother who was under Satan's attacks for a few months in body and in mind. He tried all he could to pray and resist them. He even exhausted himself in prayer and resistance. Yet for three months straight, despite his resistance and prayer, he was still under the attack. One night he prayed to the Lord, "I cannot resist any longer. My power of resistance is exhausted. I cannot pray anymore, my strength to pray is gone. Lord, show me where the root of the problem lies." God opened his eyes and gave him a word. He had heard that word before, but when he had heard it previously, it was like seeing men as trees. Now he became clear. The word was: "Is Satan worth such resistance from us?" He had never before thought that one could be wrong for resisting Satan. On that day, he saw the reality. What is the reality? The reality is that the Lord Jesus has overcome. When we are joined to Him, we also overcome. It is not that the Lord Jesus is about to overcome, and we cheer Him on. The truth is that He has overcome. It is not that Satan will be defeated, and we pray for the Lord to defeat him. Thank and praise the Lord that Satan is already defeated. It is done; it is not something to be done. Once that brother saw this truth, the attacks stopped. Everything became quiet, and all the problems were over. This is the reality setting men free. This is the

truth setting us free.

## TRUTH AND LIGHT

In order to see the truth, we need God's enlightening. Psalm 43:3 says, "Send forth Your light and Your truth." What is the purpose of God's light? It is for enlightening the truth. This is very important. We know God's truth through the light. Truth does not come from the preaching of the word; it comes from God's light. Today if you ask the brothers and sisters, "Have you died in Christ?", many will say, "I am dead. Yet I do not know why it is not producing any effect on me." This is because they have only heard the doctrine; they have not seen the truth. Whoever sees the reality has received the light. A brother said that when God opened his eyes to see Romans 6, he saw Ephesians 6 as well. He saw that his death was a fact, the Lord's victory was a fact, and his participation in the Lord's victory was also a fact. In the past, he was only hoping for it; now he knew that he had it. In the past he was only hoping that the Lord would overcome; now he could praise the Lord for having overcome. He testified that this way of living was totally different from his former way of living. Formerly, everything was in the way of yearning and hope. Now everything was reality. He was no longer trying to grasp onto something; everything was in his hands already. When the light comes, a person has to jump up and say, "It is finished!"

Every Christian has been enlightened at least once when he was saved. When a person is saved, he sees that he does not have to hope to be saved or hope to receive eternal life. He does not have to hope to receive these things in the future. Instead, he thanks and praises God for accomplishing all these things in Christ. Once the light shines on the truth, a person becomes a Christian. Every Christian becomes a Christian through the light shining on the truth. All spiritual realities come through the shining of the light upon the truth.

Therefore, when a truth is being preached without the accompanying shining of the light, it becomes a doctrine. When truth is preached, and God's light is upon it, the truth becomes revelation. To receive a revelation is to receive the truth. Those who receive a doctrine are merely filled with ideas in their mind. Only those who have received a revelation receive reality and life.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE WORD OF TRUTH

When God's light shines, the Holy Spirit brings us into the spiritual reality of what the light shines on. On the one hand, there is the Spirit of truth; the Comforter is the Spirit of truth. On the other hand, there is the Bible, which is the word of truth. There are first the facts of truth—the things that God has accomplished in Christ. When the Bible tells us these facts of truth, and we believe in the words of truth, the Holy Spirit brings us into the truth itself, that is, into the spiritual reality itself. The Lord Jesus is the reality, and God brings us into the reality through His Spirit. In this way, we no longer have a doctrine or a theory; we do not have to live in our feelings or our experiences anymore; instead, we can live in Christ's accomplished facts.

Hence, the main question is whether or not we have revelation. When we have revelation, we will not think of our own experiences or our own feelings. We will believe that everything on God's side is real. Many Christians consider that their old man is still living, that it is a reality. They dare not believe that they were crucified with Christ. But if they see the revelation, they will change. The revelation will show them that their old man is surely and undeniably dead. We must remember that only those who receive the revelation of the Holy Spirit enter into the reality. The Holy Spirit gives us revelation and shows us what is real before we can ascertain what is real and what is not.

When God accomplishes something and we see what He has accomplished, we have the real experience. Praise and thank the Lord, when we see what God has accomplished and when we say yes to whatever God has said yes to, we have the real experience. May the Lord open our eyes to see the truth. If we truly see the truth, the truth will set us free. Our liberation comes from the truth. Our freedom comes from the truth. We should all seek after the truth, which means that we should all seek after reality. May God lead us into all reality.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## THE DIVIDING OF THE SOUL FROM THE SPIRIT

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 4:12-13

Heb. 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom we are to give our account.”

*  *  *  *

### ONE

The dividing of the soul from the spirit is a very important thing. It has to do with the growth of the Christian life. If a Christian cannot tell the difference between the soul and the spirit, how can he seek after that which is spiritual? He will often take soulish things for spiritual things, always live a life in the soul, and not seek after that which is spiritual. God's Word mentions many times what the soul is like and what the spirit is like. The Bible mentions some people who grieve in the soul and some people who grieve in the spirit. It mentions some people who rejoice in the soul and some people who rejoice in the spirit. Some draw the conclusion from these verses that the spirit must be the same as the soul because they have similar functions. However, this is like saying that you are me since you can eat and I can eat. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit." Since the soul and the spirit can be divided from each other, it is clear that the spirit is the spirit and the soul is the soul.

Genesis 2 shows us that when God created man, He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. When this breath of life came in contact with the human body, the soul was produced. Verse 7 speaks of man becoming a living soul. This means that the outstanding feature of man is his soul. The breath of life is the spirit of man; it came from God. The spirit has a God-consciousness; it responds to God's voice and is able to fellowship with God. But after Adam fell, his spirit became dead towards God. Thereafter, Adam's spirit (as well as his descendants' spirit) was dominated by the soul. In the end, the spirit and the soul were mixed together. At the time man is saved, his spirit becomes alive to God once more. Yet because of the long period of mixture with the soul, the spirit now needs God's word in order to be divided from the soul.

## TWO

Although the spirit and the soul are similar in function, they belong to two different realms. They have two different sources. You may be happy today, but your happiness may be from the soul or from the spirit. In both cases it is happiness, but there is a distinction between the places from which the happiness comes. You may be sad today, but your sadness may be from the soul or from the spirit. In both cases it is sadness, but there is a distinction between the places from which the sadness comes. God is concerned about the source from which a thing comes. For example, Abraham was about to beget a son. At that time he was very old, and there did not seem to be much hope. He waited for a long time without seeing God's promise being fulfilled. Then his wife came up with a plan; she suggested that Abraham marry Hagar. Eventually Ishmael was produced. Fourteen years later God gave him Isaac through his wife Sarah. If we only read Genesis 15—17 and 21, we will not know what Isaac and Ishmael represent. In Galatians 4, we find out what Isaac and Ishmael represent. Paul said that one was born according to promise, while the other was born according to flesh. Do we see the distinction here? Man thinks that as long as one has a son, everything is all right. But God asks where the son comes from. We think that as long as we have a son, be it an Isaac or an Ishmael, we will be satisfied. But God's Word says that Ishmael represents the flesh, while Isaac represents the spirit.

Ishmael represents what man acquires through his own wisdom and strength, while Isaac represents what man receives from God and what is of God.

Then what does it mean to be soulish? Being soulish is doing things by the self. What does it mean to be spiritual? Being spiritual is doing things by God. These are two entirely different things. A person can do things without waiting on God and without trusting in Him. This is soulish and fleshly. He can also speak and move only when God tells him to speak and move, looking to God, waiting on Him, and trusting in Him. This is what it means to be spiritual. We have to ask whether everything we do is done in the Holy Spirit. This is a crucial question. We often do the right things, yet something within us still condemns them. We condemn them not because they are bad but because they do not originate from God and are not the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

## THREE

First Corinthians 3 mentions the matter of the building, which refers to one's work. Some build with gold, silver, and precious stones in their work, while others build with wood, grass, and stubble in their work. What kind of work is considered gold, silver, and precious stones, and what kind of work is considered wood, grass, and stubble? In the Bible, gold, silver, and precious stones refer to things that are of God. Gold represents glory, which comes from the Father. Silver represents redemption, which is the Son's work. Precious stones are compounds produced out of heat under the earth; they represent the work of the Holy Spirit. There is the eternal glory of God, the cross of the Son, and the edifying work of the Holy Spirit. This is the gold, the silver, and the precious stones. Wood, grass, and stubble refer to things that are of man. Man's glory is like grass, his nature like wood, and the result of his work like stubble. Hence, gold, silver, and precious stones symbolize things that are of God, while wood, grass, and stubble symbolize things that are of man. Gold, silver, and precious stones are not things that grow on the surface of the earth. One can only find these things by digging deep. Wood, grass, and stubble all grow on the surface of the earth and can be easily found. Hence, anything that is from the depths, conceived in the hidden parts, is part of God's work, while anything that the flesh accomplishes is of man

and is not worth anything. Anything that one can do easily, that one can learn easily, rarely has any spiritual value because it originates from outside. Only things that issue from the depths, that are of God, have spiritual value.

This distinction exists in our preaching as well as in our evangelistic work. Some preach the gospel by waiting before God, looking to Him, and picking up a burden from Him. It seems as if their work is born out of an inward impregnation. This is the work of gold, silver, and precious stones. Others preach the gospel according to their quick mind, powerful eloquence, or sharp memory. The minute they stand up, they can speak. They may be very busy with their work, but before the Lord this work is wood, grass, and stubble; it does not have any spiritual value at all. A brother was preaching once in a certain place. Outwardly, in man's eyes, the situation was very encouraging, and he should have been rejoicing. Yet strangely, the more he worked, the less spirit he had. Outwardly, he appeared very energetic, but inwardly he became hungrier and hungrier, and dry and parched. When he was finished with his work, he had to confess his sins before the Lord. He had to confess that he was working by himself. Therefore, it is not a matter of outward condition; the matter of importance is who is doing the work.

This inward distinction has nothing to do with words spoken outwardly or results produced superficially. The only distinction lies in the source. Because of this distinction, some who pick up the same words and who speak the same messages as others just give everyone the impression that they are clever. Others who use the same words and speak the same messages give everyone the impression that they know God. When we meet some people, we can only bow our head and say, "God is here!" But when we meet other people, we can only say that they are clever and eloquent. If we have touched God, we can cause others to touch God. If we have touched the soul, all we can do is cause others to touch ourselves. The two things are entirely different.

## FOUR

This is true not only in our service to the Lord, but in our personal life as well. Once a Christian went to speak to a servant of God. He was afraid of being

criticized; therefore, in his conversation he tried his best to be humble. He struggled to be humble in his attitude and in his speaking. But while he was practicing this humility, others felt a tremendous strain. If a man is genuinely humble, there is no place for such a great strain. This man was acting out his humility; therefore, his humility was so strenuous. Could one say that he was without humility? Others had to admit that there was some humility. But it was artificial humility. It was soulish. If God works in such a one, his humility will be very spontaneous. He will not feel that he is being humble, yet others will see God's work in him. Those who put cosmetics on their faces look in the mirror all the time, but Moses, whose face shone, did not see the shining himself. Some become what they are through the work of God within them. This is spiritual. Others are performing; they are struggling. As a result, they strive hard to be a Christian. Actually, one does not need to strive hard to be a Christian. For us, as long as the outward appearance is good, nothing else matters. But in God's eyes, the sources of two things may be entirely different; one may be of God, and the other may be of the energy of the flesh and may be an imitation. The more some endure, the more we feel sorry for them. Others, however, are not conscious at all that they are enduring, yet we have to bow down and say that God has done a marvelous work in them. We can tell that one is of God, and the other is of man. The distinction is not based on outward appearances, but on the source.

This does not mean that anything spontaneous is of the spirit; some things that belong to the natural life are quite spontaneous also. Some are born meek. But they will find one day that natural meekness and the meekness from the Lord are two entirely different things. Some are born with a love for others. But one day they will find that an inborn love is totally different from the love that comes from the Lord. Some are born humble. One day they will find that the humility from the Lord is absolutely different from the humility which they have in themselves. Natural virtues can replace spiritual things more readily than acquired imitations. One often replaces the Lord's work with man's natural endowments. Actually, anything that comes from the soul has nothing to do with God; only that which is from the spirit is related to God. The meekest one will find one day that he faces more temptation because of his natural meekness. One

day his meekness will run out, and his endurance will run out. He can only endure to a certain extent, and he can only be meek to a certain extent. This is natural, and all human natural strength is limited. But if we apply the strength that comes from the Lord, the result will be entirely different. The Lord can do what we cannot do. We do not work by ourselves. The Lord works within us first, then we work spontaneously. After the work is over, we will marvel and say, "How did this happen? Who has done this?" We can only bow our heads and say: "I do not have any endurance. Lord, it is You who are doing the work within me." This is being spiritual.

## FIVE

Of course, we have to know that outwardly it is not easy to differentiate between the two things. It is not easy to tell within ourselves what is spiritual and what is soulish. The knowledge of the truth does not come from a daily self-examination; there is no spiritual value to constantly asking ourselves whether we are of the spirit or the soul. We cannot find the answer by asking or analyzing. We will not know it if we do not ask, and we will not know it even if we ask. We can never have genuine insight to any spiritual matter through self-analysis. On the contrary, this will only lead to spiritual paralysis and spiritual sickness. Genuine insight comes from God's shining. The minute the light shines, we spontaneously see. Therefore, we do not have to ask so much. All we have to do is allow God's word to shine within us. This word is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword. It is so sharp that it can pierce through bones. Once this word comes in, we will immediately know what is of the soul and what is of the spirit. There will be a judgment within which is stronger than any judgment from men. Once we move, something within will say, "This is wrong," "This is too shallow," or "You are working, and you are trying to influence others." This power of discernment comes from within and not from without. Once we see something within, the seeing becomes a genuine vision. Others may say, "If you do this, you may be exercising yourself." We may even nod our head, saying, "Perhaps it is the self." But none of these will help. The only thing that will help is seeing something in an inward way.

May the Lord be gracious to us and grant us inward light, so that we have an inward seeing and an inward discernment. Discerning the spirit from the soul is the foundation of Christian discernment. We do not acquire this discerning power through a process of learning, but through inward enlightenment. Our hope before the Lord is that His word will come in, shine, and show us the part of our personal life and work that is soulish and the part that is spiritual.

## MESSAGE FIVE

# FEAR AND GODLINESS

## •Outline

### •One—Two

## •Scripture Reading: Psa. 25:12, 14; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; 4:7-9; Titus 2:12

Psa. 25:12 "Who then is the man who fears Jehovah? / Him will He instruct concerning the way that he should choose."

14 "The intimate counsel of Jehovah is to those who fear Him, / And His covenant will He make known to them."

2 Cor. 7:1 "Therefore since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and of spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

1 Tim. 3:16 "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory."

4:7-9 "But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness. For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come. Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance."

Titus 2:12 "Training us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age,"

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There are two words in the Bible which are quite familiar to us. One is fear, and the other is godliness. What do fearing and being godly mean? By the grace of God, we would like to share a little of what we have learned concerning these

matters.

## ONE

God demands that His children be holy. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul said, "Therefore since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and of spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This verse shows us that our holiness is very much related to our fear of God. God is holy, and the more we draw near to Him, the more we feel our uncleanness. The more we serve God, the more we fear ourselves. When we first learn to fear the Lord, it is natural that we fear the self-element in everything we do. For example, your son may come and ask what he should do. If you fear God, you will be afraid of the self-element in your answer. This is the meaning of fear. Suppose a brother asks you for help. If you fear God, you will be afraid of yourself in rendering help to your brother. But at the same time, you will also be afraid of yourself in refusing to help your brother. You are constantly in fear of yourself. This is the meaning of fear. In your acquaintance with the brothers and sisters, you may constantly be afraid of any mixture of the self. This attitude is called fear. To fear is to be afraid of the self in everything that you do. In criticizing or praising others, a person may have the fear that this criticism or praise comes from the self. Having a fearful heart is being afraid of the mixture of self-element.

Let me give a few more examples. Some brothers and sisters like to write letters. Under normal circumstances, writing letters is not wrong. But some brothers and sisters have a natural fondness for writing letters. They waste a considerable amount of valuable time in this matter. If we fear God, we will be afraid of our self even in writing letters. Any time we do something for ourselves, by ourselves, with our own goals in mind, for our own interest, and with the self in full view, we are not being fearful. Being fearful is being afraid of the self in everything and being concerned that we do not offend God in anything. This applies even to the way we deal with our children and with clothing and other necessities. We should be afraid that we have a self-element in the way we deal with our children and with clothing and other necessities, and we should be afraid of offending God in these matters. This apprehension concerning the self

is proper fear. We may discover some fault in a brother and may want to rebuke him. But if we live before the Lord, the minute we set our mind on the matter, we will pray, "Lord, I am afraid of self-activity in rebuking my brother." This is the meaning of fear. However, if we are afraid of rebuking our brother just because we do not want to offend his feelings, this is not fear. To fear does not mean to be afraid of difficulties; it does not mean to be sensitive to human feelings. To fear means to be afraid of the activity of the self. The only thing we have to be afraid of is the self. Some people are worried about many things. They are worried about this and that. As a consequence, inexperienced ones say that they are very spiritual. But those who genuinely fear the Lord are not afraid of this and that. They are only afraid of one thing—the self; they are afraid of anything that may not be of God, through God, for God, or unto God. They are afraid of their self-element. This is the proper meaning of fear.

Brothers and sisters, as we grow in life, we will not be afraid of many things. We will only be afraid of the self; we will be afraid of offending God. When some brothers and sisters find out something wrong with other brothers and sisters, their mind may try to come up with some clever ways to deal with the situation. Is this spiritual? We cannot say that this is spiritual. This is being political. Even if one succeeds, there will be no spiritual content or result to it. It is self when we deal with others in anger, and it is also self when we deal with others with smiles and subtlety. Brothers and sisters, our temper is not an expression of the fear of God, and our gentle tactics are not expressions of the fear of God. Being political is exercising the self. Anyone who is political is not being fearful of God. Those who fear God are afraid of the self not only when they lose their temper, but also when they deal with others in a gentle way. Our temper is often an expression of the self, and our gentle treatment of others is a greater expression of the self. In our gentleness we have not feared God. To fear is to maintain an attitude of apprehension about our self before God. The most precious attitude a man can have before the Lord is a fearful heart. This means that he is afraid of the presence of self within. This is being fearful.

## TWO

Then what is being godly? First Timothy 3:16 says, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh..." Godliness is God being manifested in the flesh. This means that God is expressed through man. God's life was manifested in the Lord Jesus (the Head of the church). In the same way, His life is manifested in those who believe in Him (the church). Hence, godliness is simply God's life in us being manifested through our flesh. If we are saved to the extent that our thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes no longer reflect our self but become the living of Christ, we are living a life of godliness. This is what God requires from us. He wants to extend the manifestation of God in the flesh through us.

Second Timothy 3:12 mentions "to live godly..." This means that we should be godly in our living, so that others will see God. The way we speak should make others feel the presence of God. The way we walk and act should make others feel the presence of God. Even our attire, the furniture in our house, the decor of our dwelling, and our whole living should give others the impression of God. When we contact others, they should sense God in us. This is being godly.

Unfortunately, it is hard to find even a few among a hundred Christians who live in a godly way. We often find many brothers and sisters who are ungirded in their loins and undisciplined in their mouths. They joke with each other and jest without having any feeling at all. They privately indulge in drinking and gambling without any sense of remorse within. This is because many so-called Christians do not know the meaning of godliness. Consequently, they do not have a godly living. Having the form of godliness, while denying its power, is vain. But one who has the power of godliness will surely not be void of the form of godliness. Godliness originates from God's life. The essence of God's life is godliness. When this life is manifested in us, the result is surely godliness. The trouble with man is that he is full of the self; he is still fleshly. As a result, the life of godliness is frustrated from expressing itself freely. If a Christian does not have any sense of godliness, he is either void of life or living in darkness. As long as a Christian is living in the light, he will always have consciousness within, although the degree of consciousness may vary. If he thinks, speaks, and acts according to an inward consciousness of godliness, he will become a godly man.

This is why one has to exercise himself unto godliness.

First Timothy 4:7 says, "But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness." This shows that the exercise of godliness is very related to the bridling of our words. Careless words are a sure sign of ungodliness. We should be living and fresh, but we must allow God to express Himself through our speaking. Titus 2:12 says, "Training us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts..." Godliness is not a question of the heart; it is a way of life. Godliness is God being manifested in us.

Let me repeat again. What is fear? It is a condition of the heart; it is being afraid of the presence of the self in everything and constantly being in fear of offending God. What is godliness? Godliness is a way of living; it is expressing God in our daily living. The principle of God's work is always from the inside to the outside. If a man only pays attention to the form of godliness without caring for the life of godliness, his conduct is just a performance without the power and reality of godliness. There is genuine godliness when a person, in a fearful way, becomes apprehensive of his self-activity and constantly refuses, opposes, and condemns all ungodly thoughts, words, acts, moves, and attitudes to the extent that he becomes restricted in his outward behavior. When he moves away from this restriction, he becomes uneasy within; he is condemned and no longer at peace within. We must learn to fear and exercise ourselves unto godliness. May the Lord have a way among us.

# MESSAGE SIX

## THE CONDITION OF OUR HEART

## •Outline

### •One—Four

## •Scripture Reading: Psa. 19:14; Acts 13:22-23

Psa. 19:14 “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart / Be acceptable before You, / O Jehovah, my rock and my Redeemer.”

Acts 13:22-23 “And when He had deposed him, He raised up David for them as king, to whom also He testified and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who will do all My will. From this man’s seed, God, according to promise, brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,”

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### ONE

Both of the above passages are related to David. Psalm 19:14 is a prayer of David, while Acts 13:22-23 is a description of David. In David's prayer, there are the "words of my mouth" and the "meditation of my heart," or the thoughts of the heart. He prayed that he would not only be kept in his words outwardly, but also be acceptable to God in his thoughts inwardly. The words of the mouth are an expression of the thoughts of the heart. The heart is the root problem. Whether or not one outwardly says the right words is not the basic problem. Whether or not one has an outward attitude in his speaking that is right is also not the basic problem. The thoughts of the heart are the basic problem. The thoughts of the heart constitute the root problem and cannot be overlooked. David did not merely pray, "God, may the words of my mouth be acceptable before You." He added to the prayer, "May the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You." David's prayer was for the thoughts of his heart to be acceptable before God. This

is why Paul could later testify that David was a man according to the Lord's heart.

A person who is according to God's heart allows God to touch his heart. If you will not allow God to touch your heart, it will be hard for you to be one who is according to His heart. Many Christians ask, "Why is it wrong for me to do this? Why is it wrong for me to say this? Why is it wrong for me to express myself this way?" Brothers and sisters, whether or not you are doing the right thing, saying the right thing, or expressing yourself the right way is not the real problem. Rather, is your heart right when you are doing such a thing, saying such a word, or expressing yourself in such a way? What is the condition of your heart? What is the condition of the root? Even if you are right in every outward thing, it is still possible for your heart to be wrong. God is touching the condition of your heart and asking about it. He allows many winds and waves to beat upon His children for this very reason. He uses these things to touch your heart and to expose the condition of your heart.

## TWO

The Bible shows us that David's life was characterized by the way of the cross. He lived a life of the cross. Two names are mentioned at the beginning of the New Testament: Abraham and David. These two persons ushered in the Lord Jesus; they brought God from heaven to earth. God needs to find someone like Abraham and someone like David before He can have a way to come from heaven to earth. We know that Abraham is the father of faith; his life was characterized by the way of faith. Only a way of faith can bring God down to earth. David's life was characterized by the way of the cross; he lived a life of the cross. He not only brought God to men, he also brought His rule among men. If you live in faith, you will afford God a way to come to man, and if you live under the cross, you will afford God a way to rule among men. If God's children are willing to take the way of the cross and live a life of the cross, God will rule among men in many ways. Brothers and sisters, in order for God to rule within, you must live the life of the cross. The characteristic of David's life is that he lived the life of the cross.

## THREE

David suffered many extraordinary experiences throughout his life. These experiences were there to test the condition of his heart. He was despised at home. When God told Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse to be king, Jesse gathered together his seven sons but forgot David (1 Sam. 16:6-13). Yet the heart of the young man was proper. His heart did not become improper through this experience. God told Samuel, "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (v. 7). God was pleased with David's heart. This is why he was chosen by God and used by Him.

After David killed Goliath, God put him in a situation where the women of Israel proclaimed, "Saul hath slain his thousands,/and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). One of these two sentences was a test to David, and the other was a test to Saul. Proverbs 27:21 says, "As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; / so is a man to his praise." Will you be proud when others praise you a little? Will you be jealous when others praise you less? The praises by the women of Israel tested David's heart as well as Saul's heart. David was not moved by the words, "David has slain his ten thousands," but Saul was provoked by the words, "Saul has slain his thousands." This word exposed Saul's jealousy (1 Sam. 18:6-9). Suppose you are engaged in some work with another brother. If another man comes along and praises your brother for his work, yet says nothing about you, how will you feel? Perhaps you will feel somewhat unhappy and displeased. This slight unhappiness and displeasure proves that you are not that clean inside. Did you not say with your mouth that you were doing this for God and not for yourself? Yet a word of praise from others provokes you. This proves that your heart is not all that clean. Every experience in our environment, particularly the way we are treated by those close to us, is a test to our heart. When David killed Goliath, all the hearts of Israel turned to him, yet Saul gave him a difficult time. During that long period of time, he submitted himself under God's hand and dared not walk away from God's hand. This shows how clean David was; his heart was right.

Later after David became king, he suffered a severe trial as the result of a great failure. His own son sought his life; Shimei cursed him and cast stones at him. What did he say? His heart was crystal clear that the Lord had bidden

Shimei to come, and he looked to God for his good (2 Sam. 16:5-12). Do not think that negative circumstances will harm us. If our heart is not right, they will harm us. If our heart is right, they will do us good. Our circumstances expose our heart's condition. David lived a life under the cross, and this life revealed his heart's condition.

## FOUR

Brothers and sisters, we have to be careful about our words and our attitude, but we have to be more careful about the thoughts of our heart. Sometimes what we do outwardly does not necessarily reflect the condition of our heart. Only our inner feelings reflect the true condition of our heart. It is useless to merely guard our mouth because if the heart is not right, it will find the opportunity to express itself sooner or later. Brothers and sisters, our idle talk about others exposes our heart's condition. The more our heart is for God, and the more it seeks after Him in a pure way, the less we will have idle talk. Every time we gossip and murmur against others, it is a sign that our heart is not right. A heart that is single towards God will not have too many idle comments concerning others.

A brother once said, "If a `little brother' offends me, I can forgive him. But if a `big brother' offends me, I cannot forgive him." Another brother who was listening to him nodded his head unceasingly and fixed his eyes on his heart. The second brother was indicating, "Your heart! Your heart! If a `little brother' offends you, you can forgive him, but if a `big brother' offends you, you cannot forgive him. This exposes your heart. To forgive a `little brother' when he has offended you does not expose your heart. But when a `big brother' offends you and you cannot forgive, this exposes your heart." The presence of an offending `big brother' exposes the unforgiving heart. An object may not burn when it is lit with a match, but when it is thrown into the furnace, it will burn. This means that the object is not really incombustible. A `little brother' was not big enough to expose the heart of the brother, but a slight touch from the `big brother' exposes his heart. Brothers and sisters, do not complain about your wife or your husband. Do not complain about your parents or your children. They may be a matchstick, or they may be a furnace, but they are there to expose your heart.

You should thank the Lord for them.

Dear brothers and sisters, if our heart is right, no one can shake us, and our heart will always be looking to God. David was according to the Lord's heart because his heart was after God no matter where the Lord put him. He did not have anything to do directly with men; he was related directly to God. He received everything from God's hand, and he viewed everything from God's eyes. Again I repeat that God uses our circumstances to test our heart. Brothers and sisters, may we pray the same prayer as the psalmist: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart/Be acceptable before You,/O Jehovah, my rock and my Redeemer."

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## GOD NEEDING MAN

## •Outline

### •One—Two

## •Scripture Reading: Isa. 6:8; 1 Sam. 1:10-11; John 7:17

Isa. 6:8 "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us? And I said, Here am I; send me."

1 Sam. 1:10-11 "So I stood over him and put him to death, for I knew that he would not live after his fall; and I took the crown that was upon his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them to my lord here. Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, as did all the men who were with him."

John 7:17 "If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself."

*  *  *  *

### ONE

The Bible shows us that God needs man. God needs man to cooperate with Him before He can fulfill His eternal plan. In the six days of creation, man was the center of God's creating work. God could only rest after He had created man; He could not rest without man. Although man later fell, God's intention concerning man has not changed. He still wants to gain man. Man's salvation, edification, and maturity in spiritual life is for the satisfaction of God's need. The greatest necessity in God's work is human cooperation. At no time and place has God's work been carried out without human cooperation. Man works together with God, and God cannot do anything without man. (The work of God here does not include His work of creation in the six days. The work of creation in the six days was God's own work, and man had no part in it.)

From Genesis to Revelation, we can see that God has always been seeking man, gaining man, guiding man, and working through man. In order to do anything, God first gains some men. If He has not gained some men, He cannot work. We can see this from a few examples.

Consider the story of Noah and the ark. At the time of Noah, God clearly wanted to save men. But if He did not gain Noah, He could not fulfill His purpose. God had to find Noah, work through him, and accomplish His will by means of him. God wanted an ark, but He also had to find a person who had a heart for Him. God had to find a person who could cooperate with Him before He could build an ark. He had to find Noah, who sympathized with Him, walked with Him, and received His commission before He could accomplish His work. God had to gain man before He could do anything. In order for the story of the ark to be written, God had to first secure Noah. In him we see a man walking with God and working with Him.

Consider the story of Moses. God intended to deliver the children of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh, but He first had to gain Moses. Without Moses, God had no way to save the Israelites. It is true that God is omnipotent and almighty. But if He did not have Moses, it would have been impossible for Him to deliver the Israelites. If Moses had not allowed God to use him, God could only have waited until someone was raised up and then use this one to deliver the Israelites. In Moses' deliverance of the children of Israel, we also see God's need for man's cooperation. The principle here is very clear.

After the Israelites reached the foot of Mount Sinai, God ordered them to make a tent. He intended to fill the tabernacle with His glory and dwell among men through the tabernacle. Yet He needed a group of men to build the tabernacle. If God had not found Moses and a group of people to build the tabernacle, He could not have revealed Himself to the Israelites or dwelt among men.

In the coming of the Lord Jesus, we have a clearer picture of man's cooperation with God. Who is our Lord Jesus? He is God becoming a man. There was no one in the universe who could meet God's standard. As a result God Himself became a man. The Lord Jesus was more than a man, yet throughout His

life on earth, He always maintained His stand as a man. Although He is God and the Son of God, He always did things as a man. When He was tempted, Satan told Him more than once that He ought to do things as the Son of God. Satan tried to lure Him away from the position of a man to the position of God. But the Lord Jesus answered, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). He meant that He was on earth as a man. He was tempted by Satan because He became flesh and was made a Nazarene.

When He cast out a demon, the demon cried, "I know who You are—the Holy One of God." But the Lord silenced him (Mark 1:23-26). The main purpose of the Lord coming to the earth was to be a man. He said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). When Nathanael came to the Lord, he said, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." The Lord answered and said, "You shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:49-51). He always said the Son of Man did such and such. This shows that while the Lord Jesus was on earth, He always stood in the position of a man. God can only accomplish His work through man. When man could not satisfy God's demand, He sent His beloved Son to earth to become a man, to satisfy His own demand, and to accomplish His work. Later, we see the Lord Jesus sending the twelve and then sending the seventy (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1). In order to accomplish His work, God needs a group of men. All of God's work among men from Genesis to Revelation requires the cooperation of man. Without man, God can do nothing, and His work cannot be accomplished.

In Isaiah 6:8 God said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?" God has the desire to spread the gospel and save some men, but there is no one whom He can use. Some people are occupied by vainglory. Others are occupied by enjoyment, families, or ease. These ones only care for their own affairs, and they have no heart for the propagation of the gospel or for God's work. Brothers and sisters, do you realize that many people are not saved because of your refusal to cooperate with Him, rather than any unwillingness on God's part? God has the desire to save, but you have no desire to cooperate with Him. If every brother

and sister was willing to cooperate with God, the number of saved ones would be beyond your ability to calculate. God's work cannot go on because He has not found men. Brothers and sisters, God must gain you before He can accomplish His work.

## TWO

There is a very precious thought in the Bible: God treasures man's aspiration for Him. The story of Moses shows us that he had an aspiration to save the Israelites on God's behalf. Although he was not used by God until he was eighty years old, his aspiration did not begin at the age of eighty; it was there when he was forty years old. God did not forget his aspiration during the next forty years. He came back to Moses.

Not only do we see this in Moses, we see this in the story of Samuel as well. Hannah prayed to the Lord and vowed, "If thou wilt...give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life" (1 Sam. 1:10-11). God gained Samuel and accomplished His purpose through him in that age because Samuel's mother had an aspiration toward God concerning her son. God cares for man's aspiration toward Him; He treasures such an aspiration.

If we read God's Word carefully, we will find that God only gives spiritual life and light to one kind of people. Who are these people? They are the ones who have an aspiration to be used by God. The same is true in the case of spiritual power. No spiritual power is outward. All spiritual power comes as a result of man's aspiration for God and his consecration to God. Genuine power is based on man's heart toward God and his love for God. In the Old Testament Samson was very powerful. His enemy, the Philistines, did not know the source of his power; through Delilah they found out that his strength was with his hair. Once his hair was cut, he lost his power (Judg. 16:15-17). What was his hair? It was the hair of a Nazarite. A Nazarite is one who is fully consecrated to God. All genuine spiritual power comes from one's consecration to God. If a person is not thorough with his consecration, he is still crippled and powerless. But if a person has a thorough consecration before the Lord, he will become powerful. No matter how seeking we have been, we must always remember that power comes

from consecration.

Suppose God puts His hand on a sister, and she struggles with the Lord for a long time without yielding to Him. Although she is willing to pray with others, her condition is not healthy because she has not satisfied God's demand. No matter how much she tries to help others, she cannot have a breakthrough. One day when God's love constrains her, she decides tearfully to yield to God. Once she answers God's demand, the help she renders to others will begin to touch others. This is why we say that power comes from consecration. The more consecration we have, the more power God will give to us.

Some may ask: "Why is it that others can have the light, but I do not have the light?" According to the story of Samson, whenever his hair was shaved, his power was gone, and he lost his eyes (Judg. 16:20-21). We do not have the light and we are blind because we do not have a thorough consecration. The Lord said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye....But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:21-23). The degree to which our heart is turned to the Lord determines the degree to which our spiritual eyes are opened within. God's children do not have light because they do not have a heart for God. They do not have power because their consecration is too little. When our heart is not turned to God sufficiently, when our consecration is inadequate, and when we do not answer God's demand completely, God cannot get through in us. If our consecration is thorough, it will bring in spiritual riches and heavenly blessings. I believe that when all the brothers and sisters are for the Lord and are thoroughly consecrated, the gospel will be preached everywhere and heavenly blessings will pour down everywhere.

Brothers and sisters, there is no other way to genuine power, light, and heavenly riches except through answering God's demand. The amount of consecration we have to God determines the amount of power we have from God. May we not hinder Him. In order for God to have a way, our heart must be turned toward Him; we must answer His demand and allow Him to flow through us. Otherwise, we will only hinder our God. God desires that we turn our heart to

Him and answer His demand. In His work God needs man. If we do not answer His demand, He will have to find someone else to answer Him and carry out His will. May God strengthen our aspiration toward Him, and may His will be carried out through us.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## LEARNING BY WORKING

### •Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:19-23

Matt. 25:19-23 “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents; behold, I have gained another five talents. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master. And he who had received the two talents also came and said, Master, you delivered to me two talents; behold, I have gained another two talents. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.”

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We must understand that in the spiritual realm, "time" works for "eternity." Our service in time is to prepare us for eternity. God has put us in time in order to train us and make us useful for eternity. Time is like a school; it is a place where we receive spiritual training and education. Our spiritual training and education in time will make us useful to God in eternity. This is why we say that our service in time is a preparation for our service in eternity.

According to Matthew 25, when the Lord comes back, He will say to the faithful slaves, "You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things" (v. 21). If we learn our lesson well, the Lord will entrust us with greater works when He comes back. Today is the time for us to learn; our proper service does not begin until the Lord comes back. Some brothers and sisters may think that the time for proper service is in the kingdom and not in eternity. However, Revelation 22 tells us that we will serve God in eternity (v. 3). God places us

among His children today in order for us to serve together with all of them. I say again: Our service in time today is a preparation for our service in eternity.

On the day that we were saved, the Lord put His life within us. Thereafter, He has been training us step-by-step by means of specific instances, so that we would learn to cooperate with God and be mingled with Him. God wants to mingle His nature into man and make man useful in His hand. The measure of God in us is the measure of usefulness we have before Him. When the measure of God increases, our usefulness also increases. His measure does not increase merely through studying the Bible and prayer; He mingles Himself into us through the things we do. All spiritual usefulness comes from God's life being mingled into us. In fact, our usefulness before God is nothing other than the result of the mingling of His nature within us; that which is mingled into us becomes our spiritual usefulness. When God mingles Himself into us, the expression of such a life becomes our usefulness.

Hence, we must see that God's only goal in time is to dispense His element into us day by day. We have too much of our self-element within us, and God cannot shine through us. But as time goes by, God shines forth a little more. After a while, we will see more of God shining forth. At the end of many years, we will see God shining almost fully out of us. God is using time to mingle Himself into us. This mingling determines our usefulness. Time is the period during which we learn the lesson; it is not the period for our proper service yet. Today is the time of learning and internship. God has placed many souls before us for our learning. He has placed many brothers and sisters before us for our learning. We are continually learning before the Lord. This is why we should not have any opinion or ways of our own. Our service is not aimless, but we must learn to work together with all of God's children. The trouble is that some want to work and do not want to learn, while others want to learn and do not want to work. But we have to combine these two. We have to work by learning and learn by working.

What should we pay attention to in our spiritual learning? In the Gospels, Peter followed the Lord for three years. Was he working or was he learning during that period of time? He was learning while working. What was he learning? The one thing the Lord helped Peter to learn was to realize that God

was dispensing His nature into man. The lesson Peter had to learn was to be delivered from his own thoughts into the Lord's thought. Although the Gospels do not say it this way, the picture is there. Let us now consider the story of Peter a little.

In Matthew 16 when the Lord Jesus "began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed" (v. 21), Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" (v. 22). The Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan!...you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (v. 23). Following this He said, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (v. 24). What is the "self," and where is it hiding? From this portion of the Scripture, we see that the "self" is hidden behind man's opinion. Some may say that Peter was good and that he loved the Lord, but the Lord said that he was Satan and that he was setting his mind on the things of men. The Lord showed us in this verse that the self is hidden behind man's opinion; Satan always expresses himself through man's self. In order to deal with Satan, one must deny the self. The Lord was dealing with Peter and showing him that in serving the Lord, one must be delivered out of man's thoughts into God's thoughts. God's thought was for the Lord Jesus to die in Jerusalem. Peter's way of loving the Lord was just to mind the things of men.

Brothers and sisters, do not think that as long as we love the Lord a little and serve Him a little, everything is fine. Even our love for the Lord may sometimes be something of men. Much of our service does not count in the eyes of the Lord; some of it He even reproves. We must set our mind on the things of God and not on the things of men. This is the lesson which the Lord wants us to learn. If we can be delivered from man's thought into God's thought, we have learned something.

Matthew 17 records the Lord's transfiguration on the mount. There Peter's thought appeared again. He said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are willing, I will make three tents here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (v. 4). Who told him to make three tents? Peter's own thought crept in

again. The minute he said this, God spoke. He said, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" (v. 5). Only the Lord Jesus is God's beloved Son. God has no intention to lift Moses and Elijah to the same level to which He had lifted His beloved Son. He said, "Hear Him!" This means do not hear the law, which is related to Moses, nor the prophets, which are related to Elijah, but from now on, hear Him!

Did Peter ever say anything right in the Gospels? Yes, he did. Once he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord responded by saying, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:16-17). Shortly after, in verse 22, Peter said, "God be merciful to You." This shows that Peter could never say anything right by himself. He spoke a right word earlier, but that word was of God. We must realize that all human opinions and views are useless in the spiritual realm.

In Matthew 26, Peter went through another dealing. On the night the Lord was betrayed, He said, "You will all be stumbled because of Me this night, for it is written, `I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (v. 31). But Peter said, "If all will be stumbled because of You, I will never be stumbled" (v. 33). This was Peter's self again. In his own eyes, he felt that he was very strong and different from everyone else. But he could not withstand even one question from a maid; he failed immediately. God exposed Peter's self through the circumstances, and He dealt with it.

When we read Acts 1, we see a different Peter than the one in the Gospels. One could say that he was delivered from the self by then. He understood the Scriptures, he understood prophecy, and he had his mind set on the things of God. Although he failed again later, he had almost learned his lesson.

Brothers and sisters, if you want to serve the Lord, you have to learn to be delivered from your own thoughts. Otherwise, you will not be of much use in God's hand. All service is a matter of God coming into you and coming out of you. When God comes into you and comes out of you, that is service. If you are not a person who allows God to come in and then out of you, others will only touch your mind; they will not touch God. If we are so set in our own opinions, others will not touch God. If we want others to touch God, we have to learn to be

delivered from our own opinions. Some brothers and sisters have to learn to be delivered from their own opinions even in their prayers. If we are delivered from our own thoughts into God's thoughts, we will learn a genuine lesson and we will have genuine service. We will be able not only to walk with the Lord in time and reign with Him in the kingdom but also even to render Him better service in eternity. May the Lord be merciful to us.

# MESSAGE NINE

## SERVING GOD IN THE SPIRIT

## •Outline

### •One—Three

## •Scripture Reading: John 4:23-24; Rom. 1:9, 8:6

John 4:23-24 "But an hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness."

Rom. 1:9 "For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers,"

8:6 "or the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace."

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### ONE

Among God's children, there are many who have a strong desire to serve the Lord yet who regretfully have not found the proper way to serve Him. They are not off in doctrine, and they are not wrong in their conduct. They are wrong in the way they serve the Lord. What does this mean? What is the problem? The question that faces us is whether our service issues from our mind or from our inner being. Every service among God's children should issue from their inner feeling. (This inner feeling does not refer to the feelings of the soul but the feelings of the spirit.) Be it prayer, studying the Bible, preaching, or any spiritual pursuit, everything has to issue from one's inner feeling. Even our knowledge of ourselves must be based on our inner feeling. If our life and work issue from our mind, we are at a dead end as far as our spiritual progress is concerned. We may

use our mind in ordinary affairs, but in our service to God, we must use our spirit. In spiritual matters, the first thing we have to do is act according to the feeling of our spirit; the function of our mind comes later.

## TWO

We cannot serve God according to our mind. We must serve Him according to our inner feeling. This is not just a matter of doing the right thing but of having the right source. Preaching, prayer, and Bible study are all right things. But if we preach, pray, and study according to our mind, we are doing the right thing with the wrong source. Our way is the wrong way. Brothers and sisters, we should follow our inner feeling to pray. We should follow our inner feeling to read the Bible. We should follow our inner feeling to preach the gospel and teach the truth. The most precious thing among God's children is the ability to live and work according to our inner feeling. We may have shortcomings, but as long as the source is right and the way is right, eventually we will be trimmed and become acceptable to God. Therefore, we first have to be concerned with the source of the things, not the things themselves. It is not a question of what we do, but by what source we do them. All our service to God should originate from the spirit.

It is all right for us to engage in academic study with our mind. But in order to contact God and touch Him, the mind is the wrong organ to use. We contact God with our spirit. For example, if we touch an electrical current with a piece of wood, no electricity will come through. But if we touch it with a piece of wire, immediately there will be an electrical current. If our prayer, Bible reading, gospel preaching, and truth teaching is the same as touching an electrical current with a wooden stick, nothing will happen because we are using the wrong means. In every spiritual matter, we have to look to God and sense the feeling He puts within us in our spirit. We should be concerned only with this. If our head starts spinning and our judgment springs from our mind whenever we encounter a spiritual problem, we have no spiritual value before God. Brothers and sisters, there are two ways. One is the way of the mind, and the other is the way of the inner feeling. The way of the mind will never make others touch God.

Only the way of the inner feeling will make others touch God. When we stand up among the brothers and sisters to say something, we must be careful not to initiate anything from our mind. Before we stand up, we should ask God to cleanse all of our defilement with His Son's blood and ask for His anointing. We should say whatever our inner feeling directs us to say. Even if the words are faltering and perhaps incoherent, others will still receive the benefit. But if our speaking comes only from our mind, nothing will avail even when it follows a very logical sequence.

Brothers and sisters, spiritual things are carried out according to the inner feeling. When you kneel down by your bed to pray according to the utterance that is in your inner being, the more you pray the more you will touch God. While you are praying in this way, your mind may suddenly turn to a different direction, and you will not be able to go on with your prayer anymore; the utterance will stop. When you pray in spirit and in truth, it is like touching an electrical current with a wire; electricity will pass through it. But when you pray with your mind, it will be like touching an electrical current with a piece of wood; nothing will happen. A spiritual man is one who touches spiritual things with his spirit and who exercises his spirit to touch God. In the eyes of God, a fallen man is one who walks, speaks, and acts according to what he thinks.

Whenever something happens, the first thing you should do is to find out where you are. Are you in your mind, or are you living by the feeling in your spirit? You may ponder in your mind that you will move if things turn out to your advantage and stop if things do not turn out to your advantage. In the eyes of man, you may be very smart. However, the question is not whether you should do this but what is your source. If you find your mind spinning around like an electric fan or running madly like an unbridled horse, you can be sure that you are wrong. You must first ask God to bridle your thoughts, and then you must listen to what your spirit has to say. If your spirit feels that something is right, it does not matter whether you are unable to explain what has happened. But if your spirit feels that something is wrong, it will not work even if you can convince yourself that it is right.

Suppose two brothers who are having an argument go to another brother

for arbitration. If the arbitrating brother lives in his mind, he will only concentrate on the arguments put forward by the two, and it will be easy for him to complicate the matter with his own emotions, likes, and dislikes. After listening to the case, he may say that one is right and the other is wrong; however, the judgment has been based on reasoning. Brothers and sisters, a Christian who lives according to his mind always lives in the realm of reasoning even though the reasoning he has may not even be correct. He argues because of his reasoning, and he make judgments according to his reasoning. As a consequence, those who reason will reason more, and those who disagree will disagree more. Two brothers argue because they have fallen into their reasoning. If another brother prays for God to turn him from his mind to his spirit and sense his spirit, he will help the other two and turn them from their reasoning. We must realize that our thoughts bring in our reasoning, and our reasoning easily convinces our emotion and flesh. Once a man touches his mind, he touches his emotion, and once he touches his emotion, his flesh is provoked. If we do this, we will not help our brothers; on the contrary, we will damage them. We must learn the proper lesson. May the Lord be merciful to us and save us into our spirit, so that we can sense what to do or say with our spirit. Only then will we be able to help others, and only then will we solve the problems of others.

## THREE

Finally, I will mention two things. First, if we desire to learn to live before God in this way, we have to learn the dealing of the cross. The cross deals with our natural life, our natural thoughts, and our natural emotions. If our natural thoughts and emotions are not dealt with, it will be difficult for us to live in the spirit. When something happens, and we confront it with our mind or emotion, we usually say, "How can this be!" This shows that we are living by our reasons. If we live by our reasons, surely we are living in our mind. Those who live in their mind invariably live according to the impulse of their emotions. If we live in the spirit, we will not reason according to opinions or speak according to emotions. Those who are under the control of God's Spirit have experienced the dealing of the cross.

The second point is the cleansing of the blood. In order to learn to live according to the sense in the spirit you must trust in the cleansing of the blood all the time. The more you are cleansed by the blood, the more you will shine. If some defilement in you has not yet been dealt with by the blood, you will be dull and dark. You must allow the blood to cleanse you. Only then will you have light.

These two things—the dealing of the cross and the cleansing of the blood—are necessary lessons for those who aspire to serve the Lord. A Christian does not live in the spirit primarily because his mind and emotion have not yet been dealt with and because his defilement has not been cleansed by the blood. As a result, he becomes a foolish Christian, one who never allows God to turn him to his spiritual senses. We must pay attention to the dealing of the cross and the cleansing of the blood. Then we will realize how much we have lived in the mind and how much we have ignored the senses in our spirit.

Some may say, "I do not have any inner feeling." Let me say this: If a person does not have any inner feeling, he is probably not yet regenerated. If he is regenerated, God's Spirit has surely enlivened his spirit, and he will surely have inner feelings. Even though he may be regenerated, there may be some kind of sickness within him; a sick man sometimes loses his feelings. When this happens, he will need the dealing of the cross and the cleansing of the blood.

A person who lives in the spirit is acceptable to God. May the Lord be gracious to us. May He guide us and lead us to live according to the sense in our spirit so that we can serve Him in the spirit.

# MESSAGE TEN

## GOD'S WILL AND MAN'S WISH

## •Outline

- **•The Active Wishing In The Will**
- **•The Mind Of Christ**
- **•Abiding In Christ And His Word Abiding In Us**
- **•The Believers' Experience**
- **•The Forbidding Of The Holy Spirit**

## •Scripture Reading: John 15:7

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.”

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God's children need to know God's will, and they should know His will. It is not right for us to be ignorant of His will. Our Lord said, "He who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness" (John 8:12). This means that those who follow the Lord will have light; they will see and they will know. In other words, if a man does not have light and if he does not see anything or know anything, it means that he is not following the Lord. We must be very careful before the Lord. Whenever we do not see, it means that there is a problem with our following the Lord.

However, the problem with some people is not that they do not want to do God's will but that they do not know God's will. The matter of knowing God's will is a big subject among God's children. Those who zealously seek after the Lord surely want to please Him and carry out His will in everything. In every move that they make, they ask whether it is God's will. This kind of desire and attitude is good and correct, but this is quite confusing to many people. On the one hand,

they want to do God's will, but on the other hand, they do not know God's will. They feel guilty about everything they do, yet they feel equally guilty if they do not do anything. It seems as if God's will is so far away that they do not know how to obey it. For this reason, we want to consider the matter of understanding God's will.

It is true that God's will is objective and that it is on the throne. We must seek after it before we can understand. We often need to fast, pray, and wait in His presence a great deal before we can understand His will. In order to know His will, we must also drop our own will and deny the activity of the flesh. These are very important, but I will not speak about them now. I would like to briefly mention another aspect, which is the fact that God's will is revealed many times through man's wishes. Let us consider how man's wishes are related to God's will.

## THE ACTIVE WISHING IN THE WILL

John 15:7 says, "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." The word "will" here in Greek means an active wishing in the will. According to this verse, when our will actively wishes something by asking, it shall be done for us. Some may ask, "What happens if this asking is not according to God's will?" They seem to be more careful than the Lord Jesus in His wording. They would rather say, "If it is according to God's will, and you ask by actively wishing, it shall be done for you." Yet our Lord said, "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." In other words, the Lord trusts some people to wish according to God's will. This is why He can say, "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."

Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10:27, "If any of the unbelievers invites you and you wish to go, eat everything that is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake." It is interesting that Paul did not mention God's will here. He only mentioned man's wish.

Do the above two passages mean that man can act any way that he pleases? Does it mean that man can do anything that he wishes? No, these words are not for everyone; they are for Christians, those who are regenerated, who have the mind of Christ, who have been dealt with by the cross, who abide in the Lord,

and in whom the Lord's word abides. Let us consider the subject under two separate points.

## THE MIND OF CHRIST

Paul said, "For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). The will of God is objective, whereas the mind of Christ is subjective. The will of God is on the throne, whereas the mind of Christ is within us. The will of God is outside of us, whereas the mind of Christ is inside us, continually revealing His will to us. Once we are regenerated, God's life is clearly planted into us, and we have the mind of Christ. The minute we receive life, we receive the mind of Christ as well, which gives us new thoughts, new inclinations, and new wishes.

## ABIDING IN CHRIST AND HIS WORD ABIDING IN US

The Lord Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). As a result of abiding in the Lord and His word abiding in us, whatever we will, that is, whatever we actively wish and whatever our will reaches for, we need only ask for, and it shall be done for us. The important thing, however, is the expression "if you abide in Me and My words abide in you." Only this kind of people have reliable wills, and only they will not have a problem with God's will.

If a man has life, if he abides in the Lord, and if His word abides in him, he will know what God wants and also what God does not want. In other words, he will not only be regenerated, but also be in constant fellowship with the Lord; he will only want what God wants. Here we immediately see the cross. There are those who have passed through the cross, who have been dealt with by the Lord; they abide in the Lord, and the Lord's word abides in them. The Lord's word is living in them. To these ones the Lord says, "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." Therefore, the problem does not lie in God's will but in the kind of persons we are.

We can say that some Christians have reached the stage where God can trust them. They abide in the Lord and the Lord's words abide in them to the extent that the Lord trusts their will. He trusts that the wishes emanating from their

will are according to God's will. This is why the Lord said, "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."

## THE BELIEVERS' EXPERIENCE

Some may say, "How can God's will be that simple?" Brothers and sisters, I am not saying that God's will can be understood without pursuing it. I am saying that God's will is in us also; it is in us together with His life. This word is not for everyone but for those who are regenerated, who have the mind of Christ, and who know in a serious way the meaning of abiding in the Lord and having the Lord's word abide in them. Their will is the will of God. If they wish to have something, God will want it too. If they want something which is contrary to what God wants, they will feel like a deflated tire within. There will be no response within, and they will not be able to pray at all. If it is a wish that they cannot justify in themselves, can it be something that God wants? One day, when all of our self-motives are removed, our will will be one with God's will. When we will, God will will, and when we do not will, God will not will.

Romans 14:23 says, "All that is not out of faith is sin." This is the principle of the Christian life. The faith mentioned here is different from the faith mentioned in other places in the Bible. In other places, faith refers to one's faith in God. Here faith refers to one's faith in himself in doing the right thing. "All that is not out of faith is sin." This means if you have condemned yourself already, how can you expect God to justify you when He is so much greater than you? If our heart condemns us, we must be wrong. If what we do is right, God will give us the faith to believe that it is right. If what we do is wrong, we will not have this faith. Even after we have done it, we will still not be able to say with certainty that we have done the right thing, and we will feel empty within. When this happens, we will be certain that we are wrong. Since our heart has condemned us already, and since God is greater than our heart, surely He will condemn us also.

Paul said that if anyone invites us to a meal, we can go if we wish to go. This word is not for irresponsible Christians. Needless to say, it is not for unregenerated ones. But even a regenerated person who has never done God's will and has never lived for God is not qualified to take this word. One must

abide in the Lord, and the Lord's word must abide in him before he can go as he wishes. If he should not go to a certain place, his inner being will not be able to muster enough strength to wish to go. If he tries to go anyway, something within will weaken him, advise him, and tell him that he cannot go. He is controlled by the law of life, and his will becomes a reflection of God's will. His wish becomes God's wish. We often want to do something by ourselves, and there is often the opportunity to do it by ourselves. But strangely, the minute we try to do it according to our own will, our inner being does not respond. The minute we do it, we feel squelched. The more we go on, the unhappier and weaker we become. In the end, we can only give it up because something within us is stronger than our own will.

God often directs us according to the willingness in our heart. For example, a person may invite us to a certain place, and we may desire to go. But strangely, even though we want to go, we cannot muster enough strength to say that we want to go. Our inner being is cold and unresponsive. Outwardly we want to go, but inwardly everything is cold. We cannot go, and if we do, every step we take brings more complaints and protests from within; something within will not let us go. This is God's will manifested through our will. But this word does not apply to everyone; it only applies to those who have God's life, who abide in the Lord, and in whom the Lord's word abides.

Consider the case of Paul casting out the spirit when he was in Philippi. A slave girl was possessed by a spirit, and following after Paul, she cried, "These men are slaves of the Most High God." Paul did not do anything for a few days. Should not Paul have cast out the spirit? He should have cast out demons the minute he saw them, yet Paul did not! His mouth could not move because his inner being had not moved. When his inner being was not moved, it meant that God was not moved. One day Paul became disturbed, and he said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Immediately the spirit came out of her (Acts 16:16-18). For Paul to be disturbed meant that God was disturbed. He spoke only when his inner being moved. Once he spoke, the spirit was cast out. God's word was in him; therefore, what he spoke was God's will.

The experiences of many believers testify to this. Sometimes someone

suggests that we go and visit a brother, but nothing within us moves. If we go, we find it very awkward. But when our inner being moves and we have the word, a visit to our brother will bring in very good fellowship. We must wait until our inner being moves before we move in any outward way. If our inner being does not move, we should not move in any outward way.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he saw a whole city full of idols, and "his spirit was provoked within him" (17:16). Some may think that it is not a good thing to be "provoked." But Paul's provocation was a good thing. He was provoked by what he saw, and he went to preach at the Areopagus. The words he preached became an important part of the holy Scripture. On that occasion in Athens, Paul gave a good testimony. It was something that came from his heart, and he was constrained to speak it.

Another example can be seen in Paul's determination to pass Ephesus (20:16). He made the decision to do this. The Bible does not say that God decided, but Paul decided. Some Christians often say, "God's will has led me here. It is God's will that I should do this." They seem to be more spiritual than Paul. We do not see Paul speaking in such spiritual terms. Yet his decision fully corresponded with God's will because he was a person who knew the cross and feared God.

## THE FORBIDDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some may ask, "Wasn't there the danger of Paul making a mistake when he made his decision that way?" There is not a simple answer to this. In Acts, after Paul set out from Antioch, there was no clear record of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet the Bible clearly records the forbidding of the Holy Spirit. Other than the vision at night (16:9), we see very little leading of the Holy Spirit in Paul on the positive side. We mainly see the forbidding of the Holy Spirit on the negative side.

If we abide in the Lord and His word abides in us, whatever decision we make will be God's will. But there is still the possibility of mistakes. If we make a mistake, the Holy Spirit will forbid us and not let us go. Paul's experience tells us this.

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Brothers and sisters, we do not have to be passive. Many Christians want to do God's will, yet they are too passive. God's will does not make a person passive. A man is passive because he does not understand God's will. If we are genuinely dealt with by the cross and are abiding in the Lord with His word abiding in us, God's will will become manifest in us, and we can act according to such a will within. If we are wrong, the Holy Spirit will stop us. He will make us indecisive; we will feel like a deflated tire, and we will sense that something is wrong, that it is meaningless to do such a thing, and that we cannot do it anymore. May the Lord deliver us from all misunderstanding and foolishness and save us from passivity. May He grant us an active attitude, and may He make us those who follow Him all the way.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## A DEEPER JOY

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Isa. 49:4-5; Matt. 11:25-30

Isa. 49:4-5 "But I said, I have labored in vain; / I have used up my strength for nothing and vanity; / Yet surely the justice due to me is with Jehovah, / And my recompense with my God. And now says Jehovah, / Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, / To bring Jacob back to Him, / So that Israel would be gathered to Him; / And I will be glorified in the sight of Jehovah, / And My God will be My strength."

Matt. 11:25-30 "At that time Jesus answered and said, I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

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### ONE

Isaiah is one of the prophets who prophesied a great deal concerning Christ. In Isaiah 49:5 we see the work of the Lord on earth. Verse 4 tells us whether the Lord's work on earth was successful. What was God's purpose in sending the Lord Jesus to the earth? It was for the purpose of turning the house of Jacob back

to God, to gather them to Him. But what was the result? Did he succeed? According to man's view, our Lord failed completely. The house of Jacob did not turn to Him, and the Israelites rejected Him, denied Him, and crucified Him on the cross. Even one of His disciples betrayed Him. This is why verse 4 says, "But I said, I have labored in vain;/I have used up my strength for nothing and vanity."

Brothers and sisters, in these circumstances—being despised by men on earth, with no result in the work, and seemingly having accomplished nothing for God's will—we surely would have wept in sorrow. Even if we had not wept, we surely would have been sad, and even if we had not been sad, at the very least, we would have become passive. But our Lord was different. After He said, "I have labored in vain;/I have used up my strength for nothing and vanity," He said, "Yet surely the justice due to me is with Jehovah,/And my recompense with my God." Although He did not gain what He hoped for and missed what He yearned for, His justice was with Jehovah. Although He had labored much and there did not seem to be any result in the work, His justice was with Jehovah. In other words, whether or not He was treated justly was something up to Jehovah. "My recompense [is] with my God." Although He could not obtain anything from the house of Jacob or from the Israelites, He would receive His reward from the Lord. Therefore, He was satisfied; He did not complain, weep, or grieve. This is the Lord's attitude.

Brothers and sisters, this shows us one thing—we cannot be directly related to our work; we can only be directly related to God. We cannot be directly connected to affairs or people; we can only be directly connected to God. Whenever we are directly related to work, affairs, and people, we will feel hurt, weep, and suffer as soon as we encounter difficulties and adversities. But if we are directly related to God, we will rejoice when we are rejected. Even when difficulties arise and everything seems to have failed, we will be able to rejoice. If we are directly related to God, no success or failure will touch us. We will only care for one thing—whether or not the justice due to us is with the Lord and whether our recompense is with Him. If our justice is with the Lord, our recompense will be with Him also.

## TWO

Matthew 11 speaks of the Lord's experience and attitude on earth; it matches the record of Isaiah 49. The entire chapter is about heartbreaking matters. First, John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask the Lord Jesus: "Are You the Coming One, or should we expect another?" (v. 3). This meant: "Are You the Messiah? Are You the Christ?" The forerunner of Jesus was now in doubt as to whether He was the Coming One! According to man, this was a very disappointing response.

John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and men said that he had a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking; He came among men, communicated with men, and desired to save men. No one should have had anything to say about Him, yet they said that He was a gluttonous man and a drunkard. One group criticized people both for eating and for not eating; they always had something to say one way or the other. Another group had a lust for talking; they always found things to criticize no matter what our Lord did. They could always find something to say about Him. The Lord's forerunner was reviled as being possessed by demons, and the Lord Jesus was criticized as being a gluttonous man and a drunkard. He performed many miracles in Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. But in the end, the people of Capernaum would not receive Him, and the men of Chorazin and Bethsaida rejected Him. Everything in Matthew 11 shows us the Lord as One who was distrusted, reviled, and rejected.

Brothers and sisters, what would you do if you encountered such a series of difficulties in your life, your work, or among your acquaintances? You would inevitably feel heartbroken and discouraged; you would feel that everything was over. But our Lord was different. The Bible speaks of His attitude: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight" (vv. 25-26). "At that time" means at that very moment. Under these circumstances and at the moment that He was doubted, reviled, and rejected, our Lord was able to say, "I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth." He had no bitterness, hatred, indignation, or wrath in His heart, and He could say, "I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth." Brothers and sisters, when you are being doubted,

reviled, and rejected without a cause, can you extol the Lord? The time to extol Him is not when we gain something. The time to extol Him is not when our work is prosperous and we are welcomed and admired by many. We should extol Him when we are being doubted, reviled, and rejected for no reason. Brothers and sisters, can you extol Him at such times?

Our Lord extolled God here. What did He say? He said, "I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." Here is the greatest comfort: "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." Since it was well-pleasing in the Father's sight, what more need be said? For the Lord Jesus, it was well-pleasing in the Father's sight for John to doubt Him. It was well-pleasing in the Father's sight for others to criticize Him as a gluttonous man and a drunkard. It was also well-pleasing in the Father's sight for the men of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin to reject Him. He was satisfied with whatever was well-pleasing in the Father's sight. Therefore, He could say, "I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth." Many times, we cannot say, "Father." It seems as if we no longer believe that our God is our Father. Yet our Lord could say, "Father." He still felt that the Father was very near to Him. We often cannot say, "Lord of heaven and of earth." It seems as if we no longer believe that there is a Lord in heaven and on earth. Yet our Lord was satisfied with whatever was well-pleasing in the Father's sight. Therefore, He could say, "Father, Lord of heaven and of earth." He saw that everything was according to the Father's good pleasure. Therefore, He could say, "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." Brothers and sisters, can you say, "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight"? Are you sorrowful, sad, and heartbroken just because you are misunderstood and facing difficulties? Can you utter a word of thanksgiving as a result of satisfaction in God's good pleasure? Can you say to God, "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight"? Brothers and sisters, can you say this?

## THREE

Following this, our Lord said something as a kind of explanation. It

explained why He could say what He said. He said, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father" (v. 27a). As long as the Father knew, that was enough. It did not matter that the men of Chorazin knew not. It did not matter that the men of Bethsaida or Capernaum knew not. It did not matter that the whole house of Jacob and all the Israelites, including all those who received help from Him, knew not. It even did not matter whether John misunderstood Him. There was only one thing which was important: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father." As long as the Father knew, that was enough. Brothers and sisters, God knows. Is that enough for you? Or do you need John to know or the whole house of Jacob and all the Israelites to know you? Do you need the men of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin to know you? Brothers and sisters, is it enough for God to know you? It is true that you cannot be without your brothers and sisters, but when no one knows you, you should be satisfied with living before God and being known by the Father only.

The Lord Jesus could say, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father." Brothers and sisters, have all things been delivered to you by the Father? Or have all things been delivered to you by men? Can you say, "Father, everything I have is from You"? Can you say, "Father, I only want what is from You; I ask for nothing from men"? If you can say this, you can be at rest, and you can give praise.

The Lord said, "No one fully knows the Son except the Father." He also said, "Neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (v. 27b). Only those who are willing to be known by God alone will know God, and only those who know God can lead others to the knowledge of God. Those who do not know the Father cannot lead others to the knowledge of the Father. Brothers and sisters, have you ever tried to help others and lead others to the knowledge of the Father? Why does your word not carry weight or move others? It is because what you have is not from the Father only. You feel that what you have from the Father is not enough; you are not content with what the Father has delivered to you. You still hope to gain something from men. If you are such a person, you cannot say that you are known by no one

except the Father. Brothers and sisters, is it enough that you are known by God alone? If it is truly enough, then everything is all right. If you are satisfied with being known by God alone, you will know God. Only those who are known by God will know God, and only those who know God can lead others to the knowledge of God.

Brothers and sisters, if we are far from God, we cannot know Him. We do not know God because we care too much for human affection and are too weighed down by many things. We cannot lead others to the knowledge of God because we have received too much comfort and glory from men. If our heart is filled with all kinds of things apart from God, we will not know God. We have to remember the Lord's word, which says, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Brothers and sisters, if we drop all the things that are in our heart, we will know Him, and we will be able to lead others to the knowledge of Him; our heart will be pure, and those who have a pure heart will see God (Matt. 5:8).

## FOUR

After the Lord said this, He gave us a very comforting word: "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (11:28-30). Our Lord showed us His own experience. He left us with a pattern and showed us how He found rest so that we can find rest also.

"Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Brothers and sisters, do you feel a heavy burden on you? Are you struggling day and night? Do you feel unhappy in your heart? The Lord is speaking to you, "Come. Come to Me, and I will give you rest." Do you have many worries? Do you have many burdens which you cannot bear? Are you grieving over your many failures? The Lord says to come to Him, and He will give us rest.

How does the Lord give us rest? He places Himself in front of us so that we can see His pattern. He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." What is being meek?

A brother once illustrated meekness this way: "Meekness is like the flax bumper on the side of the steamer boats. When a steamer comes close to the pier, if there is nothing between the hard boards of the boat and the hard poles of the pier, one of the two will break. But if flax bumpers are placed in between them, both will hit the bumpers only, and nothing will break." Brothers and sisters, this is meekness. If both sides are hard, neither side should touch the other. But if something soft is put between them, both sides will be preserved. Others may be hard, but if you are soft, you can withstand any bumping; they can bump as much as they like. The Lord said that He is meek. This means that He can withstand any bumping. Brothers and sisters, are you meek? You often want to have something, and you will not give up until you have it. You insist on having what you want, and no power can change you. Even God cannot change you. This is not being meek.

What is being meek? Being meek is being changeable; it means taking what God wants you to take. It means being satisfied when you have something and being equally satisfied when you do not have something. When you have it, you can sing hallelujah and praise the Lord. When you do not have it, you can also sing hallelujah and praise the Lord. Being meek is being pliable enough to allow God to change your decision according to His will. Brothers and sisters, can God's will change your will? Can you change your decision, your desire, your hope, and your pursuit when God disapproves of them? You confess that God loves you, but when He does not give you what you want, will you be satisfied? Can you sing hallelujah? Brothers and sisters, a meek heart is an obedient heart. Being meek is not insisting on one's own will, not persisting with one's own proposals, and not demanding what one wants. A meek person changes when God changes and turns when God turns. Whatever God wants to do, he agrees. Whoever is like this will find rest.

Brothers and sisters, rest is precious. Many Christians live on earth without any rest; they are frequently dissatisfied and always complaining. This is their condition because they always have unfulfilled demands and desires. The Lord showed us, however, that the condition for rest is meekness. Sometimes God's way is in conflict with our way. If we are willing to turn, we will say, "God, I yield."

If we do not yield, we are not meek. Brothers and sisters, we must be meek. If our heart is not meek, we cannot find rest. We must remember that meekness is the first condition for rest.

The Lord Jesus was not only meek but also lowly in heart. We often have wild thoughts and fleshly desires. We have vain hopes and fruitless schemes. We often compare ourselves to other brothers and sisters, and we are not happy when they are ahead of us; we want to be taller and greater than they are. Our thoughts are filled with pride and boasting. We are not lowly in heart, and we are not like the Lord Jesus. Our Lord is meek and lowly in heart. His eyes are not haughty, and He never hopes to gain anything for Himself. He is willing to accept everything from God. He can say that it is enough, and He is satisfied. This is being meek and lowly in heart. Brothers and sisters, are you satisfied with what God has given you? Or do you constantly covet more and greater things? Is God's provision enough for you? Or do you insist on your way concerning certain things and affairs? Brothers and sisters, God is after those who are lowly in heart. Many people have great ambitions and aspirations, but these things do not count in God's eyes, and God cannot use such ones. They are not lowly in heart, and they do not have rest. They do not have any rest because they are not satisfied with what God has given them.

Brothers and sisters, can your decisions be changed? Can you change your mind and drop your proposals and your hope for God's sake? If you are ambitious and aspiring and if you are always after this thing and that thing, you are not meek and lowly in heart. A meek person accepts whatever God gives him. He can say hallelujah and praise the Lord for whatever He gives him. Our Lord Jesus is meek; He is pliable before God. Our Lord Jesus is also lowly in heart; He does not demand anything for Himself. Only those who are meek can be led by God, and only those who are lowly in heart can satisfy God's desire.

The Lord said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me...and you will find rest for your souls." The Lord's own experience shows us that we have to take His yoke and learn from Him in order to find rest. Our biggest problem is that we often despise God's will. As a result, we find no rest for our soul and are not joyful. There are two kinds of joy in the Bible. One is the joy of believing in

God's grace. The other is the joy of obeying God's will. We have believed in God's grace, but are we willing to obey His will? Brothers and sisters, is there any unhappiness in our heart? Is there any dissatisfaction in us? Are we murmuring against something which is contrary to our wish? If any of these things are in us, it means that we have not submitted to God's will. All those who have some experience can testify that nothing is more joyful than consecration, and nothing brings more happiness than placing oneself in the Lord's hand and under His direction. If we are not joyful and satisfied in heart, the only possible reason for this is that we have not taken the Lord's yoke and learned from Him. This kind of joy is a deeper joy, in which everything we have is delivered to us by the Father, and we can say, "Yes, Father, whatever You decide is the best." This is what we see from our Lord's experience.

## FIVE

Brothers and sisters, if you do not have rest or joy, it is because there is something within you that you will not let go. It may not be certain particular things, but there is always something. Some people are very depressed because there are troubles going on within them. Brothers and sisters, is there any trouble going on within you? Is there anything that you dare not ask the Lord about? Is there anything that you dare not think about? Many Christians dare not look into themselves for fear that they will find problems. Many Christians try to run away when God touches them; they dare not sit still and think for a few minutes. They struggle and keep themselves occupied; they cannot find rest and do not have any joy. Brothers and sisters, if you are truly taking the Lord's yoke and learning from Him, you will be filled with peace and praise. A brother was once packing up his luggage and leaving his hometown to go to another place to preach the gospel. As he was leaving, he said, "From now on, I leave behind my kinfolk, my family, and my friends." Then he said, "I am now the happiest man on earth!" Brothers and sisters, perhaps you only know the joy of salvation, but this brother knew the joy of consecration. Indeed, our heart often may be grieving, but our mouth is filled with praise. What a pity that the praise of many Christians is blocked by many things! This does not necessarily mean that there is sin. It

means that they have too many things apart from God. If we allow the Lord to remove these things, our heart will find rest, and we will be filled with joy.

Many brothers and sisters have too deep of a relationship with man. Their relationship with man is deeper than their relationship with God. One day, when they lose this human love and care, they lose their rest and joy. Brothers and sisters, if you encountered unending misunderstanding, reviling, and rejection like the Lord, how would you feel? What would you say? Some would begin to reason and argue with the Lord, and they would lose their rest and joy. But if they would come before the Lord and say, "Lord, I say yes and amen to all the things that you have allowed to come upon me," they would immediately be filled with heavenly rest and joy.

A brother was walking along a wilderness path one night under the moonlight, and God said to him pointedly, "What would you do if I take away your beloved one?" He answered, "Lord, I cannot accept this." The Lord said, "You are weak, and you cannot accept it. But if I make you able to accept it, what will you say?" He said, "Lord, I thank You and praise You because I cannot make it, but You can make it." He allowed God to do His work and was willing to submit to His will. He wept and consecrated himself to God. The strange thing was that once he submitted, he was immediately filled with heavenly joy and peace. Brothers and sisters, have you ever tasted the heavenly joy and peace? The Lord is waiting to give you the heavenly joy and peace. The question is whether or not you are willing to take His yoke and learn from Him. You have not received the Lord's blessing and His blessing still has not flowed to others through you because you are still unhappy with His demands. The Lord said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Brothers and sisters, do you believe in this word? Those who do not know God will say that God is harsh, that He reaps where He has not sowed and gathers where He has not scattered. But those who know God will say that His yoke is easy and His burden light.

But the strange thing is that many of God's children are afraid of hearing about His will. They can sing hallelujah when they hear about God's love, wisdom, and power. But they are afraid to hear about God's will. What happened with our Lord? He did not call God's will His will; He called it "well-pleasing in

Your sight." To the Lord, all of God's will is well-pleasing. Brothers and sisters, we have to believe in God's love. We have to believe that He loves us. This will put our heart at ease no matter what we encounter. Many times we ask for fish, and it seems that God has given us serpents. We ask for bread, and it seems that God has given us stones. We ask why God has given us a serpent when we asked for fish, and why He has given us a stone when we asked for bread. But, many times, when we think that we are asking for fish, we are actually asking for a serpent. What God gives us may look like a serpent, but it is actually fish. Many times when we think we are asking for bread we are actually asking for a stone. What God gives us may look like a stone but it is actually bread. We often think that God has not answered our prayer. We think that God does not love us. Actually, He is giving us the best thing. Our God is never wrong. The trouble is that many people do not believe in God's love. We need to remember that God causes heartbreaking things and difficulties to come upon us because He wants to perfect us and give the best things to us, not because He does not love us. If we believe that everything is well-pleasing in God's sight, we will sing with tears in our eyes.

We should not only believe in God's love but also in His wisdom. He loves us, and He knows everything. His love never changes, and His wisdom never errs. Nothing will come upon us that is not profitable for us. God's power will bring us through everything we need to go through, and this power will enable us to bear the burdens that come upon us. Therefore, we can say before the Lord, "Thank the Lord. Praise Him because His will is never wrong." Praising God for His grace is initial praise; praising Him for His will is mature praise. Initial praise is praising Him for what we have; mature praise is praising Him for what we lose. Brothers and sisters, we can rest, and we can rejoice because in everything we see God's love, His wisdom, and His power.

In the book The Streams in the Desert (Oct. 24), there is this passage: "A piece of iron that is worth five dollars will be worth $10 when it is cast into a horseshoe. If it is made into needles, it will be worth $350. If it is made into fine blades, it will be worth $32,000, and if it is made into springs inside watches, it will be worth $250,000." Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? What is the

difference between a piece of iron worth $10, $350, $32,000, and $250,000? It is the same material, but after many trials and much beating, it becomes stronger, more pliable, and more valuable. In order to make us more valuable, God brings us through many trials and beatings. In order to become a useful and valuable vessel before the Lord, we must not bemoan the things that God has allowed to come upon us. Instead, we should rejoice and rest. We should say to the Lord, "Father, I thank You, because everything You have allowed to come upon me is good." If we submit to the will of God, our heart will find rest, and we will be filled with joy. Our mouth will be full of praise, and our burden will no longer be a burden.

Brothers and sisters, we have seen that our Lord possessed a deeper joy because He believed that "the justice due to me is with Jehovah, and my recompense with my God." He believed that "it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." He told us clearly that we would find rest for our souls if we took His yoke and learned from Him. Brothers and sisters, if we want to partake of this deeper joy, we should believe in His word, take His yoke, and learn from Him. Thank the Lord that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## THE ARK—THE CENTER OF THE TABERNACLE

## ●Outline

- ●One—Two
- ●Three
  - ▫The Ark Crossing the Jordan
  - ▫The Ark in Shiloh
  - ▫The Ark in the Land of the Philistines
  - ▫The Ark in Bethshemesh
  - ▫The Ark in Kirjathjearim
  - ▫The Ark in the House of Obededom
  - ▫The Ark in David's Tent
  - ▫Solomon and the Ark
- ●Four

## ●Scripture Reading: Exo. 25:10-22

Exo. 25:10-22 "And they shall make an ark of acacia wood: two and a half cubits shall be its length; and one and a half cubits, its width; and one and a half cubits, its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold; inside and outside you shall overlay it; and you shall make a rim of gold upon it all around. And you shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them on its four feet; and two rings shall be on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. And you shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark to carry the Ark with them. The poles shall be in the rings of the Ark; they shall not be taken from it. And you shall put into the Ark the Testimony which I shall give you. And you shall make an expiation cover of

pure gold: two and a half cubits shall be its length, and one and a half cubits, its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work you shall make them, at the two ends of the expiation cover. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the expiation cover you shall make the cherubim on its two ends. And the cherubim shall spread out their wings above the cover, covering the expiation cover with their wings, with their faces toward one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the expiation cover. And you shall put the expiation cover upon the Ark above it, and into the Ark you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the expiation cover, from between the two cherubim which are upon the Ark of the Testimony, of everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel."

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The ark occupies a very important place in the Bible. When God ordered Moses to build the tabernacle, the ark was the first thing that was mentioned. On the day the tabernacle was erected, the altar for the burnt offering and the laver were in the outer court, and the lampstand, the table, the showbread, and the golden incense altar were in the Holy Place. But in the Holy of Holies there was only the ark (Exo. 40:17-33). God met with man upon the ark and spoke with man from the midst of the cherubim upon the mercy seat on the ark. Hence, the ark is the center of the tabernacle, and it occupies a very important position.

## ONE

Let us first consider the name of the ark. In Exodus, it is called the ark of the testimony; it does not say the ark of the covenant. The ark of the testimony means that God's testimony was among the Israelites. Wherever the ark was, God was there also. The presence of the ark proved the presence of God's law. In Numbers, the ark is given another name, "the ark of the covenant" (10:33; 14:44). This means that the ark was related to the covenant. Wherever the ark was, the covenant was there also. In 1 Samuel, we see another name, "the ark of God" (4:11, 13, 17, 19, 21-22). Wherever the ark was, God was there also. The ark

represented God. When the ark was with the people, it meant that God was with His people.

## TWO

What does the ark typify? The ark typifies the Lord Jesus. The ark was within the tabernacle, which typifies that God is with man. The coming of the Lord Jesus is the presence of God among men. He is Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23). Wherever He went, God was there. In the Old Testament, the ark was in the Holy of Holies. Today Christ is in the heavenly Holy of Holies (Heb. 8:1-2). When God ordered the Israelites to make the tabernacle, the first thing He mentioned was the ark. This signifies that the Lord is the center of everything. The ark was built with acacia wood and covered with gold within and without. Acacia wood is a very hard wood; it typifies the humanity of the Lord. Gold in the Bible signifies God's righteousness, glory, and all His attributes. Hence, gold typifies the Lord's divinity. The Lord Jesus is both God and man. With Him there is both divinity and humanity.

Upon the ark, which was two and a half cubits by one and a half cubits by one and a half cubits, there was a mercy seat. The mercy seat covered the ark and was made of pure gold. Its length and width were the same as the ark. Two cherubim wrought of gold were placed on the two ends of the mercy seat. They stretched their wings and covered the mercy seat. The cherubim had their faces toward each other and were over the mercy seat. (Cherubim signify the manifestation of God's glory—Ezek. 9:3; Heb. 9:5.) God told Moses: "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel" (Exo. 25:22). From then on, God directed the Israelites in their walk and work from the place of the ark. The mercy seat in the Old Testament signifies the place that God dispenses His grace. In the New Testament, all of God's grace is dispensed to us through Christ. Leviticus 16 tells us that the high priest brought the blood of animals into the Holy of Holies every year on the seventh month when he offered up the sacrifice of the sin offering and sprinkled blood upon the mercy seat. In

the same way, the Lord accomplished redemption, and His blood declares before God that the work of redemption is finished and that God must forgive our sins. Simply put, the ark typifies Christ; it typifies God's dispensing grace to us through Christ. When we have Christ, we have God's presence, and through Christ, we receive God's leading.

There were four golden rings upon the four feet of the ark, and two staves made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold were placed through the rings in order to carry the ark. The staves were to be inside the rings all the time and were not to be taken out. This meant that the ark could be moved at any time. This shows us two functions of the ark. On the one hand, it was the center of worship to God. The ark was placed in the Holy of Holies, which was the place where God met with man. In order to worship God, one had to go to the ark. Without the ark, there could be no worship. On the other hand, the ark was the direction to God's people. When the ark moved forward, the people followed (Num. 10:33; Josh. 3:3). The Israelites could not go as they pleased. They could only go where the ark directed them to go. This shows us that Christ is the One who directs us to the proper way.

How was the ark carried? Numbers 4:5-6 says, "And when the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen, and cover the ark of the testimony with it; then they shall put a covering of porpoise skin over it, and spread over that a cloth all of blue, and they shall place its poles in it." Every time the ark was about to move, three things covered it. First, the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was taken down and laid on it. Second, a covering of porpoise skin was used to cover it. Third, a cloth all of blue was used to cover it. The moving of the ark signifies the time for the proclamation of Christ. The veil signifies the body of Christ (Heb. 10:20). Now the veil is rent, which means that the Christ we proclaim has become an approachable Lord. The ark was also covered with porpoise skin. Porpoise skin looks ugly on the outside. This signifies the Lord's humiliation and rejection. The ark was also covered with a cloth all of blue. In the Bible, white signifies righteousness, gold signifies glory and anything divine, purple signifies authority, while blue signifies heavenliness, because the sky is blue. This shows us that the

Christ we follow is, on the one hand, outwardly uncomely like the porpoise skin; He was rejected by men. But on the other hand, He was like a cloth all of blue, heavenly and acceptable to God. In short, the Christ we proclaim is an approachable Lord, a rejected Lord, yet a Christ who is acceptable to God.

## THREE

Let us consider the history of the ark a little. This shows us the relationship between the ark and the Israelites, and from it we can find the relationship between Christ and us.

### The Ark Crossing the Jordan

How did the Israelites cross the river Jordan when they were about to enter Canaan? Joshua 3:10-17 says, "And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you....Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan....And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon a heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan; and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." This passage of the Scripture tells us how the ark led the Israelites into Canaan. The first thing that went into the water was the ark, and the ark was the last thing that came out of the water. This shows us that a power greater than death was leading the Israelites safely across Jordan to the bank on the other side. Our death and resurrection with the Lord is like

the Israelites crossing the Jordan; the ark is there taking the lead ahead of us.

## The Ark in Shiloh

After the Israelites entered Canaan and when the warfare was over, the whole congregation gathered in Shiloh and erected the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1). When Eli the priest was old, his two sons were evil and did not know the Lord; yet they were taking over the work of the priest. Eli could do nothing about them because he honored his sons more than the Lord. Later a man of God prophesied: "And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation in all the wealth which God shall give Israel" (1 Sam. 2:32). This means that God would forsake the tabernacle. "And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; that the Lord called Samuel" (3:1-4). Although the lamp of God, which was in the temple of Lord where the ark was located, had not gone completely out and although the tabernacle was the same outwardly, God's presence was about to depart. At that time, God no longer called Eli, He called Samuel. He did not convey His word to Eli but to Samuel. From that time on, Eli was put aside, and God chose a child, Samuel, to be His prophet (v. 20).

Soon after this, the ark left the tabernacle in Shiloh. First Samuel 4:3 says, "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." The Israelites went to war with the Philistines and lost, and they thought they could avert their defeat if they brought out the ark. God's tabernacle was in Shiloh, and they carried the ark from Shiloh to their camp and shouted with a great shout (v. 5). But what was the result? "And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain" (vv. 10-11). When these men were in

peril, they tried to utilize the ark. But in the end, even the ark was captured. They thought that God would surely help them when the ark was in their midst, that God would surely not forsake His ark. But God did not do this. He allowed them to be defeated and the ark to be carried away. How serious this is! If anyone thinks that by proclaiming, "I have God" or "I come in the name of the Lord," they can overcome, they are making the same mistake as the Israelites. The Israelites were defeated before the Philistines because they did not deal with their sins. They did not realize that there could be no victory unless sin was first dealt with. They had forgotten the fact that they had rebelled against God, and they thought they would be victorious by clinging to the ark. They were wrong. God's ark cannot be used this way. We must forever remember that the flesh can never exploit spiritual things. The name of Christ can never be exploited by the flesh. If anyone tries to exploit spiritual things or use the name of the Lord in vain, the result will be total failure. The Israelites tried to exploit God's ark. They did not realize that God's glory had left Israel already. God allowed the ark to be taken away. We must remember that God's glory did not leave the tabernacle in Shiloh as a result of the ark being captured. God left the tabernacle in Shiloh first, and then the ark was captured later (Psa. 78:60-61). Once God's ark left the tabernacle in Shiloh, it never went back to Shiloh again!

## The Ark in the Land of the Philistines

What happened after the ark was taken to the land of the Philistines? The ark was well able to protect itself. First Samuel 5 says, "And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him....But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with

emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof" (vv. 1-6). The men of Ashdod were afraid and gathered together the lords of the Philistines and asked what they should do. They decided to send the ark of the God of Israel to Gath. But after the ark arrived there, everyone in the city, both great and small, had emerods, and so they sent the ark of God to Ekron. The Ekronites cried out saying, "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people" (v. 10). They sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and asked that the ark of Jehovah be sent back to its own place.

The ark of the Lord was in the land of the Philistines for seven months. How did they send the ark of the God of Israel back? Chapter six tells us that the priests and diviners among the Philistines came up with a new way. They made a new cart and took two milk cows, on which there had come no yoke, tied the cows to the cart, brought their calves home from them, and put the ark of the Lord on the cart. They also prepared gifts for a trespass offering, five golden mice and five golden emerods, and put them on the cart. They said, "See, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us" (v. 9). The amazing thing was that the cart went straight on until it stopped at a place called Bethshemesh. The lords of the Philistines were subdued. This is why we say that the ark was well able to protect itself.

## The Ark in Bethshemesh

What happened after the ark reached Bethshemesh? "And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it" (v. 13). But following this, a tragic thing happened. "And he [Jehovah] smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us? And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of

Kirjathjearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord; come ye down, and fetch it up to you" (vv. 9-21). The presence of Christ is a blessing, but a man must also be holy in His sight. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark of the Lord and did not have a fear of the Lord. Hence, God smote them. After they were smitten, they did not want the ark anymore. Rather than dealing with the reason for being smitten, they decided instead to reject the Lord's presence. What a pity this is!

## The Ark in Kirjathjearim

What was the attitude of the men of Kirjathjearim towards the ark? "And the men of Kirjathjearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (7:1-2). The ark came out of Shiloh, yet it never went back to Shiloh. It was in the house of Abinadab in Kirjathjearim for twenty years. In Shiloh there was the tabernacle, but there was no ark. How empty Shiloh was! Now the house of Abinadab had the Lord's presence. Brothers and sisters, the ark would never return to Shiloh again. The question now is: Are we like the men of Bethshemesh who feared the Lord's presence, or are we like the men of Kirjathjearim who welcomed His presence?

## The Ark in the House of Obededom

After twenty years, David was raised up as king. Once he came to the throne, he ordered that the ark be taken to Jerusalem. First Chronicles 13:1-3 says, "And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader...let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul." It was right and good for David to try to bring the ark to Jerusalem. But what did they do? "And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart....And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals" (2 Sam. 6:3,

5). In the midst of such rejoicing, something tragic unexpectedly happened. "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God....And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obededom the Gittite. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obededom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obededom, and all his household" (vv. 6-11). Rather than investigating the reason that the oxen were shaken, David rejected the ark from the city of David just because Uzzah was smitten. Yet the house of Obededom welcomed the ark, and his household was blessed. Brothers and sisters, are we going to forsake the Lord's presence as soon as we suffer God's dealings? Or are we going to welcome His presence like the household of Obededom?

David was wrong because He intended to move the ark of God to Jerusalem and discussed it with the captains of thousands and hundreds, but he did not search into the law for the proper way to move the ark. According to Numbers 4:4-15, the ark was to be carried by the Levites. God did not order the ark to be drawn by a cart. The cart with the oxen was a method copied from the Philistines. God did not blame the Philistines for their ignorance, but He would not allow David to ignore God's command and follow the way of the Philistines. This shows us that any zeal for God that is according to a new method not found in the Bible or according to a novel way apart from God's will can never last and will eventually bring in disaster. At the beginning, the playing was exciting, and many people were there. But after a while, everything stopped. God takes no pleasure in temporary excitement. He will not allow the flesh to touch anything that He has ordained for individuals as well as for the church. He will not allow man to alter any of His arrangements. Uzzah probably put forth his hand to stop the ark of God from falling because he loved the ark and was zealous for it. But God was not pleased. He did not allow Uzzah to touch the ark with his fleshly hands. In other words, God did not allow man to uphold errors with fleshly hands. Perhaps

you think that your idea is better than God's ways. But God will not allow you to change anything. You can only work according to God's design. Otherwise, you will see nothing except God's judgment. Perhaps some will say that many people in the church are replacing God's will with fleshly ways. Why is it that God has not judged them? We must say with fear and trembling that it is either because the time has not come or because the ark has left them! We should not despise God just because of His forbearance and endurance.

## The Ark in David's Tent

David did not know why God smote Uzzah. He was afraid to move the ark to Jerusalem. Yet while the ark was in the house of Obededom, God blessed Obededom and his household. When someone told David about this, he happily moved the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David (2 Sam. 6:12; 1 Chron. 15:25). This time it was different. In his preparation David ordered: "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever" (1 Chron. 15:2). He had learned the lesson. In the past, he thought he could do what the Philistines did. Now he knew that God's service had to be done according to God's pattern and not according to man's pattern. Now the Levites carried the ark. As a result, "They brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord" (16:1-2).

## Solomon and the Ark

There was still another story related to the ark. First Kings 3:4 says, "And the king [Solomon] went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar." On the night after the offering, Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream. He prayed for wisdom, and the Lord granted his request; He even gave him what he did not ask for. When he woke from his dream, what did he immediately do? "And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up

burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants" (v. 15). Read again this account in 2 Chronicles 1:3-4: "So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjathjearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem." At that time, the tabernacle was in Gibeon, but the ark was not there anymore. While the tabernacle was in Gibeon, the ark was in Jerusalem. Therefore, after Solomon received wisdom, the first thing he did was to return to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices before the ark. He no longer offered sacrifices in Gibeon. This was a great turn in Solomon.

Outwardly speaking, the tabernacle, the altar, the laver, the lampstand, the table with the showbread, and the golden incense altar were at Shiloh. But the ark was not there. (The tabernacle in Gibeon was the same tabernacle that was in Shiloh, because 2 Chronicles 1:3 clearly says that the tabernacle in Gibeon "was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness.") Man thinks that it does not mean much to be without the ark. Yet the ark represents the presence of God, and without His presence, His heart cannot be satisfied even if everything else is good. Neither will our hearts be satisfied. Before Solomon received the Lord's revelation, he did not realize the importance of the ark. But after he received the Lord's revelation, he was enlightened and realized that the Lord's presence was more precious that anything else, and he returned to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices before the ark of the Lord. In Gibeon he only offered burnt offerings, but in Jerusalem he offered both burnt offerings and peace offerings and prepared a feast for all his servants. True worship is a worship that is before the Lord. True fellowship is a fellowship that is before the Lord, and true joy is a joy that is before the Lord. This was Solomon's experience; it is also the experience of many who know the Lord. O ark, precious ark! Those who know You will seek after You and will worship before You. When Solomon finished building the temple, he placed the ark in the temple, and the ark became the center once again in the temple (2 Chron. 5:1-9).

## FOUR

We have seen much of the history of the ark. The purpose for this study is to find out the relationship between Christ and the church. We have seen that the ark represents Christ. When the ark crossed the Jordan, it typified the Lord's death and resurrection. After His death and resurrection, we began to preach Christ, telling men that the veil has been rent and that Christ has opened a new and living way to God for us. We also tell people that He was the despised One, the One typified by the porpoise skin, yet He is now the One with whom God is pleased. He comes forth from God, as typified by the cloth all of blue. We are here to preach a Christ who was despised, who was exalted by God, and who is now glorified before God.

At its beginning, the church indeed preached a heavenly Christ. But even before the age of the apostles was over, changes had crept in. At the time of Paul, some had risen up to preach "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). Peter also warned that we should beware of "destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1). John told us that we have to be aware of "the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7). This shows us that there was an adulterating of the Lord's word even at that time. When Constantine rose up, he made Christianity the state religion and made the bishop of Rome the head of the whole church. Originally, the name of Christ was found inside the church only. At this time, it was found outside the church. The ark which was in Shiloh was now in the land of the Philistines. Once God's ark left the tabernacle in Shiloh, it never went back again. Jeremiah 26:6 says, "Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth." In other words, although the tabernacle was still in Shiloh, God's ark was gone; His rejection of the tabernacle in Shiloh became certain.

God's children are truly in need of a revelation. They need the revelation of Solomon! God appeared to Solomon and opened his eyes. He gave Solomon a great turn and showed him the preciousness of the ark and the vanity of a tabernacle without the ark. Brothers and sisters, are we for God's ark, or are we for a tabernacle that is void of the ark? Will we choose Christ, or will we choose a Christless religious form? We must consider whether our emphasis and center is Christ or whether we are maintaining a tabernacle in Shiloh which is void of the

ark. Man considers the tabernacle in Shiloh precious; they grasp firmly to it. They think that since it was once the house of God, it will always be the house of God. But they are wrong. Jeremiah 7:4 says, "Do not trust in the words of falsehood that say, The temple of Jehovah, the temple of Jehovah, these buildings are the temple of Jehovah." God rebuked the Israelites because they cared for nothing except vain words, saying, "This is the temple of Jehovah," three times. Little did they realize that the temple became the temple of Jehovah because God was the center of the temple. Once God left the temple, the temple became nothing but an ordinary building.

Brothers and sisters, the thing we have to treasure is the ark and not the tabernacle because the center of the tabernacle is the ark. The question now is: Is Christ the center, or are we holding onto the tabernacle as an empty shell? Brothers and sisters, if our heart is for Christ, we must look for the place where Christ is the center. We should be at the place where the name of Christ is found. Brothers and sisters, is Christ the center in the place where you are? If He is, we thank and praise the Lord! If He is not, may the Lord open our eyes, and may He turn us back to Jerusalem like Solomon, after he received the revelation to worship before the ark. May the Lord cause us to realize the vanity of our zealous service of the past, and may He bring us into the joy and peace before the ark, so that we can offer genuine service and worship to Him. Brothers and sisters, I earnestly pray that the Lord grants you a revelation of His preciousness, so that you make Him your excellent treasure and your center, offering up the burnt offering to Him, living for Him, and satisfying His heart!

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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 5



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 5

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## MESSAGE ONE

# HE IS NOT WHO IS ONE OUTWARDLY, BUT WHO IS ONE INWARDLY

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 1:11-16

Rom. 2:28-29 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God."

Gal. 1:11-16 "For I make known to you, brothers, concerning the gospel announced by me, that it is not according to man.For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation by Jesus Christ.For you have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it.And I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of my fathers.But when it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,To reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,"

*  *  *  *

We should focus on a few expressions from the two verses we have read in Romans 2: "For he is not...who is one outwardly...But he is...who is one inwardly"; "in spirit, not in letter"; "not from men, but from God." Here are a few contrasts: "outwardly" versus "inwardly"; "spirit" versus "letter"; and "from men" versus "from God." The Bible shows us clearly through these contrasts the fact that Christianity is not a matter of outward regulations, forms, and ceremonies but a matter of the inner life. Christianity is not an outward religion or a product of the human mind; Christianity is an inward revelation and a religion of life.

What is it to be a Christian? A Christian is one who has the life of the Lord within him. Some people were baptized when they were young; they attend church services regularly and carry a Bible with them. They can recite the Lord's Prayer and know the Ten Commandments. They can sing hymns and say amen to others' prayers, and they are very familiar with the stories in the Bible. They even consider themselves to be Christians. But are they? The Bible says that "he is not...who is one outwardly." Therefore, a Christian is not a Christian by teaching or by learning. A Christian becomes a Christian inwardly; he is a person who has the life of the Lord within him. The Lord Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). A Christian is a person who has something to do with life. He is not one outwardly but one inwardly.

Life comes from the Lord Himself. In fact, life is the Lord Himself. A man receives this life through knowing the Lord Jesus and through knowing Him as the Son of God and as the Christ of God. This knowledge comes from God's revelation. Paul had been instructed in the law according to the strict traditions of his fathers. He persecuted the church greatly and thought that by so doing he was zealously serving God. When the Lord appeared to him, he repented and was saved. He testified in Galatians 1 that his gospel was not received from men nor taught by men; it came from the revelation of Jesus Christ. If a man has not received any revelation from God, his zeal is vain. He may be able to keep all the traditions of his fathers, but these traditions can never give him God's life. Paul did not become a Christian through men. He became a Christian because it pleased God to reveal His Son in him.

Once the Lord asked the disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" They answered, "Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." The Lord then asked the disciples, "But you, who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord immediately said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:13-17). This shows us clearly that a Christian must be one who has received a revelation from God. If you want to be a Christian, you

must have this revelation and knowledge. If you say that you admire the life of Jesus, this will not make you a Christian. If you say that Jesus' teaching contains some very deep philosophy, this will not make you a Christian either. You may not agree with this word. You may argue: "I admire Jesus and honor Him; I am favorably inclined towards Christianity. Does that not make me a Christian?" No, it does not. Being a Christian is not a question of admiring or not admiring; it is not a question of being favorably or ill inclined towards Christianity. Some considered the Lord Jesus to be John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. Was not John the Baptist good? Was not Elijah good? Was not Jeremiah good? Yet these were all man's views and man's opinions. Christianity is absolutely not from man. Therefore, human views and human opinions cannot replace Christianity. Christianity is a religion of revelation. Only those who have received a revelation from God and who know the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, are blessed by the Lord.

Once a man receives a revelation, he touches the Lord Jesus in the Holy Spirit, and he comes face to face with the Lord Jesus. He has a direct relationship with Him and has made contact with the Lord. Let me give a little illustration. Once an electrical power line in a brother's home became worn out. It was easy to receive an electric shock from the wire. The brother was not careful enough and touched the line. Immediately he withdrew his hand and shouted, "What a shock! What a shock!" His young son saw how his hand stretched out and pulled back, and he imitated his father and pretended that he had been shocked also. He stretched out his little hand and pulled it back shouting, "What a shock! What a shock!" But we know that the son was acting in an outward way; he was imitating. The father was genuinely shocked by the electricity; he tasted the reality of the experience. Brothers and sisters, outward imitations do not count; it is the real taste that counts. You must touch Christ like the brother who touched the electrical current. Do you know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God today? It is not what men say, but what you say within yourself that counts. You may not have any knowledge within you, and you may only have heard about Him from others. When others say that He is the Son of God, you echo and say the same thing. When others say that Jesus was a great social reformer, you

follow suit and say the same thing. Your "faith" is one that revolves around others. I am afraid that you are not clear what you believe in.

In John 3, the Lord Jesus discussed the question of regeneration with Nicodemus, who said, "We know that You have come from God as a teacher." The Lord answered him, saying, "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (vv. 2-3). With a teacher, the main emphasis is teaching and learning; these are all outward matters. With regeneration, it is a question of spirit and life; these are inward matters. Many so-called Christians have tried to enter through the gate called "Teacher." They think that as long as they understand the teachings of Christianity, as long as they are baptized and are familiar with the prophecies and types of the Bible, and as long as they have picked up outward Christian behavior such as prayer, attending services, and tithing, they can consider themselves good Christians. These people are wrong about Christianity. The Bible shows us that a Christian life begins from regeneration. If a man is not regenerated and does not have the life of the Lord within Him, he is not yet a Christian. Let me repeat: Christianity is not an outward religion but an inward revelation. A Christian is not one who is one outwardly but who is one inwardly.

In John 6, the Lord Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The same group of people looked for Jesus the next day, and the Lord told them plainly: "You seek Me...because you ate of the bread and were filled. Work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (vv. 26-27). Again He said: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst" (v. 35). These men came to the Lord Jesus because they ate bread and were filled. They did not know what their real need was. Neither did they know what the Lord was giving to men when He came to the earth. They only saw the physical bread without but did not see the preciousness of the life within. The Lord Jesus was full of mercy; He did not hide Himself from these ignorant ones. He opened Himself to them and told them that He is the bread of life and that He gives life to those who believe in Him. But these ones were still circling around the periphery. They asked, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (v. 42). They only knew the Lord Jesus from

the outside. The Lord told them again, “I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world” (v. 51). The Jews contended with one another because of this word. Their eyes only saw outward things. They wanted to know the Lord Jesus and understand His words in an outward way. But it was impossible for them to know and understand in this way.

We have to pay attention to the words which followed. Not only were the Jews bewildered by the Lord’s word, but many of His disciples did not understand it either. They said, “This word is hard; who can hear it?” (v. 60). Many of the disciples went back to what they had left behind and no longer walked with Him. They stumbled and were no longer His disciples. Five loaves and two fish on the outside attracted many to seek after the Lord Jesus. But when the inward bread of life was presented, many so-called disciples could not take it. How easy it is for men to pay attention to outward things and reject inward things! Brothers and sisters, we ought to be warned here! Many who were called disciples dropped out halfway. Those who are Christians in an outward way will drop out halfway. Those who do not touch life will drop out halfway. Anyone who has not received the Lord’s life within him cannot be His disciple. No one needs to discourage such a one from becoming a Christian; he himself will find it impossible to go on.

These so-called disciples did not withdraw because of tribulations or trials. There was only one reason for their withdrawal: “This word is hard; who can hear it?” They fell in the presence of the truth! Brothers and sisters, nothing outward works. An outward Christian will fall in the presence of the truth; there is no need for trials to come to him. Some people call themselves Christians, but they do not accept the Lord’s Word. They do not understand the truth of Christianity. They doubt, misunderstand, and even mock and oppose it. They only want the name of Christianity; they do not want the truth of Christianity. They are Christians according to their own “theology,” and not according to the Lord’s Word. The Lord said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (v. 63).

When a man receives the Lord's word, he receives the Lord's life. One characteristic of the outward Christian is that he cannot understand and will not believe, receive, or treasure the Lord's Word. All of God's children have one fundamental feeling towards God's Word, the Bible. They believe, honor, and treasure God's Word. This feeling towards the Bible is the basic and fundamental attitude which a Christian ought to have. If a person calls himself a Christian, yet doubts, rather than believes the Bible, criticizes, rather than honors it, and tramples, rather than treasures it, he must not be a genuine Christian. Although the disciples who withdrew at the Lord's word were called disciples outwardly, in reality they were unbelievers. The Bible says clearly, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray Him" (v. 64). This kind of outward Christian either withdraws halfway or mixes in with the disciples only to eventually betray the Lord!

When the many so-called disciples were withdrawing, the Lord asked the twelve disciples: "Do you also want to go away?" Simon Peter answered and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life, and we have believed..." (vv. 67-69). Peter had received the revelation. The heavenly Father had revealed to him that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God. This is why he still followed the Lord when many withdrew. The Lord's word was like a yardstick which differentiated those who genuinely believed in Him from those who did not believe in Him. It separated the outward ones from the inward ones.

Christians who have revelation and who are Christians inwardly can withstand tests. They treasure God's truth and are not afraid of any trial. We see Paul suffering many persecutions and much tribulation for the sake of the Lord's name. One day he was brought in chains to Caesarea to be judged by Festus. Even Festus himself admitted that Paul did not commit any crime and that the only questions against him were about a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive (Acts 25:18-19). Brothers and sisters, this is a sober question: Are you an outward Christian or an inward Christian? Paul had the experience; it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. This is why he insisted that Jesus was living when others said that He had died. Even when others held him in chains, he said the same thing. Even when others charged him with many false accusations, he

said the same thing. On the way to Damascus, he had indeed met the Jesus who was raised from the dead. Therefore, he could present his good testimony under any trial.

Brothers and sisters, no outward Christian can withstand the test of the truth or the test of trials. I wish everyone who called himself a Christian would settle this question once and for all: Is the Christianity you know outward, or is it inward? Are you a Christian by tradition, by learning, or by revelation? Is your knowledge of the Lord Jesus in your head or in life and revelation? Is your Christianity something of man or something of God?

Finally, I will repeat again: “For he is not...who is one outwardly...But...who is one inwardly.”

## MESSAGE TWO

# LIFE AND FEELING

**•Scripture Reading: John 1:4; Rom. 8:12; 1 Cor. 12:26**

John 1:4 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Rom. 8:12 "So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh;"

1 Cor. 12:26 "And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it."

* * * *

Every life has feelings. God's life is also full of feelings. In man's view, life is something intangible and abstract. But feeling is something tangible and more concrete. No one can show you life, but you can know life by the feelings of life. It is difficult to present life to man in a concrete way or to point a finger at something and say, "This is life." We cannot show others something called life, nor can others show us something called life. But we can know life by the feelings of this life. Thank and praise the Lord, He has given us a life, and this life has feelings; it is a life that can be known by its feelings. Although we cannot show ourselves or others something called life, the fact that we have new feelings within us proves that we have a new life.

After a man receives the Lord, we say that he is not only saved but also regenerated. This means that he is born of God; he has received a new life from God. Yet this is something that is very difficult to explain. How does a person know that he has life? How do others know that he has the life of God? How does the church know that he has the life of God? The existence of God's life is proved by the feelings of this life. If God's life is in a person, the feelings of this life must also be in that person. What are the feelings of life? When a Christian is accidentally overcome by sin, he will feel sorrowful. This is a feeling of life. When

he sins, he feels uneasy, and he feels a barrier between himself and God and loses his joy; these are all feelings of life. Because God's life hates sin, when a man possesses His life, he will surely have a feeling towards sin. When he has this feeling of life, it proves that he has life.

If a man confesses that he is a sinner and receives the Lord Jesus to be his Savior yet never has any feeling about sin, is he regenerated? Suppose a person has sinned, but only admits that he is wrong when someone goes to him and tells him that he has done wrong. After some time, suppose he commits another mistake, but asks why he cannot do something like that when he is asked about his mistake. Before he will say, "Yes, I was wrong," others have to tell him it is a sin. Shortly after this, suppose he does something else again, and others still have to go to him before he realizes that he was wrong. He may never reject their words, and he may be very obedient, but he does not have any feeling of his own. If a man does not have any feeling of his own and depends on others to feel for him, how can we say that he has the life of God? If he has the life of God, he ought to have feelings. It is impossible for a person to have God's life yet not have any feelings of God's life. This can never happen. God's life is not unsubstantial or abstract; it is very substantial. How do we know that it is substantial? We know because this life has feelings.

When a man has God's life, not only will he have feelings toward sin, but the life he possesses will also give him a knowledge about God. We have not received a spirit of slavery but a spirit of sonship. Spontaneously we feel that God is very approachable and that it is a sweet thing to call, "Abba, Father." "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). Our knowledge of the Father is a feeling of life. Some people only know doctrines; they have never contacted God. They are afraid of God and have never touched God. They do not have any relationship with God. The Spirit has not witnessed with their spirit that they are children of God. They cannot cry, "Abba, Father," from their spirit. They may pray, but in their prayers, they do not feel that sin is far from them or that God is near them. They do not feel the evil of sin nor the intimacy of God. These ones have never had a relationship with God; they have not received a new life from Him. They do not feel that God is near or that Christ

has removed the barrier between them and God. They do not have the feeling that they are God's children. They say that they are Christians, but they do not have the proper feeling before God. They can call with their mouth, "Our Father in heaven," but they do not have that feeling within them. The existence of feeling proves the existence of life. If they never have this feeling, how can anyone say that they have this life?

The same thing can be said about the Body of Christ. Many brothers and sisters ask, "What do I have to do before I can say that I have seen the Body of Christ? How can we live out the Body life?" I answer them, "All those who know the life of the Body of Christ will have the feeling of the Body of Christ. If you have seen the Body, it is impossible for you not to have the feeling of the Body. If the life within you is a fact and an experience, this life will give you a feeling." We must see the Body of Christ not only as a principle or a doctrine but also as a matter of feeling.

First Corinthians 12:26 says, "And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it." Suffering is a feeling, and joy is a feeling. Although there are many members, the life they have is one, and the feelings they have are also one. Some people have artificial limbs. Outwardly their limbs look much the same as real limbs. But artificial limbs do not have life and therefore do not have the feeling of the body. When other members suffer, an artificial limb does not suffer. When other members rejoice, the artificial limb does not feel anything. Other members have feelings because they have the same life. But the artificial limb does not have any feeling because it does not have life. Hence, it is impossible to imitate life, and there is no need to imitate life. If you have it, you have it, and there is no need to imitate it. If you do not have it, you do not have it, and even if you imitate, it will not look like the real thing. The most obvious manifestation of life is feeling. Once a Christian sees the life of the Body, he will immediately have the feeling of the Body and have the same feelings as other members.

In spiritual matters, it is useless to have teachings without feelings. Suppose a person hears that lying is a sin and an improper thing for a Christian to do. As a result he also tells others that lying is a sin and that he should not lie. But the

question is not whether he says with his mouth that he should not lie. The question is whether or not he feels anything wrong within him when he lies. If he does not feel sinful when he lies, it is useless for him to say with his mouth that lying is a sin. He can say that it is wrong to lie while lying just the same. One characteristic of those who have God's life is feeling inwardly wrong when they lie. They do not have to understand doctrinally that lying is wrong; when they lie, they feel uneasy within. This is being a Christian. Being a Christian is being a person with life and feelings within. One characteristic of being a Christian is the feeling of life. A person who does not have life and who has no feelings within is not a Christian. Outward regulations are merely standards; they are not life. Suppose a man says, "I know the teaching about the Body; therefore, I should not act independently." This is not enough. Such a person must have the proper feeling within about this matter. If he says with his mouth that he should not act independently yet does not have any feeling within when he is acting independently, he has never seen the Body of Christ. This does not mean that he has never heard the teaching concerning the Body of Christ; it means that he has not seen the reality of the Body of Christ. Hearing the teaching of the Body of Christ and seeing the Body of Christ are two entirely different things. Hearing the teaching of the Body of Christ merely means understanding a principle outwardly. But when one sees the Body of Christ, he will have a different feeling within him. When one hears the teaching of salvation, he merely knows how God saves sinners. But when he receives the Lord Jesus as the Savior, he will have the feeling of sin and the feeling of God within him. Brothers and sisters, can you see the difference here? This is why we cannot neglect the feeling of life. (We are not speaking about outward conscious feelings but inward conscious feelings.) This feeling is the expression of life. The presence or absence of feeling is the test that shows whether or not we have something real within us; it shows whether we have the life of God within us.

One mark of the feeling of life is that we do not need anyone to tell us about anything; we have this knowledge within us spontaneously. If we have to wait for others to tell us about something, our response is too late. Suppose every Christian needed someone else to tell him what sin is, what he should do, and

what he should not do. This would be terrible! What would happen when there was no one else to tell him what he should do? What would happen if others told him, and he forgot about it? A Christian does not act according to what others tell him. A life within, a light within, and a feeling within will tell him what to do. We should pay attention to the feelings within. These inner feelings come from God's enlightening and from life; they are not from man.

At the time we were regenerated, we received a real life. Therefore, we also have a real feeling. The reality of the feeling proves the reality of life. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we can touch the feeling of life and live by the feeling of life. May the Lord give us rich feelings so that we will have feelings for everything—feelings for sins, feelings for God, feelings for the Body of Christ, and feelings for all spiritual realities. May the Lord lead us on for the glory of His name!

## MESSAGE THREE

# THE FEELING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

## ●Outline

- **●Brotherly Love**
- **●No Division**
- **●Deliverance From Individualistic Works**
- **●The Need Of Fellowship**
- **●On Being A Member**
- **●Submission To Authority**

## ●Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:25-27; Eph. 4:12-13, 15-16

Rom. 12:3-5 "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has apportioned to each a measure of faith. For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

1 Cor. 12:25-27 "That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."

Eph. 4:12-13 "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,"

15-16 “But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.”

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In the previous chapter, Life and Feeling, we saw that the presence of feelings proves the existence of life. In this chapter we want to go on to consider the meaning of the feeling of the Body of Christ.

## BROTHERLY LOVE

First let us consider love. One amazing thing about love is that the Bible says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers” (1 John 3:14). All those who have passed from death into life love one another. All those who are members in the Body love one another. This love is produced by life and is spontaneous. You do not have to ask a person in the meeting whether he is a Christian, and if he says yes, you do not have to ask whether Christians should love one another. In the same way, he does not have to say that he will start loving other Christians just because you have told him so. This is not the way God’s children behave. Everyone who is genuinely born of God has God’s life. Those who are saved by God spontaneously love their fellow members. Whether or not a person has been told to love another one, he will have a feeling of love for his brothers. It is true that we often have to remind others to love their brothers. But these reminders will not supply what they do not already have; it will only make them more zealous for what they have. If love is there, it is there. If it is not there, it is not there. Once we meet one of God’s people, we spontaneously love him. We cannot explain, but within there is such a feeling; within there is such a love.

A brother had a son. When others asked him, “Now that you are a father, do you love your son?”, he answered, “A week before I became a father, I kept wondering how I could love my son. But the minute my son was born, my heart

spontaneously went out to him when I saw him, and I loved him." Love is an inner feeling; it is something produced from the inside, rather than something taught from the outside. Every child of God who is redeemed by the Lord's blood, who has received the Lord's life, and who is baptized into the Body of Christ spontaneously loves his fellow members. Many times we meet someone who genuinely belongs to the Lord. It does not matter whether he is from far away or from the same city or whether he is cultured or uncultured. It does not matter what nationality he has or what job he occupies. The minute we find out that he is a Christian, spontaneously there is a love for him. Love is a feeling of life. As long as we are in the Body, we will have this feeling.

## NO DIVISION

Those who have seen the Body of Christ have a feeling for the Body of Christ. Once they do anything sectarian or anything that divides God's children from one another, they feel uneasy inside. Since they love all those who belong to God, they cannot divide God's children from one another. In the Body, love is something spontaneous, while division is something unnatural. A man has two hands, and it would not matter how many things one hand said against the other hand, the two hands can never be separated from each other; it is impossible to divide the two. Some think that as long as they have left the sects, they know the Body of Christ. But in reality, leaving the sects does not necessarily mean that one has seen the Body of Christ. Those who have seen the Body of Christ will surely forsake the sects, but it does not follow that those who have left the sects have seen the Body of Christ. Many people have outwardly left a sect, but actually they build up another sect for themselves. Their leaving of a sect is only an attempt to accentuate their "distinctiveness"; they do not see that all the members are our brothers and are equally lovable. All sectarian spirits, all divisive attitudes, and all outward moves and inward thoughts that cause separations between God's children are proof of the lack of vision concerning the Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ will deliver us from the sects as well as from sectarianism. It will deliver us from ourselves as well as from individualism.

Many people do not live according to the principle of the Body. Rather, they live according to the principle of individualism. This individualism can be found everywhere. In the prayer meetings, some can only pray by themselves; they cannot pray with others. Their bodies may be kneeling down with others, but in their feeling they are praying by themselves. They can only have others listening to their prayers; they cannot listen to the prayers of others. They do not respond to the prayers of others and cannot say amen to them. They do not join themselves to the feelings of others. They pray according to their way and leave others to pray according to their way. It seems as if their prayers are totally unrelated to the prayers of others. When they come to the meetings, they only care to speak their part. Then they have nothing more to do with the others; whatever prayer, burden, or feelings others may have seem to be totally unrelated to them. This is the principle of individualism; it is not the principle of the Body. Such ones do not see the Body, and they cannot work together with others before the Lord. Sometimes when three, five, ten, or twenty brothers are speaking together, you can sense that some of them can only speak about their own burden; they have no heart to speak or hear about the burdens of others. If you sit down with them for an hour or two, the only time they are alert is when they are talking about their own affairs. When the subject is about other people, they begin to wander around in their mind. If you talk to them afterwards, you will find that they did not hear a single thing that the others said. These small indications tell us whether or not a man has seen the Body of Christ.

Individualism can develop from one individual to a few individuals. In the church, sometimes we see three or five people, or eight or nine people being knitted together into a tight circle. Only the few within the circle are one with each other and can love each other. All the other brothers and sisters do not fit in. This proves that these ones have not seen the Body of Christ. There is only one Body of Christ; there cannot be several Bodies. If a man sees the Body of Christ, he cannot have any form of individualism; he cannot form parties and cannot have his little circles. If you see the Body of Christ, you will detect individualism as soon as it appears. You will sense that it is wrong, and spontaneously you will not dare to move in that direction. When you and a few others try to do

something by yourselves, the Body-consciousness will tell you that you are not blended in with the other children of God. This Body-consciousness will not let you go; it will nag you, speak to you, rebuke you, hinder you, and tell you that you are wrong. This feeling of life will deliver you from all forms of divisions.

## DELIVERANCE FROM INDIVIDUALISTIC WORKS

If we have Body-consciousness, we immediately will see that the Body is one. Once we see this, we will not be individualistic in our spiritual work. If we want to participate in the Lord's work, we need to deal with this one matter—individualistic works. Some people can only do things well when they are doing it alone. If they cannot do it alone, they cannot do it well. They only regard the things that they are doing as having any spiritual value, and what others do has no spiritual value at all. When they preach and no one is saved, they feel sorry. When others preach and some are saved, they feel strange. This is being individualistic in one's work. Whenever God's children see the oneness of the Body, they will also see the oneness of the work, and they will be delivered out of individualistic work into the work of the Body. This does not mean that we no longer work by ourselves. It means that we no longer consider any work to be our own. It does not matter whether a work is done by us or not, as long as someone is doing it, we are satisfied.

After we become Christians, we should have a desire for spiritual things and seek after them. But this does not mean that we should have a competitive and ambitious spirit, much less a spirit of jealousy. The proper attitude in the work is this: We should hope that whatever we can do, others can do the same as well, and that whatever we cannot do ourselves, others will be raised up to do it. It is hoping that both we and others can do better. We can only be used as a vessel in the work; we cannot take over the work; we cannot claim the work and the result of the work as our own. If we think that something can only be done by us, we have not seen the Body. If we see the Body, we will see that the result is all for the benefit of the Head and the Body, whether we or others are doing it. All the glory goes to the Lord, and all the blessings go to the church.

The Lord has assigned a portion to each one of us. We should not consider

ourselves greater than what we are. We should be faithful to the portion that the Lord has assigned to us, and we should honor the portion that the Lord has assigned to others. Many young people are always comparing themselves with others; they say that they have this and that, and that others do not have this and that. Or they say that they do not have this and that, and that others have this and that. Actually, it is impossible to make such comparisons. It is like adding a chair to a table and asking whether it is two or one. A table plus a chair is just a table plus a chair. If you ask whether the hands are better or the eyes are better, I can only say that both are good. Those who see the Body will see that all the members have their functions; they will see that they are only one of the many members. They will not place themselves in a conspicuous position and make comparisons with others or usurp their places.

Once a Christian sees the Body, it will be impossible for him to be proud or jealous anymore. Since the Body is one, it will be the same if the work is done by others or by ourselves; there will be no difference at all. Whether the work is done by you or by others, the glory ultimately goes to the Lord alone, and the blessings go to the church. If you see the Body of Christ, spontaneously you will have this feeling within you. You will sense that the Body is one and that the work is also one.

## THE NEED OF FELLOWSHIP

Those who see the Body will spontaneously see the need of fellowship. They will spontaneously see that they cannot act independently. Fellowship is not a formal acquaintance but a spontaneous issue of the life of the Body. The common notion of fellowship among God's children is to visit a brother or a sister when we are free and chat with them a little. For most people this is fellowship. But fellowship really means a realization that we cannot go on alone, that we need to do everything together, with other members and with the Body as a whole. Although we cannot have all the brothers and sisters in the whole church come together, we can have two or three brothers come together and work according to the principle of the Body. We have to learn the principle of fellowship when we pray. We have to learn to fellowship when we encounter difficulties, and we have

to learn to fellowship when we are seeking God's will, when we are not clear about our future, and when we do not understand God's Word. Fellowship means I cannot pray by myself, that I have to find two or three brothers to deal with a matter together. It means that I do not understand God's will by myself and that I seek to understand it together with two or three brothers. It means that I am confused about my own future and that I seek fellowship and I consider my future together with two or three other brothers and sisters. It means that I do not understand God's Word by myself and that I find two or three brothers to study God's Word together with me. Fellowship is to acknowledge that we are short, that we are inadequate, and that we need the Body. Fellowship is the acknowledgment of our own limitations and of the possibility of making mistakes by ourselves; it is receiving help from those who have spiritual discernment before the Lord. (This does not mean to ask for help only from those who are affectionate towards us.) I cannot go on by myself; I need the help of other brothers and sisters.

The Body of Christ is a matter of life, and this life has feelings. This feeling will tell you that without fellowship, you cannot go on.

## ON BEING A MEMBER

Once a person has a feeling for the Body, he will see his place in the Body at the same time. In other words, he will see that he is only a member in the Body. Every member has its use. A member is different from a cell. A body can survive without a cell, but it cannot survive without a member. Of course, every cell has its use too. But the Bible tells us that we are members in the Body of Christ; we are not cells in the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, many Christians are like cells in the Body; they do not act like members. They do not have any specific function in the Body of Christ, and they never take care of their responsibility. It seems that their presence in the meeting is not indispensable and that nothing is missing when they are not there. They do not function in the Body because they have never seen the Body. They never realize their ministry when they are among the brothers and sisters. They do not see what they should do. If they see the Body, they will spontaneously see that they are members; they will realize that unless

they minister life to the Body of Christ, the Body will suffer. Brothers and sisters, none of us can be a passive member in the Body. As long as we are a member of the Body, we cannot be passive, and we cannot be a bystander in the meetings. When we come to the meeting, we should realize that we are a member in the Body of Christ and that we have to pray. They may be audible prayers or silent prayers. But we must at least pray and minister life to the Body. Some Christians are suppliers of life; once they come to a meeting, the meeting receives their supply even when they do not open their mouth to speak. Their very presence is a life supply to others. Wherever they go, death is swallowed up. Brothers and sisters, once we see the Body of Christ, we will inevitably see ourselves as members.

We are members of the Body of Christ. As members severally of this Body, we should seek to profit the Body. We should seek for ways to supply life and power to the Body. Even if we do not open our mouth in the meeting, we should pray silently, and even if we do not speak, we should always be looking to God. This is being Body-conscious. Once we see the Body, we will no longer say that we are dispensable or unimportant. Once we see the Body, we will say that we are a member of the Body and that we have a responsibility to fulfill. We should speak, and we should pray. When we come to the meeting, we will do whatever God tells us to do. We cannot be a bystander. Brothers and sisters, if we see the Body, we will not act in any other way. When we function this way, the life of the meeting will swallow up all death. Many meetings do not have enough power because the presence of death is too strong; there are too many bystanders in these meetings.

## SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

If you see the Body of Christ, you will also have the sensation that you are under the authority of the Head. You will feel that God's children are lovable, that division is wrong, and that fellowship is vital. You will also feel that as a member of the Body of Christ, there are responsibilities that you have to fulfill. These feelings are feelings of the Body. At the same time, once you feel that you are in the Body, you will feel that you are under the Head. Those who feel that they are

in the Body also feel that they are under the Head. If a man knows the life of the Body of Christ, and if he is conscious of the fact that he is a member, he will also be conscious of the authority of the Head.

Moreover, we must submit not only to the direct authority of the Head, but also to the indirect authority of the Head. My arms are not only under the authority of my head; when my shoulders move, my arms move with them also. My arms submit to the Head by submitting to the shoulders. Those who see the Body of Christ surely see the need for submission to God's appointed authorities in the Body of Christ.

Sometimes someone will tell you to do something, and after you pray about it, you may feel that the Lord does not want you to do it. When you act accordingly and put the matter aside, you feel happy; you feel that you have obeyed the Lord's word and that it was right for you not to listen to man. But more than once have you not felt that when you ignored the words of others, you were actually disobeying the Lord? More than once have you not felt that a person or a few persons really knew the Lord, and that the Lord had put them there to represent His authority, and that if you went against them, you would be going against the Lord? If you see the Body and see the authority of the Head, you will see that there are always one or more persons who are ahead of you in the Body, to whom you should submit yourself. Not only must you see the Head, you must also see those who represent the Head and realize that going against them is going against God.

Brothers and sisters, if the Lord opens your eyes, you will see the Body, and you will see authority. Why do the different parts of the human body always work harmoniously together? The body is always one because there is authority in the body. If the body is not upheld by authority, all the members will be in confusion. Suppose the stomach is hungry and wants to eat, yet the mouth refuses to cooperate and to take in the food. Can the body still survive? As long as one part of the body rejects the authority of the body, the whole body will become sick. Cancerous tumors are dangerous diseases. These tumors grow when some cells of the body do not follow the law of the body and begin to grow independently. The body does not need such growth, yet they continue to grow.

They take away much of the nourishment of the body for their own growth. They only care for their own growth and do not care whether the body wants them to grow. They do not submit to the authority of the body, and they act independently. The more they grow, the more damage the body suffers. In the end, a few insubordinate cells can kill the whole body. Authority is the law of the body, while insubordination is a disease in the body. If a man does not know authority, how can he say that he knows the Body of Christ? When three or five people come together, those who know the Body can always find who the authority is and to whom they should submit. Everyone has his authority to whom he should submit. The hands submit to the arms, while the arms submit to the shoulders. This is something very spontaneous and comely. Even if there are only three or five persons, if they practice this, they will see the Body of Christ manifested among them.

Many Christians speak carelessly and act carelessly. They do not listen to others, and they think that they themselves are the greatest; it seems as if they have never found anyone to whom they can submit. This proves that they have never been restricted by the Body, and they have never submitted themselves to the authority of the Head. May the Lord be merciful to these ones. If we are truly dealt with by the Lord, if our flesh is truly touched, and if the "backbone" of our natural life is truly broken, we will immediately see that our hands and our mouth can no longer be free. The Body will restrict us, and we will no longer be able to rebel against God's appointed authority.

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May the Lord deliver us from mere doctrines. May the Lord lead us on to a full knowledge of the Body of Christ. May this feeling follow us all the time so that we no longer act according to our own will or live foolishly or carelessly. If we do this, we will receive a rich supply from the Body, and through the Body we will express the Lord's testimony on the earth.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## PLEASING THE LORD

**•Scripture Reading: Gal. 1:6-10; 1 Thes. 2:4; 2 Cor. 5:9**

Gal. 1:6-10 "I marvel that you are so quickly removing from Him who has called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, Which is not another gospel, only there are some who trouble you and desire to pervert the gospel of Christ. But if even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, now also I say again, If anyone announces to you a gospel beyond that which you have received, let him be accursed. For am I now trying to win the assent of men or of God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ."

1 Thes. 2:4 "But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts."

2 Cor. 5:9 "Therefore also we are determined, whether at home or abroad, to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him."

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Every servant of God must have a fundamental attitude of pleasing the Lord. In Galatians 1:10 Paul said, "Am I seeking to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ." When Paul spoke this word, on the one hand, he was very grieved because the Galatian believers had turned away from his gospel so soon, and on the other hand, this word expressed his serious attitude towards the Lord. When Paul went to Galatia the first time to preach the gospel, he told the people there that a man is saved by the grace of the Lord and that salvation is through faith and not through the law. At that time, many believed in the Lord. They loved Paul so much that they were willing to pluck out their eyes and give them to him (4:15). But later another group of men came and

told the Galatians that it was not enough to believe and have grace; one must be perfected by the law as well (3:1-3). Hence, Paul warned them seriously, "But if even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed" (1:8). The Galatians were deeply deceived by these people. Even while Paul was struggling to defend the truth of the gospel, they became dissatisfied with him. This forced Paul to say, "For am I now trying to win the assent of men or of God? Or am I seeking to please men?" (1:10). "So then have I become your enemy by presenting the truth to you?" (4:16). Brothers and sisters, one fundamental desire of a servant of God is to please Him. If Paul was willing to compromise a little and not be strict with the Lord's gospel, agreeing that salvation is not only by faith, but also through the law and according to one's work, he would have sacrificed the truth in exchange for the approval of the Galatians and would have won their favor. If he had done this, he would not have had to pay any price. But he could not do this, nor would he do this. He could not be unfaithful to the Lord. He did not care for man's "face"; instead he rebuked them soberly saying, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly portrayed crucified?" (3:1). "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (5:4).

Paul's attitude should be the attitude of every servant of God. Who are the servants of God? Many people think that the preachers of the gospel and the teachers of the truth are the servants of God and that other believers are not the servants of God. But what does the Bible say? The Bible tells us that all of God's redeemed ones are servants of God. Every child of God is a servant of God. In Leviticus 25:55 God says, "For the sons of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants, whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am Jehovah your God." This tells us clearly that as long as a person was an Israelite and was brought out of Egypt, he was a servant of God. Not only were Moses and Joshua the servants of God, but all the Israelites who were led out of Egypt were the servants of God as well. As long as we are saved and as long as we are children of God, we are servants of God. We need two kinds of understanding about the blood of the Lord, and we need two kinds of knowledge about the Lord Himself. The blood of

the Lord Jesus washes away our sins. At the same time, His blood also purchases us. The Lord Jesus is our Savior. At the same time, He is also our Lord. We have to see that Jesus is our Lord and we are His servants; we are purchased by His blood. We need to have a thorough knowledge concerning the Lord's right over us, and we ought to live for Him. All those who have truly seen the love of the cross have a love for the Lord in their hearts. If a man truly loves the Lord, there will surely be an expression of love; he will surely try to please the Lord.

Why do some Christians not please the Lord? A big reason is that they love the glory of men more than the glory of God. John 12 shows us that many of the rulers believed in the Lord, yet because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him so that they would not be put out of the synagogue (v. 42). They dared not become Christians openly. The problem with them was that they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God (v. 43). Brothers and sisters, are we like this? Do we love the glory of men more than the glory of God? Some Christians dare not confess the name of the Lord Jesus in public. They dare not say that they are Christians in public, and they dare not give thanks for their meals in public. They have long ceased living a life of praying and studying the Word, and they have long ceased meeting with Christians. Why? This is because they are afraid of men's mocking. They do not want others to say that they are superstitious. They love the glory of men more than the glory of God. Brothers and sisters, if you truly love the Lord, you will surely want to please Him. If you really want to please Him, you cannot love the glory of men more than the glory of God.

A Christian who pleases the Lord is faithful to the Lord. He should also be faithful to His truth. In upholding the truth, Paul ignored all opposition from men. He said, "So then have I become your enemy by presenting the truth to you?" (Gal. 4:16). He would rather suffer mistreatment from others than discount the truth. He would rather sacrifice himself than sacrifice the truth. He would rather see himself suffer than see the truth suffer.

In the past, many Christians have paid a great price to adhere to the Scripture in everything, to accept everything that is scriptural and to reject everything that is unscriptural. Brothers and sisters, if you compromise a little, you will suffer less attack and mockery. But if you are going to stand for the truth,

you cannot avoid difficulty, and you cannot evade the price.

A brother once saw the meaning of baptism from the Bible, and he wanted to be baptized. But his father would not agree to it. He struggled in his heart very much. If he went ahead with his baptism, he would hurt his father's heart. But if he was not baptized, he would betray the Lord's command. While he was tossing and turning on his bed and being tormented by such thoughts, the Lord gave him a word: "He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). It immediately became a matter to him of paying the price. Was he going to please his parents, or was he going to please God? Thank the Lord! The Lord's love conquered him, and he was baptized. This brother's story tells us one thing: If we are to please the Lord, we have to obey His truth in an absolute way. If Paul compromised a little with the Galatian believers, if he made some concessions and was not absolute with the truth, and if he said a few ambiguous words, he could have won the favor of the Galatians. But Paul reckoned the cost. He would not please men at any cost; he would only please God. Otherwise, he would not be a servant of God. He would rather become their enemy than withhold the truth from them.

Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy the truth, and sell it not;/also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." Truth is something that we have to buy; it is something that has a price. If we want to please the Lord and stand for the truth, we have to pay the price. If we are clear about the truth, we have to obey it all the way. Many Christians cannot pay the price because they want to please men; they try to dodge the truth. Brothers and sisters, we can only buy the truth; we cannot sell the truth. At the same time, truth can never be changed. Truth is like a pillar in a house. A pillar is not like a window or a door, which can be enlarged or reduced at will. A pillar cannot be moved; it cannot be made higher or lower, and it cannot be tilted. In other words, truth can never be changed. If we cannot pay the price to obey any part of the truth, we can only condemn ourselves and confess our weakness; we cannot lower the standard of the truth just because we cannot make it or because it creates dire consequences for us. If we lower it, we will bear serious responsibility before the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we have seen that all of God's children are His servants.

The Lord's Word tells us that a slave is not greater than his master (John 15:20). Whatever pathway our Lord took on earth, we have to take the same one. We have to suffer everything that He suffered on earth. If we acknowledge that we are His slaves, we should have a fundamental attitude of pleasing Him. If we do not settle this question, sooner or later we will not be able to go on in this way. Countless numbers of people have fallen by the wayside because they love man's glory more than God's glory. Brothers and sisters, human glory has a very deep influence on us. We have to go through countless lessons and dealings before this will be purged out of our system. From the day man ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he has had a fundamental problem within—he loves the glory of men. Every one of us has his own throne, and this throne is built upon the glory of men. But if we want to be faithful servants of the Lord, we have to resign our throne. Otherwise, we cannot serve our Lord.

Hebrews 12:2 says that the Lord Jesus despised shame and chose the cross. Brothers and sisters, the cross is not just death, but shame. A clear mark that the cross has done a breaking work in a person is that he is no longer afraid of shame. Many Christians fail because they are afraid of shame. They love men's glory and are not willing to renounce their throne. Brothers and sisters, do not think that we are born humble and meek. We do not know how proud we are! We do not realize how much God's grace has to work in us before we will come down from our throne and before we will be delivered from the glory of men. May the Lord grant us the mercy to have a heart that pleases Him so that by His grace we can be faithful servants, looking forward to the day when, at the reckoning before the Lord's judgment seat, we will hear His voice saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

# MESSAGE FIVE

## THE MAN OF GOD AND THE OLD PROPHET

### •Outline

- **One—Three**

### •Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 13:1-32

1 Kings 13:1-32 "And at that moment there came a man of God from Judah by the word of Jehovah to Bethel while Jeroboam was standing at the altar to burn incense. And he cried out against the altar by the word of Jehovah and said, Altar, O altar, thus says Jehovah: Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he will sacrifice upon you the priests of the high places who burn incense upon you, and men's bones will they burn upon you. And he gave a sign that day, saying, This is the sign that Jehovah has spoken: The altar here will be torn apart, and the ashes that are upon it will be poured out. And when the king heard the word of the man of God that he cried out against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from over the altar, saying, Lay hold of him! And his hand, which he had stretched out against him, withered, and he could not draw it back to himself. And the altar was torn apart, and the ashes were poured forth from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of Jehovah. And the king responded and said to the man of God, Entreat Jehovah your God, I beg you, and intercede for me that my hand may be restored to me. And the man of God entreated Jehovah, and the king's hand was restored to him as it had been formerly. Then the king said to the man of God, Come home with me, and have something to eat; and I will give you a gift. But the man of God said to the king, If you gave me half your household, I would not go with you; and I will not eat food nor drink water in this place; For thus was I commanded by the word of Jehovah, saying, You shall not eat food nor drink water, nor shall you return by the way that you came. So he went by another way

and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel. Now there was a certain old prophet dwelling in Bethel. And his sons came and related to him all the things that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words that he had spoken to the king, they also related to their father. And their father said to them, Which way did he go? Now his sons had seen which way the man of God, who came from Judah, had gone. And he said to his sons, Saddle the donkey for me. So they saddled the donkey for him, and he rode on it. And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under a terebinth. And he said to him, Are you the man of God who came from Judah? And he said, I am. And he said to him, Come home with me, and eat some food. But he said, I cannot return with you and go with you; neither will I eat food nor drink water with you in this place. For I was told by the word of Jehovah, You shall not eat food nor drink water there, nor shall you return by going on the way that you came there. And the old man said, I also am a prophet like you, and an angel has spoken to me by the word of Jehovah, saying, Bring him back with you to your house that he may eat food and drink water. He lied to him. So he returned with him and ate food in his house and drank water. And while they were sitting at the table, the word of Jehovah came to the prophet who brought him back; And he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, Thus says Jehovah, Because you have rebelled against the word of Jehovah and did not keep the command that Jehovah your God commanded you, But returned and ate food and drank water in the place concerning which He said to you, Do not eat food and do not drink water; your corpse shall not come to the grave of your fathers. And after he had eaten food and had drunk water, the old man saddled the donkey for him, that is, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And as he went, a lion met him on the way and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion stood beside the corpse also. And some men soon passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road and the lion standing beside the corpse, and they went and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, It is the man of God, who rebelled against the word of Jehovah; and Jehovah has given him to the lion, which tore him apart and killed him, according to the word of Jehovah

which He spoke to him. Then he spoke to his sons, saying, Saddle the donkey for me; and they saddled it. And he went and found his corpse thrown on the road and the donkey and the lion standing beside the corpse; the lion had not eaten the corpse, nor had it torn the donkey apart. And the prophet took up the corpse of the man of God and laid it on the donkey and brought it back; and it was brought to the city of the old prophet for mourning and for burial. And he laid his corpse in his own grave and mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother! And after he had buried him, he spoke to his sons, saying, When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; beside his bones lay my bones. For the word that he cried out by the word of Jehovah against the altar that is in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria shall surely come to pass."

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The story recorded in 1 Kings 13 is a sobering story; it is also a tragic story. In it we see two persons—a man of God and an old prophet. Both men were used by God, but both had a tragic ending. The lesson we draw from these two men is a very grave one.

## ONE

The old prophet was a prophet who was once used by God; however, God could not use him any longer. Jeroboam sinned in Bethel, and God intended to warn him. But He did not ask the old prophet in Bethel to speak for Him; instead, He sent the man of God from Judah to speak for Him. This means that the old prophet could no longer be used by God. The "oldness" of the old prophet does not imply spiritual maturity or the abundance of spiritual experience but staleness. He was no longer useful in the hand of God. When God wanted to speak with Jeroboam, He could only go to the man of God; He could no longer use the old prophet. Man of God implies a person in fellowship with God. Fellowship is the basis of light. Whenever fellowship ceases, light stops. The old prophet had a spiritual history; he was once a prophet. But he lost his fellowship with God and became an old prophet. God could no longer use him. What a

sobering thing this is!

The spiritual condition of many brothers and sisters today is the same as their condition eight or ten years ago. They have not made any spiritual progress before the Lord. Some have a good mind and appear to have made some progress. Actually the progress is not spiritual progress at all. They speak what they do not understand. Even as they are speaking, they do not understand what they are saying. They only have mental knowledge but not genuine light. They have picked up many spiritual terms, but in God's eyes they have not made any genuine spiritual progress at all. Some people received some light ten years ago, and their condition was quite proper before the Lord at that time. But when you meet them ten years later, they do not have any fresh light, and there is no spiritual growth at all. They are prophets, but old prophets through whom God can no longer speak. God is a God who is always working. The Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17). The light we received twenty years ago, ten years ago, or even five years ago is not sufficient to be our guide today. If we remain in our past experiences, we will have no way to go on.

We must pay attention to this one question: How can we not be put aside by the Lord? How can we preserve ourselves from being rejected by the Lord? The question of freshness is a big one before the Lord. The question of spiritual riches is also a big one before the Lord. Many times we are too old and too poor spiritually!

## TWO

The old prophet lived in Bethel. What was the condition of Bethel at that time? In Bethel Jeroboam sacrificed to the calves he made, appointed priests of the lowest people, who were not of the sons of Levi, made offerings upon the altar, and burned incense on the days and months that he had devised of his own heart (1 Kings 12:28-33). All these things offended the Lord. Jeroboam was afraid that the people would offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. Therefore, he set up another place of worship outside Jerusalem. He was not worshipping other gods; he was still worshipping the God who led the Israelites out of Egypt. But he

worshipped according to his own way outside Jerusalem, and for that the Lord condemned him. He did not sin alone but led many kings into the same sin (see 1 Kings 16:19, 31; 22:52; 2 Kings 13:2, etc.). The sin that Jeroboam committed in Bethel was a very serious sin. The old prophet was living in Bethel, and the acts of Jeroboam were committed before his very eyes, yet he did not consider them as sins. This is too serious! A prophet speaks for God because he understands God's heart's desire. But here was an old prophet who did not understand God's heart's desire. Those who do not know God's heart's desire can never speak for God. God cannot commission anyone to speak for Him who does not know His heart. Therefore, He had to send the man of God.

The old prophet did not see any sin in the worship at Bethel. This proves that something was wrong with him. Brothers and sisters, do not think that practicing love is being a nice person. There is no such thing. If you think that this and that are good, that it is good to worship God in Jerusalem and equally good to worship in Bethel, you have not seen anything and you are sick. Many people are like the old prophet; their eyes are blinded, and they are sick. They do not see the things that offend God, and they think that it is good to worship God any way they like. They do not understand why it is wrong to worship in Bethel. Brothers and sisters, can you say that this is love? A doctor can care for his patient and love his patient, but he cannot cheat his patient and tell him that he is not sick. If a doctor says that a sick man is not sick, it proves that there is something wrong with the doctor himself; his eyes are blind. The old prophet lived in Bethel, yet he did not see the sin of Bethel. Sin was before him, yet he did not have any feeling for it. What a tragedy this is! How terrible this is!

## THREE

But what was tragic was not just the condition of the old prophet but the damage the man of God suffered under the old prophet! The Lord charged the man of God saying, "Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest" (1 Kings 13:9). The man of God remembered this charge and rejected the offer of the king. He also rejected the first invitation of the old prophet. Yet he was deceived when the old prophet said, "I am a prophet also as

thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water" (v. 18). He thought that the old prophet was more experienced than he, and he thought that he should listen to him. He returned with the old prophet and ate bread and drank water in his house. The man of God disobeyed the Lord's charge because of the word of the old prophet, and he was killed by a lion. He was very clear about the Lord's charge but was affected by the words, "I am a prophet also," and he became confused. Here we must learn a grave lesson. Once a servant of the Lord has received a clear commandment from the Lord, he should never listen to an old prophet whose word does not match the Lord's charge.

Paul's charge to the Galatian believers was along the same principle. "If even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). The gospel which Paul preached was not according to man but according to the revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12). But there was another group of people who tried to change the gospel of Christ. They preached another gospel to the Galatian believers. Paul warned the Galatian believers not to be deceived by them. He saw through the deception of the ones who came as servants of God and who tried to distract others with seemingly spiritual words. He warned the Galatians with severe words. He said, "But if even we..." This means that even if Paul himself went to them and preached a gospel different from what he had been preaching, they should not believe in it; they should only believe in the gospel which came from the revelation of Jesus Christ. They should not put their trust in the name "Paul." If he, Paul, were to preach a gospel different from the one he had received from God, they should not believe in it. Paul knew that many people were easily influenced by names; it was easier for them to believe in man's name than in God's word. Therefore, he took a stand; he spoke on behalf of God's truth. He did not give any ground to man or to himself. He wanted them to follow God's truth completely and not man's name. Paul struggled to defend the truth; he was absolutely for God and not for himself at all. He maintained God's truth, not his own name. The only reason he opposed the deceivers was because they had adulterated the word of God and had led the believers into error. He showed us

that we should stand on God's side and choose what words we should receive and what words we should reject. If anyone teaches anything that is contrary to God's truth, we cannot listen to him no matter who he is.

Paul said, "But if...an angel out of heaven..." He reminded them that they could not even lightly accept the words of the angels. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, when Paul spoke about the false apostles, he said, "For such ones are false apostles, deceitful workers, transfiguring themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transfigures himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if also his ministers transfigure themselves into ministers of righteousness." An "angel of light" comes with a mask of benevolence, and it is easy for a man to drop his guard. The Galatians were deceived after they had heard the gospel of the Lord because these ones claimed that they were also preaching the gospel, and that they were zealous for the law of God. Their words seemed persuasive, and the Galatians who had heard the truth were deceived.

These deceivers often creep into the church to damage men's faith and to entice them from the Lord's way. We must guard against them watchfully. They are able to deceive others through their false spirituality and their pretended love for the Lord. They speak about "God's revelations" and "God's will," and they can teach seemingly correct doctrines. They confuse truth with falsehood and easily deceive others. Brothers and sisters, we should have a watchful heart and discerning power; we should be faithful to God's Word and keep the faith that has been once delivered to us. We should reject all the "gospels" of those who adulterate the Lord's word, no matter who they are, and we must ask the Lord to keep us in His truth.

This old prophet did not have any feeling concerning the great sin that Jeroboam had committed. Yet he cheated others with his title of "prophet." He had lost his fellowship with God, yet he still claimed that "an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord." The failure of the man of God lies in the fact that he did not keep the word which he had received directly from God; he was shaken by the vain name of the old prophet and deceived by his lies; therefore, he fell into tragedy.

The old prophet was so fallen that he even lied to a man sent from God. When they were sitting together at the feast, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet. Does this mean that he had become spiritual again? No. God was dealing with the man of God who had disobeyed His word. He no longer had any demand on the old prophet; God already had put him aside. After the man of God was killed by the lion, the old prophet buried him in his own grave and charged his sons to bury him next to the man of God when he died. The old prophet believed that the word which the Lord charged the man of God to speak against the altar in Bethel and against all the houses of the high places which were in the cities of Samaria would surely come to pass. Yet he himself simply waited to die there!

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Brothers and sisters, we should remember a few things from this sober and tragic story. First, once a man has lost his fellowship with God, he becomes old, blind, and stale. Second, even though a man has been used by the Lord, once he departs from God, he must no longer deceive others with his "qualifications." Third, once a man disobeys God's word and stays in a place that he should not stay, spiritual death will result. Fourth, any spiritual utterance must match the word of God. Otherwise, even if the words come from an old prophet or from an angel, one should reject them resolutely.

## MESSAGE SIX

# THE WORK OF GOD

## ●Outline

- **●Man Cannot Work The Works Of God**
- **●God Having Worked**
- **●Man Working Together With God**
- **●The Foundation Of The Work**
- **●The Material For The Work**
- **●The Work Of The Holy Spirit**
  1. **The Beginning of the Work—Pentecost**
  2. **The Place of the Work—the Spirit of Man**
  3. **The Direction of the Work—from the Center to the Circumference**
  4. **The Method of the Work—Revelation**
  5. **The Lines of the Work**
  6. **The Pattern and Goal of the Work**
- **●The Proper Attitude Of Those Who Are Being Worked On**
- **●Those Who Convey God's Word**
- **●Those Who Listen To The Word**

## ●Scripture Reading: John 6:28-29; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 1:11-12, 16; 1 Cor. 3:9-15

John 6:28-29 "Then they said to Him, What shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom He has sent."

Eph. 2:10 "For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them."

Gal. 1:11-12 "For I make known to you, brothers, concerning the gospel announced by me, that it is not according to man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation by Jesus Christ."

16 "To reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,"

1 Cor. 3:9-15 "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's cultivated land, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it. For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, The work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; If anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

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## MAN CANNOT WORK THE WORKS OF GOD

In John 6:28 a group of people asked the Lord Jesus what they should do that they might work the works of God. They were zealous for God and wanted to do God's work. But they did not know what it was to work the works of God. They thought that once they knew what to do, they could do it. Once the question of "what to do" was settled, they thought that they could engage themselves in God's work. The question of whether or not they could actually do the work was not part of their consideration at all; they only needed to know what to do. Here we see man's desire to participate in God's work. He feels that he can work God's work; he thinks that his ability is great enough to take up God's work.

But the Lord's answer was entirely different from man's question. The Lord said, "This is the work of God, that you believe into Him whom He has sent" (v.

29). While man boasted of what he could do, the Lord replied that man ought to believe. Man's trying to do something means that he wants to prove his ability; man's believing means that he acknowledges his inability to do anything. Believing is receiving (John 1:12), and believing into the One whom God sent means believing into the Lord Jesus. There is no question of human merit or human ability. Man cannot do anything; God has done it all. All that man needs to do is receive, stretch out his hand, and take in the Son of God. Faith signifies that God has done all the work; He has given us His only begotten Son. There is no need for man to do anything; all he has to do is accept what God has done.

## GOD HAVING WORKED

Following this the Lord said, "This is the work of God." The ignorant ones thought that they could work the works of God. They were zealous and trying to do something for God. But the Lord told them that the work of God is to believe into Him whom God has sent. This is the work of God. It is not what man has done for God but what God has done Himself. It is the work of God and not the work of man. For man to believe in the Lord Jesus is a work of God; it is not something that man does but something that God does. God's work can only be done by God alone. Man cannot work God's work; he has no part in God's work.

Consider the story of Martha and Mary. It serves as a good illustration of our point. Martha was busily serving the Lord. She did a great deal of work and was so busy that she asked the Lord to send her sister over to help her. Perhaps she thought that by expending so much effort, paying such a price, and suffering so much hardship she would be considered as having served the Lord and having done some work for Him. Yet the Lord did not praise her. Instead He said, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but there is need of one thing, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

What had Mary done? The Bible says that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His word. Sitting and listening do not constitute a work at all. She was not as busy as her sister; she was quietly sitting at the Lord's feet and drawing near to Him. Listening to His word is receiving His word. The Lord's word is

spirit and life, and He dispenses life to men through His word. Mary was receiving the Lord's word and affording Him the opportunity to operate on her. She was giving the Lord the opportunity to dispense Himself into her through the word. Mary was just a receiving vessel. The One doing the work was the Lord, not Mary. She, the person, was the work of the Lord; she was the object of the Lord's work. Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Thank the Lord that we are not the work of man but the work of God. God's work is fully trustworthy. Oh, what a glorious fact that we are the work of God!

## MAN WORKING TOGETHER WITH GOD

Does this mean that man has no place in the work of God? Why did Paul say, "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9)? He asked the Corinthian believers, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" (9:1). We must consider the way Paul became a fellow worker of God. First Corinthians 3 shows us that God is the Lord of the work and that all the workers are under His direction.

Paul told us in Galatians that the word he preached was according to revelation because it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. Through revelation, Paul received genuine spiritual knowledge of Christ. As a result, he did not confer with flesh and blood; instead, he preached the Christ whom he knew through revelation to the Gentiles. Paul was able to work because he first allowed God to work in him; he allowed God to work Himself into him. First God revealed His Son through the Spirit in Paul; he came to know Christ according to spiritual reality and not according to flesh (2 Cor. 5:16). Then Paul was able to preach this Christ he had received to others. Paul did not preach an objective Christ; he did not preach an intangible Christ. He preached a Christ whom he had experienced personally. Christ was as real in him as his very self. Christ was in him, and he was in Christ. Christ was in his thoughts, his words, and his actions. Christ was the Lord within Paul, and Paul was Christ's outward expression. You may say that he was Paul. You may also say that Christ was seen in him and that he was Christ, for indeed he was taken possession of by Christ (Phil. 3:12, Darby's New Translation). Paul's preaching was based on what he had. The

measure of Christ that he knew became the measure of Christ he preached to others.

Therefore, being a fellow worker of God does not mean that we should work for God. Rather, it means that we should first allow God to work Christ into us. Only then can we tell others about the Christ we know through revelation. The work is still the Lord's; man is only there to report His work. Paul asked the Corinthian saints, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Their being in the Lord was the result of Paul's preaching the Christ he knew to them and of their receiving.

What was the message Paul preached among the Corinthians? He said, "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). This was the central message which he preached. Here we see the two aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believers. On the negative side, there is the removing of the old creation from the believers through the cross. On the positive side, there is the constitution of Christ into the believers through revelation for the building up of the new creation. What Paul preached is the same as what the Holy Spirit is revealing in the believers today. Just as the Holy Spirit revealed the knowledge of Christ and His crucifixion to Paul, so also the Holy Spirit is revealing the knowledge of Christ and His crucifixion to us today. We repeat that the work is the Lord's; man is here only to speak of His work within man.

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORK

This is why Paul said that the foundation of the work is Jesus Christ and that no one else can lay another foundation. He also said that we are God's cultivated land and His building. If the seed sown in the cultivated land is Christ, the harvest must also be Christ. If the foundation of the building is Christ, the building itself must also be according to Christ. At the time of our regeneration, God put the life of Christ into us, and we received a life which we did not have before. The life which we received at the time of regeneration is an additional life. It is something added to us at the time of regeneration. This is the work of God. God's work in man is absolutely based on this added life. This life is Christ (Col.

3:4), and it is the foundation of the work of God. Just as the regenerated life is absolutely of God, the growth and maturity of this life can only be brought about by God (2 Cor. 5:5). Man's hand has no part in this, and even the best of what man has cannot participate in this. The greatest responsibility that man has is to cooperate with God and not afford any hindrance to His work.

Sanctification is merely the continuation of this life, and victory is merely the outflow of this life in overcoming sin, the flesh, the world, and Satan. The growth and maturity of this life are simply the reigning and ruling of this life over the whole being. The life we received at the time of regeneration is the beginning of the work of God. Therefore, the continuation of this work cannot be affected by anything other than this life. Brothers and sisters, especially those who are called to the Lord's work, we have to be very careful. If we really want to be fellow workers of God, our work must be this pure. We need to deny the best that we have in fear and trembling so that God's work will not suffer any mixture. We must remember that without the revelation of the Holy Spirit, without seeing and experiencing something in the reality of the spirit, we cannot do God's work.

Only a regenerated person can testify of the Lord's salvation. Those who do not have the experience of regeneration cannot do this work. Victory, sanctification, the filling of the Spirit, and the reigning of the indwelling Christ can only be testified by those who by grace have passed through these experiences in a genuine way. Even while they are testifying, they must still trust in the working of the Holy Spirit. Without the working of the Spirit, there will not be any anointing from the Lord. Dependence is an absolute necessity in spiritual work. Unless the Spirit of the Lord works, no work of man will accomplish anything.

Please remember that God's work is first God working in us and then God working out of us through the Spirit. Only such a work will build the church.

## THE MATERIAL FOR THE WORK

First Corinthians 3:12 tells us that the working material of some people is gold, silver, and precious stones, while the working material of other people is wood, grass, and stubble. The day will come and reveal everything by fire; the

fire will prove of what sort is each one's work. We know that wood, grass, and stubble do not remain once they are burned. But gold, silver, and precious stones are things that cannot be burned away. Gold signifies something of God; it is the work of God. Silver signifies redemption; it is the work of the Lord on the cross. The precious stones signify the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the Holy Spirit's constitution of the life of God in man through revelation, blending God and man into one. This is our subjective experience today. The precious stones are compounds. In order to be compounded together, there is the need of intense heat. After this, there is still need of a carving work by the hand of the craftsmen before we can have some shining precious stones. This is how God constitutes Himself in the believers. On the one hand, God uses the environment to burn the believers. On the other hand, they must pass through God's carving hand, which removes what He does not approve of and retains what He does approve of through the revelation of the Spirit. Only then will they shine and glorify God.

Those who have become precious stones, who are both human and divine, are the masterpieces of God in Christ. These are the ones in whom God can trust. First Corinthians 7:25-40 is clearly Paul's own words because he said clearly that he did not have the Lord's command. Yet at the end he said that he had the Spirit of God. For a period of time, Madam Guyon found that as soon as she set her mind on something within herself, it was accomplished around her. This is because her mind had become the mind of God. Although the words of these ones issue from themselves, God honors their words. He is not afraid of joining Himself to them. They have lost themselves in God as a drop of water has lost itself in the ocean; the water and the ocean have become inseparable. These are precious stones; they are the consummation of the work of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God.

We should humble ourselves before the Lord and allow Him to work on us, to constitute the life of Christ into us. Only then will we be able to help others, and only then will they know the constitution of the Holy Spirit. This is the work of precious stones.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Now let us consider the work of the Holy Spirit in man.

## 1. The Beginning of the Work—Pentecost

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit—the Worker—descended and began His work on earth, convicting men of sin and turning them to believe in Jesus. He continues His work by living within the believers, enabling them to grow in spiritual stature and to mature in life.

## 2. The Place of the Work—the Spirit of Man

The Holy Spirit abides in man's spirit. This spirit is the place from which He works; it is the center of His operation. All spiritual work begins in man's spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is twofold: the direct work and the indirect work. The direct work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God's desire in man's spirit, then to enlighten man's soul so that his mind will understand, and finally to direct the body to execute God's will. The indirect work of the Holy Spirit is God's speaking to man through all kinds of circumstances. At times He uses the Bible, and at other times He uses angels, persons, things, or events. For example, He spoke to Brother Lawrence through the barren trees in winter and convinced him of God's resurrection power. Our wise God speaks to man in many ways. Yet one thing is certain: The word spoken must be transmitted into man's spirit before it will have any genuine effect on his spiritual life.

## 3. The Direction of the Work—from the Center to the Circumference

God's work always begins from the center and goes to the circumference. God reveals Himself within man's center, his spirit, then extends to his soul, enlightening his mind, and finally directs his body to execute His will. Take the matter of sanctification as an example. The God we know in our spirit is absolutely holy. This holy God is joined to our spirit through the Holy Spirit (we become one spirit with the Lord). From this spirit God enlightens our mind, so that our mind begins to understand. The power of holiness thus begins to operate in our mind. All unholy thoughts are rejected, and anything that is incompatible with God is immediately denied. In this way, the soul becomes sanctified. At the same time, the effect reaches the body, particularly the eyes. The inward sanctifying power will direct the eyes, so that they can no longer

look at anything that is contrary to holiness. The eyes will shun everything unholy. When the Holy Spirit speaks through the ones who know holiness in such a genuine way, their words will convey the sanctification that they have seen and experienced, and they will produce an effect in others.

## 4. The Method of the Work—Revelation

Revelation is the method by which God works. Revelation is something of the spirit. Hence, the spirit and not the mind comes first. The spirit and life take priority, while the mind and the intellect follow. Many people use their mind and intellect to seek after God's will. The result is confusion in the mind. They will never know God's will this way because the method is wrong. The first thing God wants us to do is to wait for His revelation in our spirit. After this, He will enlighten our mind. Only then will we know God's will. We must remember that the mind is secondary and not primary in spiritual matters. This does not mean that we should not use the mind, but we should use it as a secondary means.

We need to consider a few things that constitute a spiritual vision. God's Word shows us that at least three things are needed. The first is revelation. The meaning of revelation is an unveiling or a removing of the covering. Suppose that there is a book in a cabinet, yet it cannot be seen because the door of the cabinet is closed. The door must be opened before the book can be revealed. The second thing is light. If this room does not have any light, one cannot see anything even when something is placed before his eyes. The third is opened eyes. A thing may be uncovered and light may be present, but one cannot see anything if his eyes are closed. The Holy Spirit unveils the reality of Christ to man through revelation. At the same time, He enlightens the mind in man's soul. The mind is man's inner eyes. As long as a man does not have the eyes of the Laodiceans, he will see. The Laodiceans did not see because they felt that they had something; they thought that they had something. Once there is a thought of having something, that thought becomes a veil to the eyes, and a person becomes blind. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.

## 5. The Lines of the Work

There are two lines in God's work. On the negative line, God's work leads

man to a knowledge of himself through revelation. Once man sees himself, he will apply the cross to deal with sin, the flesh, and the world by the power of the Spirit. On the positive line, the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to man's spirit and dispenses Christ to man. Man receives Christ by faith and abides in Him, allowing His life to be wrought into his being. The measure of revelation and knowledge of Christ determines the measure of the stature of one's spiritual life. The destination of these two lines of work is the purifying of the "self" to the point that nothing of the "self" remains and only Christ occupies the whole being.

### 6. The Pattern and Goal of the Work

When Moses built the tabernacle, God showed him the pattern on the mount. He could not change anything; everything had to be built according to the pattern of God's instruction. Today the building work of the Holy Spirit in us is according to the pattern of Christ. Nothing apart from Christ can be brought in. The work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely pure, and His work is to make men as pure as the Lord (1 John 3:3).

## THE PROPER ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO ARE BEING WORKED ON

Mary had a proper attitude. There are at least four aspects to a proper attitude.

(1) She was at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and not at the feet of anyone else. She was drawing near to the Lord. This is the shortest and quickest way to grow in life. No method is better than coming to Him moment by moment, loving Him, worshipping Him, and unceasingly fellowshipping with Him and remaining in His presence. Many who know God in a deep way have found this way. Madam Guyon said, "Our drawing near to God constitutes all service." Paul also charged us to pray unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17). If a man unceasingly fellowships with the indwelling Christ with an unveiled face, he will be changed into the Lord's likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

(2) She sat at the feet of the Lord. This means that she put herself in a humble position. Humility is a crucial condition for receiving God's blessing. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). Humility is not

belittling ourselves; humility is ignoring ourselves, negating ourselves, and considering ourselves as nothing. If we draw near to God with deep humility, He will give grace to us.

(3) She was sitting down. She was not busy like her sister. Quietness is often the source of spiritual strength. The greatest challenge man faces is being quiet before the Lord. His eyes and thoughts often are distracted to the outside world. Of all the members in the body, the eyes are the busiest, and of all the faculties in the soul, the mind is the busiest. Those who are busy cannot receive revelation easily. A wandering mind and vacillating thoughts are like restless waves on a lake; the lake will never be able to clearly reflect the flowers and trees on the shore. If a man wants to have the Lord's image imprinted in him and to be transformed into the Lord's image, quietness is a necessity.

(4) She was listening to the Lord's word. The words that the Lord speaks are spirit and life. Through this word, the Lord dispenses Himself to men. Her listening to the Lord's word afforded the Lord the opportunity to communicate Himself to her so that she would gain the Lord and become like Him. She was continually receiving the Lord Himself. She did not just hear words; she was meeting the Lord. Brothers and sisters, it is a pity for anyone to just hear man's voice in a sermon and not meet the Christ behind the voice.

## THOSE WHO CONVEY GOD'S WORD

In conveying God's word to others, a servant of God has to take care of the following points:

(1) He should speak in the Spirit. On the one hand, he should be in fear and trembling concerning himself. On the other hand, he should be strictly controlled, restricted, and directed by the indwelling Spirit. Anything spiritual must be spoken in the Spirit; otherwise, it will make the listener feel extremely uncomfortable. Your inner sense (the spiritual consciousness) will tell you if the source is wrong, even though the words may be right. There may be nothing wrong with the wording, but the condition of the speaker may be wrong. When this happens, God will not seal His presence on the words. A more descriptive way of putting it is to call this a jewel of gold in a swine's snout (Prov. 11:22); the

two things do not match one another.

(2) He should not speak under an atmosphere dominated by the flesh. When others are jesting and there is an absence of any spiritual atmosphere whatsoever, one cannot speak. This is like putting an egg in a refrigerator; it is impossible to hatch an egg this way.

(3) He should dispense spiritual reality to others. God's revelation always conveys spiritual things, which are as real as physical things. A cup is an object, and a chair is an object; they are real things. Spiritual things are just as real as physical objects. They are not theories or philosophies. In conveying the word, one should present real things to others.

(4) He should ask the Lord for suitable spiritual utterance to convey spiritual things. For example, in explaining self-analysis, Brother Lawrence said, "Self-analysis is the dying flicker left behind from self-love; it is the activity of self-love under the zealous mask of one's pursuit for perfection." Self-analysis is an undesirable element in our spiritual experience; it is a kind of introspection. Brother Lawrence explained this spiritual thing with a spiritual utterance. This is what it means to interpret spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:13).

(5) Spiritual things can only be understood by a spiritual man; a carnal man cannot understand them (1 Cor. 2:14). Since there is nothing spiritual within the carnal man, he cannot understand them. The spiritual man has the real thing within him; therefore, he can understand. Suppose you met a man who had never seen a watch before. It would not matter how much you explained what a watch is like; he would not understand. But if you showed him a watch and then told him what it was and what it was used for, he would understand. Hence, one must first see a thing before he can understand anything that is spoken concerning it. The same is true with spiritual things. For example, the matter of regeneration is the first spiritual experience of a Christian. Many people have listened to sermons for years without being regenerated. If you tell them about the experience of regeneration, it is like telling a naturally blind person about the light of the sun; he will not understand it. This is because he does not have that very thing within him. It is no wonder that he cannot understand. Some people are indeed regenerated. They have had the experience of regeneration, yet the

gospel they received was not very complete. They do not know that they are regenerated and saved; they are still hoping to be saved. One needs to tell such people the truth of regeneration. Since they have the fact of regeneration, they will understand it once they hear. Hence, those who convey God's word to others must first show them the real thing and then use suitable words to convey it to them so that the listener will receive not only the spiritual fact but also the spiritual knowledge. The principle that applies to regeneration applies to every subsequent experience. The more revelation a believer receives, the more his life grows. If someone with spiritual utterance points out the revelation, that is, if he points out the very thing he has received, others will not only see, but also understand. If a man preaches the word this way, the church will receive real edification.

## THOSE WHO LISTEN TO THE WORD

Those who listen to the word should also take care of a few things.

(1) Do not expect to hear good teaching. Instead, expect to meet Christ. Listening to a message is not for the purpose of satisfying the intellect but for the purpose of receiving the supply of life. Some people can give very thoughtful, clever, and persuasive messages. Yet they produce no spiritual result. We should not admire this kind of message. The kind of messages that we need are those that enable us to touch something spiritual in an inward way; they must be messages that allow us to touch the Christ behind the words. These words carry life and power, and they bring about a spiritual change as well as an increase of spiritual stature in a person. We have to ask the Lord to give us the grace to have the power of discernment so that we will pursue after the right things.

(2) When we hear something we do not understand, we should wait humbly for the Lord's timing because spiritual understanding has quite much to do with spiritual age. We may not understand it now, but we may understand it a few years later. We should never criticize lightly the things we do not understand, lest we suffer a loss. On the other hand, never think that any spiritual thing is so easy and that we understand it all. We have to realize that it may have taken others a few years to learn certain lessons before they could deliver the

messages they are giving.

(3) Beware of substitutes. When a person is talking about a deer, we may understand it to be a horse. Actually the two things are absolutely different. For example, when we talk about "reality," we are referring to the things that the Holy Spirit reveals to us in Christ. But many people (even those who have been workers for years) have taken practicality to mean reality. If practicality is reality, the men in 1 Corinthians 13:3 have the most reality. But actually, they had no reality at all. (Of course, those who have reality have practicality also.) For example, when some say that they have received light, they mean they have received a new idea in their mind, a concept which they think is reasonable. The source is the intellect, and it is powerless. Other people think that light comes when the eyes see certain physical rays. But none of this is light. The genuine light of life comes from the revelation of the Spirit and is understood in the mind afterwards. It is something real that we see; it is a spiritual reality which the Spirit unveils to us, and it comes with power. Some brothers have stated that with light there is killing, shining, and burning, and it results in a change in life. For example, when a man is saved, the Spirit enlightens him and shows him his sins. He realizes the evil of his sins. He feels ashamed and hates his sins. The sins that we confess under the light can be far more numerous than the sins we know in our mind. This is the light of life. Unfortunately, some have substitutes and have not seen anything genuine. Therefore, we have to humble ourselves and not think that we understand and know everything.

(4) We should humble ourselves before God and pray for the speaker. We should pray that God will release the word of life. We should also pray for the audience and ourselves so that the words we hear will penetrate the depth of our being and become revelation and light to us and that the church will grow in the stature of Christ. This is the cooperation a listener can render to the speaker.

* * * *

Finally, may the Lord be merciful to us, so that we realize that God alone is the One who can accomplish His work; we are merely speaking what we see through revelation. May we learn to cooperate with God, to remove all

hindrances, to change nothing of the pattern on the mount, and to be purified by the light until we are free from all mixture. We need to always look to Him, always trust in Him, and acknowledge with fear and trembling that “we are unprofitable slaves” (Luke 17:10).

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## LEARNING THE LESSONS IN OUR SERVICE

### ●Scripture Reading: Rom. 7:6, 12:1; 40:17-33

Rom. 7:6 "But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter."

12:1 "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service."

Exo. 40:17-33 "And in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was raised up.And Moses raised up the tabernacle and put down its sockets and set up its boards and put in its bars and raised up its pillars.And he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it from above, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.Then he took the Testimony and put it into the Ark, and he set the poles onto the Ark and put the expiation cover upon the Ark above it.And he brought the Ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil for the screen and screened the Ark of the Testimony, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.Then he put the table in the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the tabernacle outside the veil.And he arranged the bread in order upon it before Jehovah, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.Then he put the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle.And he set up the lamps before Jehovah, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.Then he put the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting before the veil,And he burnt fragrant incense on it, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.Then he set up the screen of the entrance to the tabernacle.He also set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meal offering, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.And he set the laver between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water there for

washing.And Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash their hands and their feet with water from it;Whenever they went into the Tent of Meeting and whenever they came near the altar, they washed; as Jehovah had commanded Moses.And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work."

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In learning to serve the Lord in the church, we should be faithful in practical affairs, but our attention should always focus on the increase of the measure of spirituality. The purpose of taking care of business affairs is to dispense spiritual matters to others. If we only have the business side but are short on the spiritual side, we have deviated from the main focus of our service to the Lord. God has entrusted a spiritual responsibility to us. If we pay attention only to business affairs and neglect life, we have incurred a great loss. If we are short in life, our service will be nothing but a series of activities, and we will be in the realm of outward affairs only. If we are short of life, we will not be able to meet the need of God's children. Life takes care of the need of God's children. We must first have genuine growth in life before we can minister life to other brothers and sisters through the practical affairs.

If we want to learn to serve the Lord at all, we have to be trained in spiritual matters. In our service to the Lord, we must not be those who only work but never learn. God wants us to learn and grow. We must grow week by week and time after time. God often allows us to fail in order for us to learn some lessons. If we feel that we have succeeded in anything, God will come in to frustrate our success. We must remind ourselves that business affairs should never occupy all of our attention and that we should never neglect spiritual lessons while we are doing our work. We must learn while we work. The more deeply we learn the lessons, the better it will be, and the more thoroughly we are trained, the better it will be. We should not pay attention to our success. Rather, we should pay attention to learning the lessons.

In the Old Testament, when a priest wanted to serve in the Holy Place, he had to first pass the altar and offer up sacrifices for his own sins. Then he had to

pass the laver where he washed away his defilement with water. Further on he entered the Holy Place. Everything in the Holy Place was gilded and shining. Once he touched anything with his hand, a fingerprint appeared on the utensils. As soon as a man goes into the Holy Place and serves, his real condition is exposed. At the same time, no one can act according to his own will in the Holy Place. Every move must be according to God's ordination and cannot deviate from it at all. If we serve Him, we have to see the need of the blood for the cleansing of our sins and the need of the laver for the cleansing of our defilement, or we should not serve God at all. We also have to put ourselves aside. Only those who have this realization are engaged in genuine service to God. If a man does not have this realization, he is doing something that God does not want him to do, or there is something wrong with him.

If we are truly serving the Lord, we will be full of realization whenever we touch the service. It is possible for us to be short of feeling when we eat with others, but we should have a great deal of feeling when we serve together with others. It is possible for us to have little feeling when we transcribe secular notes, but when we are transcribing spiritual material, we cannot help but be touched to pray, "Lord, I am not qualified to engage in Your work. Lord, cleanse me with Your blood." If a man is flippant and indifferent when he touches the Lord's service, he is not a servant of God. Brothers and sisters, if we are doing what God wants us to do, we will immediately feel that there are things that we have not dropped yet. We still have our flesh, and we still are not perfectly submissive to God. There is still disharmony between us and the brothers and sisters. If we visit someone who confesses that he does not come to the meetings because his temper is too rash and if we rebuke him as soon as we hear this, it means that we do not have a feeling about our own quick temper, and our service will not carry any spiritual weight. We must realize that as soon as a priest enters the tabernacle and the Holy Place, he will see his own sin and defilement. He will not fail to see his true condition because he is in a place that is holy. Once a man enters the Holy Place, the self is exposed. Similarly, when we engage ourselves in the service of the Lord, our true condition will be exposed. The place to know the self is in our service to the Lord. The more a person is sensitive toward God's

service, the more it proves that he is a true servant of the Lord and that he is doing a service to God. If a man is void of feeling, it proves that he is not a servant of God and that the things he is doing are not a service to the Lord.

When a priest who serves the Lord comes to the altar, his sins are exposed. When he comes to the laver, his defilement is exposed, and when he comes into the Holy Place, his whole person is exposed. In the course of our service to the Lord, we see our sins, and we need the cleansing of the blood. We see that we have been defiled, and we need the washing of the water. When we go in further, we see that we cannot touch anything that is holy; the self must be removed. Brothers and sisters, we must never equate spiritual weight with excitement and activity. No, spiritual weight is the manifestation of holiness in our service. With such manifestation, there is the presence of God. Many brothers and sisters can testify that their service in the church is like the service of the priests in the Holy Place; there are things which they need to deal with. They need sins removed by the blood; they need defilement removed by the renewing of the Spirit, and they need their self-element removed through the holiness of the Holy Place. This should be our experience every time we come to serve God. If we do not feel our sinfulness, our defilement, and our self-element, we probably have very little presence of the Lord.

If a place is a holy convocation of the Lord, the brothers should at least see their own sin, their own defilement, and their self. The presence of this feeling proves the presence of God. This is the Holy Place. When a man comes in, he will be conscious of his sins, his defilement, and his self. This consciousness will force him to go to God and call on Him. This will bring in growth. Every time we see our own condition, our life grows a little more. In serving the Lord, we have to touch that which is “holy” time after time. If we touch it, we will learn something before the Lord, we will grow and be useful, and God will have a way through us. I will repeat. Our service must not be a series of business activities that do not carry any spiritual weight. May the Lord be merciful to us in this matter.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## PRAYER AND GOD'S WORK

### •Outline

**•One—Four**

### •Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:18; Ezek. 36:37; Isa. 62:6-7

Eph. 6:18 "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,"

Ezek. 36:37 "Thus says the Lord Jehovah, Moreover for this I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock."

Isa. 62:6-7 "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, / I have appointed watchmen; / All day and all night / They will never keep silent. / You who remind Jehovah, / Do not be dumb; And do not give Him quiet / Until He establishes / And until He makes Jerusalem / A praise in the earth."

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## ONE

God works according to certain laws and principles. Although He can act as He pleases, He does not act recklessly; He acts according to His preordained laws and principles. God is above all laws and principles; He is God, and He can act as He pleases. Yet we see a wonderful thing in the Bible. Although He is so great and can act as He pleases, He acts according to laws, and it seems as if He has voluntarily placed Himself under law and is willing to be governed by law.

What are the principles of God's work? One main principle of God's work is the need for man's prayer. He wants man to cooperate with Him in prayer.

There was once a Christian who was very experienced in prayer. He said

that all spiritual work consists of four steps. In the first step, God intends to do something; there is God's will. In the second step, He reveals this will to His children through the Spirit so that they know His will, His plan, His desire, and His aspiration. In the third step, God's children return His will back to Him through prayer. Prayer is the echoing of God's will. If our heart is in tune with God's heart, spontaneously we will speak forth God's will. As a result God will accomplish His work in the fourth step.

We will not look at the first and second steps now. We will pay attention to the third step, which is returning God's will back to God. Please pay attention to the word return. All worthwhile prayers are a kind of returning. If our prayer is only for the fulfillment of our plans and wishes, it will not have any value in the spiritual realm. Only the prayers that are initiated by God and that echo what He has initiated have any worth. God's work is governed by prayers. God is willing to do many things, but He will not do them when His people do not pray. He must wait for man to agree with Him before He will do them. This is a great principle of God's work, and it is also one of the most crucial principles in the Bible.

## TWO

The words in Ezekiel 36:37 are most peculiar. God said that His purpose is to "increase them with men like a flock." This is God's ordination. He will surely accomplish what He has ordained. But He has to wait; He cannot accomplish it immediately. What is God waiting for? He said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." God ordained that the men of the house of Israel be increased. Yet He had to wait for the Israelites to inquire of Him. Once the Israelites inquired of Him, He would fulfill it. God is determined to do something, but He will do it only after man has given his consent; He will not do it immediately. When God works, He does not work only according to the fact that He has a will; He also waits until there is a response from His children before He acts. This is a most amazing fact.

We must remember that spiritual work is a matter of God determining and His children agreeing. God initiates, and then His children agree. This is an important principle in spiritual work. God said, "I will yet for this be inquired of

by the house of Israel." God's work required the Israelites to inquire. One day, when the Israelites truly inquire of the Lord, God will accomplish it for them. Brothers and sisters, this is the principle of God's work! God may initiate a work, but He will not accomplish it until we pray. From the time the church was formed, God has not done anything without the prayer of His children. From the time that there have been children of God, everything has been done according to the prayer of His children; everything is accomplished by the prayer of His children. We do not know God's reason for doing this. But we know that this is a fact. God is willing to place Himself in this position. He wants to carry out His will through the prayers of His children.

Another example can be found in Isaiah 62:6-7: "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,/I have appointed watchmen;/All day and all night/They will never keep silent./You who remind Jehovah,/Do not be dumb;/And do not give Him quiet/Until He establishes/And until He makes Jerusalem /A praise in the earth." God wants Jerusalem to become a praise in the earth. How does He accomplish it? He appointed watchmen upon the walls to remind Him. How should they remind Him? They should not be dumb, and they should not give Him quiet. We must not stop our reminding, and we must not allow God to become quiet. We have to pray until He answers and accomplishes His work. God has a will, and His intention is that Jerusalem would become a city of praise, yet He appointed watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem and charged them to pray. Only after they pray will He work. He asks them not to pray once but unceasingly. They have to pray unceasingly until God's will is accomplished. In other words, God's will is governed by man's prayer. God is waiting for us to pray. The content of God's will is determined by God alone; it is not determined by us, and we have no part in the determination of it. However, the carrying out of His will is governed by our prayer.

A brother expressed it very well when he said, "God's will is like a train engine, and our prayer is like the tracks of the train." The train can go many places, but it can only travel along the tracks. The power of the engine is very great, and it can go east, west, south, or north. Yet it can only go where the tracks are laid. God is not without power, yet He is controlled by man's prayer. All

worthy prayers are prayers that pave the way for God's will. Hence, if we do not take up the responsibility of prayer, we will frustrate the accomplishment of God's will.

## THREE

When God created man, He gave man a free will, so that now there are three wills in the universe. One is the will of God, the second is the will of Satan, and the third is the will of man. Man wonders why God would not destroy Satan quickly. But God would not do this. He wants man to join Him in dealing with Satan. God has His will, Satan has his will, and man also has his will. God wants man's will to be joined to Him; He does not want to destroy Satan alone. We do not fully understand, but we know that God wants to do it this way. He does not want to act alone; He wants man to cooperate with Him. This is the responsibility of the church on earth.

In order to do something, God must first put His will within us through the Holy Spirit. He will only accomplish something after we have echoed it in our prayer. God operates through this procedure. He works this way. He wants man's cooperation; He wants a will that is one with Him and that echoes Him. If God does everything without us, then man does not need to be here, and we do not need to know God's will. Yet every part of God's will needs someone to carry it out, and He wants our will to become one with His will. The first step in carrying out His will is to pray out God's will and utter His will through our prayer. From this we see that prayer is a work. There is no work more important than this work because prayer is the speaking of God's will and the accomplishment of His will. Brothers and sisters, we have to know that God's will is uttered through our prayers. Therefore, prayers that originate from our self-will are useless prayers. Prayers that are according to God's will originate from God. He conveys His will to us through the Holy Spirit, and then we return the same thought to Him through our prayer. Prayers that are after God's heart have God's will as the starting point; man is merely the transmitting and responding organ. Prayer that originates from ourselves has no spiritual value.

In reading church history, we find that every great revival began with prayer.

Prayer enables God to do what He wants to do. We cannot ask God to do what He does not want to do, yet we can delay what He does want to do. God is absolute, and we cannot change Him at all. We cannot ask God to do what He does not want to do, and we cannot ask Him not to do what He wants to do. However, if God needs a channel to carry out His will and we do not cooperate with Him, His work will be hindered on account of us. Hence, when we pray, we are not asking God to do what He does not want to do, and we are not asking Him to change His will. Rather, we are declaring God's will in prayer so that He can do what He intends to do. If we think that by begging desperately we can make God do what He does not want to do, we are wasting our energy; the effort is fruitless. If God does not want to do something, no one can make Him do it. We can only do one thing, and that is to pray for God to do what He wants to do. God will accomplish His work through our oneness with Him.

The descending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was prophesied a few hundred years prior to its occurrence, in the time of Joel. Yet many disciples had to pray before the Holy Spirit would descend on them. God had ordained it already, but there had to be men who prayed before it could be fulfilled. Although God can do everything alone, He loves to wait for man to pray before He does anything. God can do many things, but He is waiting for our consent. God is willing to accomplish many things, but He is waiting for our willingness. God is ready to do many things, but without our consent, He still has to wait. Brothers and sisters, although we cannot force God to do what He does not want to do, we can ask Him to do what He wants to do. We have lost many spiritual blessings because we have not expressed God's will through our prayers.

It would be wonderful if we could engage ourselves exclusively in the work of prayer. God is waiting for man to cooperate with Him so that He can accomplish His work. Some Christians have asked why God does not save more sinners. Why does He not make every believer victorious? We sincerely believe that God would do these things, if there were men who first prayed for them. God is not reluctant to work. He is waiting for a group of people who will cooperate with Him. As soon as man cooperates with God, He will work. There is much spiritual work to be done, but God is waiting for His children to respond.

Whether or not the work will succeed depends on how God's children pray. We should respond to God by consenting to work together with Him. He is waiting to bless us. The question is whether or not we will ask.

Those who do not know God will say, "If God wants to do anything, He can do it all by Himself. Why is there the need for our prayer? God knows everything. If we pray too much, we may tire Him out." We have to remember that man has a free will. God will not act contrary to His will, but neither will He take over man's will. If man does not pray for God's will, He has to wait. If He wants His will to be done on earth as in heaven, He can do it Himself. Why does He need the disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in the heavens...Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth"? (Matt. 6:9-10). If God wants His kingdom to come, He can do it Himself. Why is there the need for His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come"? If God wants His name to be sanctified by all people, He can do it Himself. Why does He have to ask the disciples to pray, "Your name be sanctified"? The answer to these questions is that God does not want to do anything alone; He wants man's cooperation. God is powerful, but we have to lay the tracks. The more tracks we lay, the more God works. Therefore, our prayers should be like a railway network, the more the better.

## FOUR

How should we lay the tracks for God's will? Ephesians 6:18 says, "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance." Our prayer should be by all means and at every time. We should have general prayers, and we should also have specific prayers. Many of our prayers are too loose and too careless; there are too many loopholes. This is why Satan finds many opportunities to creep in. If our prayers are fine and careful, and if we cover everything in prayer, Satan will not be able to do anything.

Suppose a brother is about to travel to another place to preach the gospel. You should lay the tracks for him so that God's will can be fulfilled in him. If you only pray a few words for him and ask only that God bless him, protect him, and supply him, this prayer-net is too loose. If you want to pray for a person, you

need to lay a very careful prayer-net for him so that Satan cannot creep in from any direction. How should you pray? You should start from the time he leaves his home. You should pray for his health, his luggage, and his train. You should pray for the time he will board the train, his food, and his sleep on the train, as well as the people he will meet on the train. You should also pray for everything he will encounter after he leaves the train and for the house where he will eventually be staying. You should pray for the neighbors and the things he will need while he is staying there. You should pray for the time of his work and everything related to him. After you have prayed for him in such a thorough way, Satan will find it very difficult to identify any loopholes from which to attack him. Hence, the work of prayer is a very practical work. Whoever is lazy, foolish, and loose cannot participate in the work of prayer. After we have earnestly prayed over all the aspects of a certain matter, we often find the matter eventually being accomplished.

There is still one lesson that we have to learn. Satan is full of deception, and we can never anticipate all the schemes that he has. It is impossible for us to pray over them one by one. We can only pray, "Lord, please deal with everything from Satan with Your precious blood." We must realize that the blood is the answer to all the works of Satan. Such a prayer is the best way to deal with Satan. He can never penetrate through these prayers to attack us.

Every time we pray we have to see three things. First, we must see to whom we are praying. Second, we must see for whom we are praying. Third, we must see against whom we are praying. Many times we remember only two of the three aspects; we remember that we are praying to God and for men, but we put Satan aside. In our prayer, we must not only know to whom we are praying but also against whom we are praying. We must not only know for whom we are praying but also that an enemy is out there to damage us. Our prayer is to God; it is for men, and it is against the devil. If we deal well with these three aspects, God will work for us.

Everyone who has a genuine desire to work for the Lord must set up a prayer-net so that God can work through him. God is not reluctant to work; He is waiting for men to pray before He will work. He is looking for some who will

have a life of prayer. His will is waiting for man's prayer. There is often no predisposed intention to pray, yet something within urges you to pray. This means that some items of God's will are waiting for your prayer. When you have a burden to pray, and you pray accordingly, that prayer is according to God's will; it is the Holy Spirit who is urging you to pray a prayer that is according to God's will. When the Holy Spirit urges you to pray, you should pray. If you do not pray then, you will feel clogged up, and you will feel that something is left undone. If you continue to refuse to pray, you will feel more clogged up. If you insist on not praying to the end, the spirit of prayer and the feeling for prayer will become dull, and you will not be able to easily pick up the same feeling again later. You will have failed to pray according to God's will.

Every time God wants to put a burden for prayer within us, the Holy Spirit will first give us a feeling and a burden to pray for certain things. Once we have such a feeling, we should immediately pray conscientiously; we should pay a price to pray for that matter. Once we have the prompting of the Spirit, we will immediately have a burden in our spirit, and the burden will remain there. Once we pray, we will feel released, and the rock will be removed. If we do not pray for it conscientiously, we will feel that something is still there. If we do not pray for it, we will feel that we are not being one with God. If we are faithful to prayer and pray immediately after we have a burden, our prayer will not become a burdensome task but an easy and refreshing work.

Unfortunately, many people quench the Spirit; they quench the feeling for prayer which the Holy Spirit has put within them. After a while, these feelings no longer come to them, and they are no longer useful vessels in God's hand. They can no longer accomplish anything for the Lord or execute God's will by prayer. Brothers and sisters, if we are this way before the Lord, having lost all feeling for prayer, we are probably in a very dangerous condition. We have lost our fellowship with God, and God can no longer use us for His work. We must be very careful with the feeling that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Anytime we have a burden to pray, we should immediately ask, "God, what do You want me to pray for? What do You want to do now? And what do You want me to pray about?" If we get through in our prayer with this one burden, the Lord will entrust us with

a second prayer. If we have not released our first burden, we will not receive a second burden.

We need to ask the Lord to make us a faithful praying person. Once there is a burden, we should release it immediately; we should express it through prayers. If the burden is too heavy and we cannot release it through prayer alone, then we need to fast. Anything that cannot be released through prayer can only be dealt with by fasting. Fasting can release the burden of prayer quickly; it can help us to unload our heaviest burdens. If we continue to engage ourselves in the work of prayer, we will become a flowing channel for God's will; He will come to us whenever He has something that He wants us to pray about. Brothers and sisters, God's will is always seeking an outlet; God is forever seeking men to be the spokesmen for His will. If many people are raised up to do this work, God will accomplish many things through their prayers.

## MESSAGE NINE

# WATCH AND BE SOBER

## ●Outline

- **●Miracles And Works Of Wonders**
- **●Visions And Dreams**
- **●Concerning The Coming Of The Lord**
- **●Praying With One Sentence**

## ●Scripture Reading: Matt. 22:23-29; 1 Thes. 5:6

Matt. 22:23-29 "On that day some Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to Him and questioned Him, Saying, Teacher, Moses said, If anyone dies and does not have children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother. Now there were seven brothers with us. And the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; Likewise also the second and the third until the seventh. And last of all the woman died. In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her. And Jesus answered and said to them, You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

1 Thes. 5:6 "So then let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober."

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The Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection came to the Lord Jesus one day and asked, "Teacher, Moses said, If anyone dies and does not have children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother. Now there were seven brothers with us. And the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; likewise also the second and

the third until the seventh. And last of all the woman died. In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her" (Matt. 22:24-28). If we had been confronted with such a problem, we would surely have thought that this was a rare and strange question. There were seven brothers who married the same woman and had no children, and they all died one after the other. This is a very hypothetical question. The Sadducees were trying to catch Jesus with this question and disprove resurrection. But the Bible shows us that even if there had been such a case, it would not have put Jesus into a corner. Our Lord Jesus struck them with His opening remark: "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." The Lord Jesus said that they erred! The Sadducees erred! They erred in their view! They erred in their question! Why would they even think of such a strange thing and come up with such an absurd question through their own cleverness? Why would they not believe in resurrection? Why had they erred? The Lord Jesus pointed out clearly that they erred because they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Brothers and sisters, we are not focusing on the interpretation of this passage. Rather, we want to extract an important principle from this portion of the Scriptures. Although this passage is on the error of the Sadducees, it also points out the proper attitude of a Christian. Although a Christian has believed in the Lord, it is still possible for him to err. He can still err, and worse still, he can err without realizing it because he does not know the Scriptures and does not know the power of God. Brothers and sisters, in order to go on properly in the spiritual pathway, serve well in the Lord's work, and satisfy God's heart in the way we handle our affairs in the church, in expounding the Bible, or in our daily life, and in order to keep from falling into error, we must know the Scriptures and the power of God.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work." We cannot find a good Christian who has a desire to please the Lord but who does not know God's word. God's speaking to man today is based on what He has spoken in the Scriptures. The Bible has clearly unveiled God's will,

desire, pleasure, and displeasure to us. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet/And a light for my path." In order to avoid getting lost and stumbling on the spiritual pathway, we need light. The word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. If we want to go on in the spiritual pathway and not fall into error, we have to follow the Bible. Another verse in the same psalm says, "In my heart I have treasured up Your word/That I might not sin against You" (v. 11). If we want to be one who does not sin against the Lord, we have to let His word dwell in our heart richly. If God's children would spend time to study the Bible, taking it as their unique guidepost and fearing the word of God, they would not fall into grave errors.

Today we have not only the Holy Bible but also the Holy Spirit within us. In the New Testament age, God has put His law within us. This law is the law of the Spirit of life in Romans 8:2; it is also the anointing in 1 John 2:27. This anointing teaches us all things. If we do not quench the Spirit and if we learn to obey the teaching of the anointing within us, we will not fall into error. God's children err in the spiritual pathway because they do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. In the past, some have emphasized the matter of miracles and works of wonders exclusively. They publicize these miracles and works of wonders, and many people are attracted by these things. There are others who always talk about visions and dreams. They relate their visions and dreams to others, teaching others these things and assuming the role of a great prophet or great apostle. Sometimes they may even have supernatural powers and point out the hidden things in man. They may attract many immature believers who follow them and inquire of them like great prophets. Still others pray in a strange way, repeating one sentence over and over again, and praying this way hundreds of times. Some even claim that the Lord Jesus has come the second time already or that He will come on a certain date of a certain year. Brothers and sisters, if we search the Scriptures carefully, we will learn the questionable nature of these practices. In the following sections we will consider these practices.

## MIRACLES AND WORKS OF WONDERS

I believe in miracles. I believe that the Lord Jesus healed the sick and cast

out demons. He is the Son of God, and it is a natural thing for Him to perform miracles. He is the Creator of heaven and earth; healing and casting out demons are small things to Him. But in the Bible, when men tempted the Lord and asked Him for a miracle, He would not grant their request (Matt. 16:1-4). The Lord did not want people to believe in Him because of miracles (John 4:48). After He healed someone on earth, He would charge him not to publicize it and not to speak about it (Matt. 8:4; Mark 5:43; 7:36). Our Lord Jesus does not want men to follow Him out of curiosity. Even when many believed in Him because of the miracles, He would not commit Himself to them (John 2:23-24). In John 6 five thousand ate of the loaves and the fishes that the Lord gave, yet in the end they forsook Him. Real knowledge of the Lord is not based on outward miracles and works of wonders but on the word of God and the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the seventy disciples were able to subdue the demons (Luke 10:17). We also believe that Peter, John, Stephen, and Paul all performed miracles, healed the sick, and cast out demons (Acts 3:2-8; 6:8; 9:36-41; 14:8-18; 16:16-18; 28:1-6). We believe the words of Mark 16:17, which says, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name..." But the Bible shows us that we should not rally men around us or attract them by miracles, works of wonders, healings, and the casting out of demons, because these things are not the center of salvation; they cannot occupy too great of a place. The only thing we should exalt is the Lord's name.

It is not scriptural for anyone to exclusively seek after miracles and works of wonders or for anyone to exclusively speak about these things. Those who do can be easily deceived and obsessed by Satan because the false prophet and Antichrist can also perform great miracles and wonders (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; 2 Thes. 2:9-12). Therefore, brothers and sisters, we should have a proper understanding of the power of God and not be curious about miracles and works of wonders.

## VISIONS AND DREAMS

It is true that in the Old Testament God taught His people by means of visions and dreams at times. But instances of this nature were not very frequent.

In the New Testament, particularly after the coming of the Holy Spirit, there were even less occurrences. Although there are still cases of visions and dreams, this only happens for a special reason because in the New Testament age, the Holy Spirit is in us and God is teaching us all things through the anointing. God wants us to know His heart according to the Bible on one hand, and according to the sense of life on the other hand.

The New Testament mentions a few cases of visions and dreams. For example, at the house of Simon the tanner, Peter saw the great sheet with all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of heaven in it (Acts 10:9-12). Why did the Lord give Peter such a vision? It was because Peter had a deep prejudice against the Gentiles at that time. The Lord used the vision to remove his prejudice and open the way for the gospel to go to the Gentiles at that time. Paul also saw a few visions. Twice when he was in peril, God comforted and strengthened him through visions (18:9; 27:23-24). Another time Paul saw a Macedonian standing and entreating him in a vision, saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." After Paul saw the vision, he was ready to go. But the writer of the Bible added, "...concluding that God had called us to announce the gospel to them" (16:9-10). The use of the word "concluding" means that Paul did not consider the vision as the only means of guidance.

Visions and dreams have their place in the Bible, but they cannot be our only guidance. Even after one has received a vision or a dream, the guidance must still conform to the Scriptures, the teaching of the anointing within, and circumstantial arrangements. After Peter saw the vision at Joppa, there was an immediate confirmation in the environment—Cornelius sent men to him. Hence, a vision or a dream is reliable only if it matches the words of the Scriptures, the teaching of the anointing, and the confirmation of the environment. Furthermore, visions and dreams must also be meaningful and purposeful. In the New Testament age, visions and dreams are not God's usual means of giving guidance to men. Even when a person has a vision or a dream, this does not mean that he must tell others about it. Paul had the experience of the third heaven, yet he spoke only reluctantly about it after fourteen years (2 Cor. 12:1-6). If a man always claims that he is seeing visions and dreams, there must be some problem

with his mind.

We must realize that many sudden thoughts are injected into our mind by evil spirits from outside of us. Some believers experience flashes of thoughts in their mind which supposedly give them understanding, realization, and revelation of some special things or suggestions to do this or that. These thoughts should be rejected because they are not from the Holy Spirit.

The evil spirits not only inject thoughts into the believers' mind, but they display all kinds of images in their mind. Some are wonderful images that the believers love, while others are filthy ones that their conscience abhors. But whether they are beautiful or ugly, good or bad, as long as a believer does not have the strength to stop these images from coming into his mind, it means that he is already deceived.

There are natural dreams and supernatural dreams. Some of them are from God, and some of them are from the devil. Except the dreams that are produced as a result of man's physiological and psychological activities, all other dreams are supernatural. Some believers are mentally unstable as a result of shock or illness. They open their mind to evil spirits because they do not know the Bible, and as a result, they are filled with dreams. We must realize that dreams from God make a person normal, peaceful, stable, sensible, and conscious, while dreams from evil spirits are always strange, vain, absurd, foolish, and irrational.

Brothers and sisters, do not think that all visions and dreams are good. We must remember that many visions and dreams are not from God. We must not receive them; rather, we must reject them. Only then will we not be deceived.

Some people are psychologically ill or deceived by evil spirits. They may even be possessed by evil spirits or demons. In their mind they have some kind of illusion. They are often proud and subjective. They often think that they are great prophets or apostles raised up by God. We must realize that a man who is deceived by evil spirits is one who is very self-confident; he does not easily take the advice of others, and he does not easily believe in the feeling of other brothers and sisters. These visions and dreams attract ignorant, immature, and curious believers because they have a supernatural element. They think that they are great prophets and apostles raised up by God, and other immature

believers also think that they are great prophets and apostles. Some even go to them and inquire of them as if they were God. This is absolutely unscriptural. The Bible shows us in the New Testament that there are only prophets in the church; God does not allow any of His children to be a prophet to an individual. In the New Testament, God's law is not written in outward tablets of stone but in our heart (Heb. 8:10). Everyone who has the life of God has this innate ability to know God's desire. In the New Testament, God does not allow anyone to be a prophet to an individual or to substitute for a believer's knowing of God's will. We must ask the Lord to deliver us from curiosity so that we do not fall into deception.

## CONCERNING THE COMING OF THE LORD

We believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus. This is our fundamental faith. But the Bible does not tell us the day the Lord will come. "But concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). "And Jesus answered and said to them, See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and they will lead many astray" (vv. 4-5). "At that time if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ! or, Here! do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen....Therefore if they say to you, Behold, He is in the wilderness, do not go forth; Behold, He is in the inner rooms, do not believe it" (vv. 23-26). "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (25:13).

We can find similar words in Mark 13. The Lord told the disciples clearly, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ! and will lead many astray" (vv. 5-6). "And then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ! Behold, there! do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the chosen. But you, beware" (vv. 21-23). "But concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father. Beware, be alert; for you do not know when the time is" (vv. 32-33).

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians, "That you be not quickly shaken in mind nor

alarmed, neither by a spirit nor by word nor by a letter as if by us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way" (2:2-3a). "The coming of whom is according to Satan's operation in all power and signs and wonders of a lie" (v. 9).

When the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples concerning His coming, He reminded them again and again to "beware" (Mark 13:23, 33) or "take heed" (v. 9) or to "see" (v. 5). This word in Greek is repeated four times in Mark 13. He also reminded the disciples to be "alert" (v. 33) or to "watch" (v. 35, 37). This word in Greek is repeated three times in Mark 13. Therefore, brothers and sisters, concerning the coming of the Lord, we should beware, and we should watch. We should pray, and we should wait. We should be ready daily to welcome the return of our Lord and wait for Him by being watchful and praying. The Bible does not allow us to do any foolish things such as counting the days or predicting the time of the Lord's coming. If anyone says that the Lord will come on a certain day of a certain month, we have to beware and not be deceived by these words.

## PRAYING WITH ONE SENTENCE

Some people pray with one sentence repeatedly, such as "praise the Lord, praise the Lord," or "hallelujah, hallelujah." They repeat the sentence over and over again and pray with a loud voice. It is easy to cause the mind to be blank in this way. It leads a person into all kinds of strange experiences, such as deception by evil spirits. All the time, however, the person thinks that he is being filled by the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes tells us that when we pray to God, we must not be rash with our mouth or let our heart be hasty to utter any thing before God (5:2). The Lord also teaches us not to babble empty words when we pray (Matt. 6:7). Prayer is not a kind of chanting of Scriptures. It is not to repeat a word over and over again. Prayer is telling the Lord what is in our heart (Phil. 4:6). The Bible teaches us to be quiet and to not be in confusion but to do things becomingly and in order (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Therefore brothers and sisters, we need to be in fear and trembling and be watchful in prayer. We should not believe in ourselves too much but learn to be led by the indwelling Spirit within us so that we can learn to obey the teaching of the anointing. At the same time, we have to understand

the Bible and reject anything that is not according to the Bible. We know that the Lord Jesus overcame the temptation of Satan with the word of God when He was tried in the wilderness. We should spend time to study the Bible and should allow the word of God to dwell richly in our heart, lest we be led astray by the many strange teachings.

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We thank the Lord that He has given two great treasures to the church. One is the Holy Bible, and the other is the Holy Spirit. If we truly follow the Bible and the Spirit, we will not err. Brothers and sisters, how easy it is for us to err, and how easy it is for us to be deceived and cheated. We have to remember Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, which says that we should not sleep but should watch and be sober. If we do not search the Scriptures carefully, if we do not take the Bible as the lamp to our feet and light for our path, if we do not submit to the authority of the Spirit in fear and trembling, watching and praying at all times, and if we do not have a fear of falling into error, we are indeed in poverty and darkness! We need to prostrate ourselves at the feet of the Lord and ask for His shining and His preservation. We have to ask Him to give us a firm determination to pay any price to please Him, to reject anything that is not according to the Scriptures, and to accept everything that is according to the Scriptures. At the same time, we should submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit and not make any proposals of our own or have any considerations of our own. We should not act according to our own will or teach others or serve the Lord according to the preference of our flesh. May the Lord be merciful to the church, and may He preserve the church.

# MESSAGE TEN

## MIRACLES ARE SPONTANEOUS

### •Outline

**•One—Five**

### •Scripture Reading: Mark 16:17-18; Psa. 72:18

Mark 16:17-18 "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; They will pick up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it shall by no means harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well."

Psa. 72:18 "Blessed be Jehovah God, the God of Israel, / Who alone does wondrous deeds;"

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In Mark 16:17-18 the Lord Jesus spoke to the eleven disciples. He said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it shall by no means harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well." These two verses cover the matter of miracles. How should we view these two verses?

### ONE

We have to pay attention to one thing: No one can make a performance out of any part of God's Word, and no part of God's Word can be performed by man. Man is incapable of performing not only these two verses in Mark 16 but also any part of the Scriptures. God answered the prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel by sending down fire, but this was only for the purpose of proving that Jehovah was God and that Baal was not God (1 Kings 18:30-39). God is willing to use miracles to prove Himself and prove that He is God. But He is not willing to allow

man to use miracles as a kind of performance. Some try to perform the verses in Mark 16, but God does not honor their performance; He allows them to fail. You cannot say that they do not believe in the word of Mark 16; they believe. But God will not vindicate them; He will not prove Himself to them because He is God. He only does what He wants to do; He will not work according to man's wish.

## TWO

We have to remember a spiritual principle: Faith is a spontaneous and effortless thing. Christians who are immature in their faith find it very strenuous to make God answer their prayers. Every time they try to get an answer from God, they have to pump up much faith. They have to consciously exercise their faith. It seems as if they are saying, "I am believing! I am believing!" Although their prayers are answered, they become worn out in their believing. After they learn the proper lesson, they still pray, they still believe, and God answers their prayer. But they no longer have to exert much effort. They pray spontaneously, and God answers their prayers spontaneously. Previously they exerted considerable strength to believe; it seemed as if their heart and energy were drained through such an exercise of faith. They wanted to believe, yet they could not believe. They did not find faith in themselves, and they tired themselves out by such believing. But after they learn the lesson, their faith is spontaneous; it becomes an effortless faith.

## THREE

Faith is spontaneous, and so are miracles. Those who perform miracles are never conscious that they are performing miracles. To those who have faith in God, miracles are ordinary things. Only those who are far from God think that miracles are something extraordinary. Those who live in the presence of God and who are near God do not think that miracles are extraordinary.

Brothers and sisters, we have read the story of the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea. The first time we read the story, we thought that it was an extraordinary event. It was a tremendous thing for so many people to cross the Red Sea at one time! Yet what did the Israelites say? The Bible does not record that they exclaimed, "What a wonder! The sea is about to divide itself!", while they were

still on the [Egyptian] side of the sea. Nor did they say, “Behold, what a miracle!” Only after they arrived at the other side did they begin to make a song and sing. They realized that it was a great miracle only as they looked back. The same is true with believers today. While God is performing a miracle for them, they do not realize that it is a miracle. Only when they look back do they realize that they have experienced a miracle. Brothers and sisters, consider the many times that you were sick and God healed you. Did you feel something extraordinary at the time you were healed? No. When you encountered difficulties and God delivered you, were you conscious that something momentous had occurred at the time of His deliverance? No. Only when you looked back did you realize that great things had happened. Even the looking back is spontaneous; one does not look back consciously.

Some have misunderstood the words in Mark 16:17-18. They look at these two verses with human eyes and consider them as something extraordinary. But brothers and sisters, once we consider God, we will not feel that there is anything extraordinary about them. These are very small acts compared with the Israelites’ crossing the Red Sea. Does this mean that a believer can take poison every day and not die? No. If a man purposefully tries to take poison, he will surely die. These verses tell us that if we know what kind of God He is and the power of God, we will realize that there is nothing He cannot do. Miracles are not the result of a strenuous exercise of man’s faith. Miracles are the manifestation of the power of God. God is the only One who does wondrous things; when He works, we have miracles. Once God moves His hand, we no longer feel that miracles are a difficult thing. The trouble today is that man views miracles from a distance that is far from God; therefore, miracles are regarded as something spectacular. Those who are near God realize that miracles are a common thing in the house of God.

There was a girl who lived by the sea and whose relatives were fishers. Later she married a man from the mountains. The mountain people were secluded and much poorer; they had a meager living. One day her father-in-law became very angry with her, and he condemned her for not being thrifty and for squandering the household goods because she ate one crab within three days. He

angrily went to his in-laws, who invited him to stay for supper. He saw many dishes of crab at the table, and when he looked at the porch, countless crab shells could be seen. When he saw this, he decided not to complain anymore and returned home. Many people value miracles in the same way that the father-in-law valued crabs. They experience a miracle once every ten or thirty years. Therefore, they consider a miracle as a rare thing. But those who live before God consider miracles to be an ordinary thing. God's hand is the source of the miracles, and God Himself is constantly performing miracles.

## FOUR

Hence, there is no need for anyone to struggle to perform miracles. When God's power is manifested in us, there are miracles. Paul was bitten by a viper, and he shook it off into the fire (Acts 28:3-5). How did Paul perform that miracle? He did not tell the men of the island of Malta, "Come and see me perform a great miracle for you." He shook the snake into the fire without any fanfare. There was no promotion of any kind. Only those who do not know God promote miracles; those who know God do not promote miracles. (This does not mean that those who do not promote miracles know God. Some do not believe in God or miracles.) Those who know God do not promote miracles because miracles are spontaneous things for them. Brothers and sisters, when God answers your prayer and you feel that you have done something marvelous, it proves that your faith is very immature. If you really believe in the power of God, you will find Him answering your prayers and performing miracles without even being conscious of it. Under such circumstances, miracles are spontaneous. There is no need for any struggle, and they will not be extraordinary.

We must realize that miracles are not performed in a conscious way. If we feel that we are performing miracles, we have failed already. In other words, when we set our mind to perform miracles, they will be far from us. This is like setting our mind to do good; we discover that we cannot. When we live in the presence of God and believe in Him, there will be miracles spontaneously. The miracle of not being hurt by the viper was done without Paul's even noticing it. If others asked him to do the same thing again, he might not be able to repeat it. If

someone asked us to repeat what Paul did, we could not do it either. We cannot imitate others, and we cannot reenact our own experience. We are touching a very important principle of the Christian experience. In our Christian experience, God's answer to our prayer and His miracles follow one basic principle—everything is spontaneous, and everything is done without our awareness. In the beginning, we may think that we had much strength and great faith. But as we go on and learn more, we will no longer feel the same way. To some degree, we will not even know how we believed. We simply commit things into God's hand, and things are done spontaneously.

## FIVE

In Paul we see many miracles and works of wonders. Yet Paul said of himself, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). God is willing to work through man. But He is not willing to allow man to become conscious of what he can do. Only those who do not know God say that they can do this and that. Those who genuinely know God say that they do not know what they can do. A man whom God truly uses will not feel that he can do this or that. Whatever he has done is behind him. Thank God, His power is so great that He can do everything Himself. We do not have to do anything. The more we go on as a Christian, the simpler we become. Those who become complicated are wrong. The more we know God, the simpler we become. We are just what we are. Even our believing will not be as strenuous as before. Day by day as we live before the Lord, we will become simpler and simpler. We will say genuinely from our heart that everything is of God and not of us. Brothers and sisters, if we truly know God, we will know that all of His work in us is spontaneous.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## LET THE WORD OF GOD

## DWELL IN YOUR HEART RICHLY

### •Outline

**•One—Four**

### •Scripture Reading: Col. 3:16

Col. 3:16 "But to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one: "And to your seed," who is Christ."

*  *  *  *

Many of God's children live in poverty because they have not allowed the word of God to dwell in them richly, as Colossians tells us to do. The first cause of spiritual poverty or the first step toward spiritual poverty among Christians is poverty in the Word of God. A man who is poor in the eyes of God may read through the Bible page by page and chapter by chapter, but he will not know God's Word. He has not made any contact with God and he does not find any life in the Word. Therefore, he is poor.

## ONE

There was a brother who had believed and been baptized for a year. He met an elderly Christian who asked him three questions which he found difficult to answer. The three questions were as follows:

First, the man asked, "Since you became a Christian a year ago, have you read through the Bible once?" He realized that this was a hard question. If he were asked whether he had read the Bible, it would have been easy to answer because he read his Bible every day. If he were asked whether he had spent time

to study the Bible, he could also answer because he spent much time to study it. But it was not easy to answer that he had read through the Bible. He said, "I read the Bible every day." The man retorted, "I am not asking whether you have read the Bible every day. I am asking whether you have read through the whole Bible." He could not dodge the question and said, "I read it every day, but I have not yet read through it once." The man exclaimed, "You have been a Christian for over a year, and you have not read through the Bible once!" The two were silent for a few minutes. The brother said in his heart, "Lord, if you give me another year, I will surely read through the Bible at least once."

The man would not let him go. He asked the second question: "You have been a Christian for over a year. Have you prayed?" He answered, "I pray daily, and every Saturday I go to the hill to pray." The man asked again, "Since you have prayed so much, how many times has God answered your prayer? Try to remember, have you received at least one clear answer to any of your prayers?" He thought for a moment, but it was difficult for him to think of one case! He had prayed much, but he could not name one instance when God answered his prayer. He could only admit, "I am afraid not once." The man said, "You have been a Christian for over a year, yet God has not answered your prayer once!"

Following this, there was the third question: "You have been a Christian for over a year. Have you led one person to the Lord? Is there anyone who has come to the Lord clearly as a result of your preaching?" He knew that he had preached the gospel, but it was hard to say whether there was one particular person who had been led to the Lord by him. It seemed as if there was one, but he dared not say for sure. He had to answer, "No." The man did not ask any more questions but merely sighed, "You have believed in the Lord for over a year. But you have not read through the Bible once, received one answer to prayer, nor led one person to the Lord." At that very moment, the brother resolved in his mind, saying, "Lord, I will lead at least one to You this year, I will pray until I have at least one definite answer to prayer, and I will read through the Bible at least once."

From that day on, that brother had a new start. He was determined to read the Bible through from beginning to end. He counted the number of books and chapters in the Old and New Testament, and he scheduled his time. He believed

that he could devote considerable time for this. He thought that he could read through the Old Testament at least three times and the New Testament twelve or fourteen times. Thank the Lord that by the end of that year, God enabled him to finish more than what had been scheduled. From that point on, he began to study the Bible conscientiously and studiously.

I would ask the young brothers and sisters in particular: How much of God's Word do you read every day? Have you read through the Word of God once? In your spiritual pursuit, it is easy to have lofty aspirations while neglecting basic lessons. If you have not read through God's Word properly from beginning to end, and if you are still skipping through it here and there, I would advise you to change your way of reading. You must have a proper plan for reading the Bible. Every day you have to spend some time to systematically read God's Word from beginning to end. In reading a book, you would not reap much benefit if you skipped through it here and there. You cannot read the Bible this way either; you have to read it systematically through from beginning to end. You have to start from Genesis and go all the way to Malachi, and you have to start from Matthew and go all the way to Revelation. You have to read systematically, according to a schedule. Otherwise, ten years will pass and you will still be very poor in God's Word.

## TWO

There are many ways of reading the Bible. Reading it through sequentially from beginning to end is only one way of reading it. There is another way of reading, which a Christian should practice as soon as he begins his Christian life. This is reading early in the morning. There is one condition for this kind of reading of the Word—one has to rise up early every morning. It is another matter if you are sick and you are told by a doctor to rest. But every normal, healthy person should rise up early. When the sun comes out, the manna is gone. Many people read the Bible too late; therefore, they cannot read it well. You must catch the early morning hour to read God's Word.

However, no one can rise up early if he goes to bed late. It is another matter if some are required to stay up late by their work. But many people have no

special reason to go to bed late; they have built up the habit of putting things off until the evening. When they go to bed late, they cannot rise early. Some people are not busy at all; they just like to waste their time at night. They like to stay a little longer in the sitting room and chat a little longer, and before they know it, half an hour has passed. Whoever wastes or ill-manages his time this way will find it hard to rise up early; it will be hard for him to do anything in a systematic way. We have to develop the habit of retiring to bed on time and rising on time. Many people are very weak when it comes to the matter of rising. They cannot control themselves and cannot rise up early to touch the Lord. As soon as possible, young Christians should develop the habit of rising early. They may find it hard the first day; however, by the second or third day, they will not find it as hard. After a period of time, it will become natural to them.

One brother was determined to rise up between half-past four and five o'clock in the morning. When he woke up the first morning, it was six o'clock. When he woke up the second morning, it was six o'clock again. He was determined to get up at five. The next night he constantly looked at the clock and did not sleep well from two until five in the morning. He realized that this was not right, because when he did not sleep well at night, it was harder for him to rise up in the morning. He realized that the only thing he could do was look to the Lord. On the third night, he prayed, "God, I am going to sleep now. I commit myself to Your hand. Please wake me up at five tomorrow morning." Then he went to sleep soundly. The next morning when he woke up, he was afraid that it was six o'clock again. But thank the Lord, it was exactly five o'clock; it was not a minute late or early. From that day on and for many years, he woke up at the right time. We believe that when we truly commit ourselves to God, He will wake us up.

I am not saying that everyone should rise up at five o'clock. If you can rise up earlier, it is good. But if you have some hardship, you may need to rise up later. We do not suggest going to an extreme. We all have to judge ourselves according to our physical strength. We have to learn how many hours of sleep we need and when we need to go to bed. Then we will know when we can get up in the morning, whether it is five o'clock, half-past five, or six o'clock. We have to plan

well before the Lord. Once we make our plan, we can rise up every morning according to our plan to read God's Word.

We can testify that reading the Word early in the morning is the best nourishment for our spiritual life. We can read the Bible at other times, but reading it in the morning has a different flavor to it, and it reaps special benefits for us. If we have not experienced the benefit of reading the Word early in the morning, I hope that we will start practicing it and will not miss out on this blessing.

## THREE

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." We have to let the Word dwell in us. We should not only memorize it, but we should also digest it into our heart. The Lord taught us to pray for God to give us this day our daily food. We should ask the Lord to give us our daily food. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord. Therefore, we must pray for God to give us not only physical food but also spiritual food and to teach us the way to eat this food so that we can store the word in our heart.

Our reading of the Word in the morning should be different from our ordinary reading; we should not read through it sequentially. Instead, while we read, we should meditate and pray. After reading one or two sentences, we should begin to pray. Never read without stopping. You have to pray in order to mingle your reading with prayer. These prayers do not have to be like ordinary prayers in which we say, "In the name of Jesus, amen." This prayer is a mingling of reading with praying. On the one hand, we read God's Word, and on the other hand, we speak to God through prayer. We have the Word of God before us, and we read it to ourselves as well as to God. While we are reading, we should pray. We should not read through hastily but digest the Word as we read slowly. If we do this, we will receive nourishment from the Word.

For example, Isaiah 54:1 says, "Give a ringing shout, O barren one, you who have not borne;/Break forth into joyful shouting and cry out, you who have not been in labor; /For more numerous are the children of the desolate one/Than

the children of the married woman, says Jehovah." This means that the Lord can give man through the Spirit what he does not have in his flesh. When you read this verse, you should meditate on it and pray, "Lord, I am barren, and I have not borne anything. Spiritually speaking, I have nothing to give others. But I thank and praise You. I can sing because You can give to me what I do not have; You have the power."

Whichever portion you may come across, you can meditate on it and pray over it. Some people say that they do not have enough items to pray about. Actually there are enough items for you to pray about in the Bible already. Whatever you read can become the subject of your prayer. Many things in the Bible can lead you to pray, utter a praise, confess your sins, and make supplication for others.

When you come across a commandment of God, you may pray to Him saying, "God, forgive my sins, for I am weak. I have not obeyed You in this matter. I do not have this thing, and I am not this kind of person. Lord, forgive me." You may think of others and confess for others. You can say, "Lord, I cannot make it. I look to You to accomplish this in me." God wants you to be faithful. You can look to Him to make you faithful. God intends that you love. You can look to Him to make you love. When you read God's command in this way, you will find that all of God's commands are actually His promises. When God gives you a command, He also gives you the strength to keep that command. If you only see God's command and feel that He is giving you a hard time by asking you to do what cannot possibly be done, you have not seen that His commands are with promises.

Remember the story of the young ruler in Luke 18. He heard the Lord Jesus' word, "Still you lack one thing: all that you have, sell and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in the heavens; and come, follow Me" (v. 22), and he left in sorrow. He thought he could keep the Ten Commandments, but he could not do this one thing. He thought this commandment of the Lord was too harsh. But shortly thereafter, the Lord showed that His commandments are not merely commandments but promises as well. He said, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (v. 27). Thank the Lord that His commandments show two things: man cannot make it and God can make it. Before His

commandments, we have to see that we cannot make it and that He can make it. If we see only that we cannot make it, we become sorrowful. But if we see that God can make it, we will praise Him. Many times when we read God's Word, we realize that we cannot make it. Since the commandments are so severe, we pray, "Lord, I cannot make it. But I praise You because You can make it. This is impossible with man. Lord, I cannot do it. But with You, nothing is impossible. So I look to You to accomplish this in me today. Please come and accomplish this in me." If we pray this way, we will see God answering our prayer.

When we read and pray simultaneously this way and learn to read God's Word in God's presence, we will gradually touch the spirit within the Word and discover the vast difference between our condition and the spirit in the Word. For example, we may read Philippians 3:18-19: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their stomach..." It is very easy for us to say that these are the enemies of God, and that their end is destruction. But it is difficult to touch the spirit of the writer of the Bible. If we read it casually through, we will not detect it. But if we pray while we read, we will read ourselves into the heart of the writer of the Epistle and see that he was full of love. One who was full of love was used by God to speak a severe word: "I have told you often and now tell you even weeping." Some had made their stomach their god. They were the enemies of the cross of Christ, and their end was destruction. This is a fact, and Paul had to write this. But while he was writing, he was full of love. It is very easy for us to speak severe words, but it is very difficult for us to have Paul's spirit. It is easy for us to be nice and speak nice words, but it is very difficult for us to speak severe words as he did. When we come to this portion and touch the spirit of the writer, we will know him as a person, and we will also know ourselves. If we do not touch the spirit when we read His Word, we will not have much feeling. But if we read and pray at the same time and our heart is turned to God and our spirit is open to Him, we will get into the Bible, and the Bible will no longer be dry and tasteless. It will be full of life-food, and while we are reading, we will be eating as well.

I hope that the brothers and sisters will read God's Word conscientiously

every morning. Do not read it through quickly; pray as you read, and read as you pray. If you read this way for fifteen minutes, half an hour, or an hour every day, you will be fed and strengthened. If you eat God's Word today, you will find that the Lord is your strength today; He will carry you through everything.

## FOUR

In addition to reading the Word in the morning, we must also spend time during other hours to study His Word. We have to read the Bible consistently, repeatedly, thoroughly, carefully, and systematically. Only then will the word of God dwell in our heart richly.

Other than our personal reading of the Word, we can also read a portion of the Word with the brothers and sisters when we meet together. It is also a big help to memorize the Word with other brothers and sisters. We may not understand one verse, but when it is recited through the mouth of another person, we suddenly understand it. This may sound strange, but it is a fact. Once the brothers and sisters come together, they will receive light which as individuals they cannot receive. Therefore, when brothers and sisters come together, it is better for you to not gossip. You can open the Word and read it. It does not matter if you do not understand it. Either one person can read while everyone else listens, or everyone can take turns reading. Or you may read the chapter you read today, while I read the chapter I read today. This kind of reading will uncover many hidden things in the Bible.

Reading the Bible is indispensable to a Christian. Young brothers and sisters should first develop a habit of rising early to read the Word. We believe that this kind of reading is most beneficial to the growth in life; it will unlock the power within God's Word. I am afraid that many Christians have been starving for a long time. They have been starving not only for a few days or a month but for many years! Perhaps some have never eaten God's Word from the time they became a Christian; they have never risen up early to eat God's Word. It is no wonder that they are so weak! Brothers and sisters, we have to eat God's Word. In the morning, we should pray and read God's Word simultaneously. This is to eat God's Word. May the Lord deliver us from spiritual poverty. May He deliver us

from any form of poverty in His Word so that we may have the word of God dwelling in us richly and so that we will receive the supply of life from His Word daily.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## NUMBERING OUR DAYS

### •Outline

**•One—Seven**

### •Scripture Reading: Psa. 90:12; Eph. 5:16-17; Joel 2:25

Psa. 90:12 "Teach us then to number our days / That we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Eph. 5:16-17 "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Joel 2:25 "And I will restore to you the years / That the swarming locust has eaten, / The licking locust and the consuming locust and the cutting locust, / My great army / That I sent among you."

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(Editor's Note: The following article was printed in the Chinese edition of Twelve Baskets Full, Volume 5, chapter twelve. It is similar in content to the article "The Numbering of Spiritual Days" published in Issue No. 47 of Notes on Scriptural Messages and reprinted in The Collected Works, Volume 19. However, there are variations in the arrangement of the material in these two articles. Since we do not have the assurance that this message is based on the same spoken message, we have included it in this volume.)

In the Psalms, Moses prayed to God, "Teach us then to number our days/That we may gain a heart of wisdom." If our days are numbered according to the calendar, then a day is a day and a year is a year; this is easy to understand. But if we take God's view, then some years and days will be numbered, while others will not be numbered. Our days on earth are limited. How should we please God within such a limited number of years and days? How can each day

and each year of our life be counted? This is the subject of our study.

## ONE

There are two genealogies in Genesis 4 and 5. Chapter four is the genealogy of Cain, while chapter five is the genealogy of Seth. The way that the two genealogies are recorded is different. Cain's genealogy is very simple; it does not record the age of Cain and his descendants. Seth's genealogy is much more detailed; it tells us how old each person was when he begot offspring and how many years he lived. It records the ages of generation after generation. Based on the fact that one genealogy is simple and the other is detailed, we can trace God's principle in numbering our days. Cain's genealogy was simple because he offended God and was far away from God. He did not have any fellowship with God. Seth's genealogy was detailed because Seth replaced Abel and was acceptable to God; he fellowshipped with God. Hence, our spiritual days are reckoned according to our condition before the Lord. When we were far from God and dead in sin, our days were not reckoned in the sight of the Lord. But when we repented, turned to God, and began to fellowship with Him, our spiritual days began.

When the Israelites left Egypt, God commanded them, saying, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exo. 12:2). The first month is the beginning of the year; it is the starting point of reckoning. In this month the Israelites killed the Passover lamb, left Egypt, and freed themselves from the bondage of Pharaoh. Hence, God charged them to call this month the first month. From this month forward, the Israelites had a new beginning before the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, how much spiritual history do you have? Some of you are quite old; you may be fifty or sixty years old. But spiritually, you are still only one year or even one month old. Your spiritual age began the day you were regenerated and saved. The day you received the Lord's salvation was the day your spiritual history began. Before that day, no spiritual years were counted before the Lord. However, even after you believed in the Lord, one year does not necessarily mean one year. You may have been a Christian for five years, but in

the eyes of God, you may not be five years old as a Christian. In other words, even after you become a Christian, some days and years are not counted in God's sight. We can see from the Bible that some years were skipped over because God considered them to be wasted, and they could not be counted. He also records some years in the Bible to serve as our warning. We will consider the following passages and draw some lessons from them.

## TWO

How many years were there from the time the Israelites left Egypt to the time of the building of Solomon's temple? Acts 13:18-22 says, "And for a time of about forty years He carried them as a nurse in the wilderness. And when He had overthrown seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance. And after these things, for about four hundred and fifty years, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had deposed him, He raised up David for them as king." (David was king for forty years—2 Sam. 5:4.) How many years were there from the exodus to the fourth year of King Solomon when he built the temple? It was forty plus four hundred fifty plus forty plus forty, which equals five hundred seventy. If we add the three years prior to the building of the temple, we have five hundred seventy-three years. Yet 1 Kings 6:1 says, "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord." This verse says four hundred eighty years rather than five hundred seventy-three years—a difference of ninety-three years! Why is there such a great difference? Is Acts wrong or is 1 Kings wrong? No, both records are right. A spiritual principle is involved in the discrepancy between the two numbers. In Acts, the record of the forty years in the wilderness is correct, the record of the forty years of Saul's reign is correct, and the record of the forty years of David is also correct. The temple was built in the fourth year of Solomon's reign; therefore, it is right to add three years to that period. The discrepancy is in the

four-hundred-fifty-year period. First Kings has ninety-three years less than Acts. Where did these ninety-three years go? In studying Judges, we discover a fact: During that period, the Israelites were subdued by heathen tribes several times. Let us see how many years they were under oppression.

Judges 3:8 says, "Therefore the anger of Jehovah burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years." This was the first period of oppression the Israelites suffered; it lasted for eight years. Verse 14 says, "And the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years." This was the second period of oppression the Israelites suffered; it lasted for eighteen years. Judges 4:2-3 says, "And Jehovah sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. And the captain of his army was Sisera, who dwelt at Harosheth-hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out to Jehovah; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the children of Israel severely twenty years." This was the third period of oppression the Israelites suffered; it lasted for twenty years. Judges 6:1 says, "Then the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years." This was the fourth period of oppression the Israelites suffered; it lasted for seven years. Judges 13:1 says, "Then the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." This was the fifth period of oppression the Israelites suffered; this bondage under the Philistines lasted for forty years. How many years were there in the five periods of oppression by the heathen tribes? There were eight plus eighteen plus twenty plus seven plus forty. How many years were there? There were exactly ninety-three years, no more and no less. Now we understand the discrepancy between the records in 1 Kings and Acts. In Acts, Paul was speaking about history; therefore, he included the ninety-three years. The emphasis in 1 Kings is on the condition of the Israelites before the Lord, and the ninety-three years were not counted. This is why it says four hundred eighty years.

It is very meaningful that ninety-three years were not counted. These years were lost years. Whenever the Israelites lost their freedom, served heathen

tribes, and did not have a judge, their days were not reckoned. The Israelites belonged to God; they were saved from Egypt already. Whenever they were subdued by their enemies and became slaves, whenever they were in bondage, and whenever they could not serve God freely, their days were not counted. When they served something other than God, their days were lost and not counted in God's sight. Brothers and sisters, we should consider how many of the days since we were saved have been counted before the Lord. Perhaps we have believed in the Lord for eight or ten years. How many days during these years have we lived foolishly? How many days in the past have been struck out? We have too many wasted days! I doubt whether the days that can be counted before the Lord add up to a year. We must realize that the days that we live according to man's desire, the days that we live apart from God, and the days of failure and decline are not counted in God's eyes. We have been Christians for many years. Let us ask ourselves, "How many of these days have we wasted? How many of these days can be counted?" Every day that is not lived in fellowship with God is a lost day. Therefore brothers and sisters, we must all redeem the time.

## THREE

We must not think that the days we have lost are a few, unimportant days. If we consider the journey the Israelites took in the wilderness, we will realize how serious it is to waste our days. Three months after the Israelites left Egypt, they came to Sinai (Exo. 19:1). They remained there for ten months. On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year, they left Sinai and traveled toward the land God promised to give them for their inheritance (Num. 10:11-12). Deuteronomy 1:2 says, "It is eleven days' journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the way that leads to Mount Seir." Kadesh-barnea was at the border of the land of Canaan. It was only an eleven-day journey from Mount Sinai to Canaan. Yet when they arrived at Kadesh-barnea, they could not enter Canaan because of their unbelief. After this they wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years before their descendants finally entered Canaan. This was indeed a big, indirect route! It took not just three or five years but thirty-eight years. They spent

thirty-eight years on a journey to Canaan that should have taken them only two years! In our spiritual journey, there are countless wasted days. Some problems can be dealt with in three to five days, yet they remain unsolved in some people for three to five years. These ones are like the Israelites, who circled around in the wilderness and wasted many days. This is a great loss. We should not consider it to be inconsequential.

## FOUR

The story of Abraham also shows us that parts of his life were counted and parts were not counted. According to Acts 7:2-3, while Abraham was still in Mesopotamia (i.e., in Ur), God appeared to him, saying, "Come out from your land and from your relatives, and come into the land which I will show you." What did he do? He would not have had peace if he did not obey; yet he was not willing to obey completely. As a result, he partially obeyed. God told him to come out from his relatives, yet he took his relatives along. He did not go alone; rather, he brought his nephew Lot and his father Terah with him. God intended that he go all the way to Canaan. Yet he went only as far as Haran and stayed there (Gen. 11:31). This is the picture of a Christian who is not willing to be absolute. Some Christians are not altogether cold; they still have some glow in them. Yet they are not hot. This was Abraham's condition. He left Ur of the Chaldees, yet he did not enter Canaan. He was like a halfway Christian.

After his father Terah died, God called Abraham again (12:1). This time, God called him from Haran. God's will cannot be changed. Once He has decided to do something, He will always accomplish it. God wanted Abraham to go to Canaan, and Abraham's deterrence in Haran did not change His will at all. The first time God called Abraham, he only obeyed halfway. Therefore, God called him the second time. When Abraham obeyed God by leaving Haran, the Bible immediately points out that he was seventy-five years old (12:4). His years in Ur were not mentioned, and his years in Haran were not mentioned either. But the minute he left Haran for Canaan, the Bible points out that his age was seventy-five. This shows us a new beginning in his life. The days Abraham spent in Haran, the days he tarried halfway, were wasted days; God did not remember

those days. Brothers and sisters, in looking back at our past, we find that there are numerous days we have lost! We must remember that God has no concern for the days in Haran. We often walk according to our self-will. We become lazy and seek our own comfort; we tarry halfway. These are days in Haran and days which will not be counted. In order to receive blessing from God, Abraham had to leave Haran. The year he was seventy-five years old was the year he left Haran. Until then the Bible did not record his age. Until then God did not consider that his age was worth mentioning. He wants man to obey Him in an absolute way!

These were not the only years Abraham wasted. He also suffered a loss in the course of begetting a son. God promised Abraham that he would have a son. Yet he took his wife's suggestion and married Hagar as his concubine. He committed the sin of presumptuousness in the eyes of God. Later, Hagar gave birth to a son; however, this son was born out of Abraham's fleshly energy rather than out of God's promise. At the end of Genesis 16, he is spoken of as being eighty-six years old. But at the beginning of chapter seventeen, he was ninety-nine years old. There was a gap of thirteen years. During those thirteen years, there is no record of anything concerning him. We do not see him building an altar, and God did not appear to him once. He did not receive any new revelation or promises. Those days were empty days and days of nothingness. Those were the days Ishmael grew up. We have to remember that this period of Abraham's life was wasted and lost.

Brothers and sisters, have we received any new experience, new light, and new messages during the past few years? Was anyone saved through our hands during the past few years? Did anyone receive our help during the past few years? Have we received a deeper knowledge of God during the past few years? Have we gained a stronger assurance of His promises? Have we renewed our consecration to God? If we did not have any of these experiences, our days were wasted days. An older sister once said, "Every single day of a Christian's life should count for a day. This is the way to assure our reward." What a pity that ten days often do not add up to one day! Brothers and sisters, it would be wonderful if we could live our Christian life in a conscientious way. If we spend our days foolishly, rebelling against God, sinning, and walking according to our self-will,

our days have been wasted in the eyes of the Lord; our time has been squandered away. What a waste this is!

Why does the Bible point out that Abraham's age was ninety-nine? It is because he was circumcised in that year. One year after he was circumcised, he begot Isaac. The meaning of circumcision is the removal of the flesh. If we walk according to the flesh, our years are wasted. May we start today by removing everything that is of the flesh and offering ourselves up fully on the altar, so that we will no longer waste our time. We should not wait for fifty years to find out that we have wasted forty-nine of them. We have to consider how many days we have wasted in foolishness and how many days we have left. If we are waiting for the Lord's coming every day, we will pay attention to the way we spend our days.

## FIVE

The Lord spoke a parable in Matthew 20 concerning a householder looking for workmen for his vineyard. We have to pay attention to two words, "standing idle." The householder "went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place, and to those he said, You also go into the vineyard" (vv. 3-4). "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing, and said to them, Why have you been standing here all the day idle?...You also go into the vineyard" (vv. 6-7). This parable shows us that God does not want us to be idle; He wants us to work. It also tells us that God has His sphere of work—His vineyard. We may say that we are very busy, and that we are not idle at all. But are we busy in the right place? If we are not working in the vineyard, how is that different from being idle? If we are not living in the will of God, it does not matter how much we have worked; in the eyes of God we are still idle. We may be very busy with our spiritual work, but in God's eyes we are very idle.

The only work that God approves is work in the vineyard. The work in the vineyard is the work that is genuinely from God and for God. If our work is outside God's will, our days are idle days in the eyes of God. The householder told the ones standing at the eleventh hour, "Why have you been standing here all the day idle?" The entire day signifies man's whole life. Brothers and sisters, what about us? Are we idle, or are we working in the vineyard? Do not be

mistaken. I am not saying that we have to quit our job and be a preacher. The most important thing is being clear about our standing and knowing that we are standing in the will of God in whatever we are doing. To work in the vineyard means to work according to God's will. There are many kinds of work in the vineyard. Some are digging the ground; others are sowing; still others are trimming. Whatever we do, as long as it is for the vineyard, it is good. We should not consider that it is God's work only when we work as certain people do or only when we do certain things. No, we do not have to do that. As long as our days are spent in the vineyard, they are counted.

Brothers and sisters, you may have been saved for three or five years. Or you may have been saved for ten or twenty years. How much time have you spent for the Lord? It is true that you have done much. But for whom are you doing these works? As long as you are sure that you are working according to God's will, everything will be fine. God has no intention that every Christian drop his job to be a gospel preacher. Sometimes it is contrary to God's will for someone to give himself up solely for gospel work. It is a matter of your heart and how much it is towards God. Hence, consecration is indispensable. From the day you were saved until now, if you have not had a heart for God, your life has been an idle one.

## SIX

Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, "And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able" (1 Cor. 3:1-2). As far as I know, from the time Paul first preached at Corinth until the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, there was only a span of a few years. But Paul already felt that the Corinthian believers were not growing. He did not say that they had been Christians for only a few years and that it was understandable that they were immature. Paul said that they should have matured. Yet they had not grown and had wasted their days. They should have been strong enough to eat solid food, but they had wasted their days and were still fleshly babes. They should have been experienced in their obedience to

the Lord, in their trust of the Lord, and in their pursuit of the Lord, and they should have been able to lead others. But they still did not know about these things. They had been Christians for a number of years, but they were still babes, and Paul felt that this was wrong. Brothers and sisters, if you think that you should be a babe because you have been saved for only a few years, you are wrong. How many years do you have in your life? How many years can you be a Christian? If you have been a believer for eight or ten years and are still the same as when you were regenerated—fleshly and babyish—you have wasted many days.

Brothers and sisters, how many years can you live on this earth? Seventy years? Eighty years? How short your life is! Within this short period, you have to subtract the years when you were not yet saved. How many years are left? Brothers and sisters, do you know how many more years you will live on this earth? You have lived sixty years. Perhaps God will say, "You have lived less than ten years before Me." Or you may have lived fifty years, but God may say, "In My eyes you have only lived a few days." It would be a pity if all your days were wasted away.

## SEVEN

Brothers and sisters, my heart aches when I think of the days you have wasted in the past. But thank the Lord that He has given you comfort; you have the words of Joel 2:25. The years that the locusts have eaten will be restored to you. Thank God that He has a way. Perhaps you are sixty years old and have wasted thirty to forty years. You have to say, "Oh, my opportunity is gone. My best days have been eaten up by the locusts, and the lost days cannot be recovered again. What can I do?" Thank the Lord that He will restore the days that were eaten up by the locusts. If you waste your days, ten years may be equal to one day. But if you redeem the time, one day may equal ten years. David said, "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand" (Psa. 84:10). The days in heaven are not counted by a twenty-four hour cycle. God has a different way of counting days. If our service is according to God's will, one day will equal many days.

There was once a young man who fell into sin and was about to die of tuberculosis. An old servant of God went to him and preached about Jesus taking away sins. He exhorted him to repent, confess his sins, and accept the Lord Jesus as his Savior. At first the young man thought it was a hard thing to do. He doubted whether a sinner such as he could be saved. But eventually, he accepted the Lord and was saved. He was filled with joy and peace. A few days later, the old servant of God went to see him again and noticed that he was full of sorrow and sadness again, and he asked, "Why are you this way? Do not allow the devil to deceive you!" He answered, "No, I know that my sins are forgiven." The old servant asked, "Why then are you still so sorrowful?" He answered sadly, "My days on earth are about over. When I stand before the Lord, what should I bring to Him? My hands are empty! How can I go to the Lord empty-handed?" He was sorrowful because of this. The old man said to him, "Brother, it is all right! Use the very words that you have just said as the subject and write a hymn about it. Perhaps some will be touched by this hymn and will go out to preach and to gain some others. The reward will then go to you." The hymn that he wrote is the famous one, "Must I Go, and Empty-handed," (Hymns, #930). Many have been touched by this hymn to become zealous for the Lord's work. Although this young person lost many of his years, he had a heart for the Lord at the close of his life, and the Lord fulfilled his wish.

Brothers and sisters, let us all number our days! May the days that we have lost be restored to us, and may each day of our life be worth a thousand. May we all walk step by step in the light of God's will!

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# Twelve Baskets
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# MESSAGE ONE

## THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

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Psa. 119:125 "I am Your servant; give me understanding, / That I may know Your testimonies."

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### GOD'S TESTIMONY BEING AN EXPRESSION OF GOD HIMSELF

We often talk about the testimony of God. What actually is the testimony of God, and what does it refer to?

The word testimony is used in the Old Testament more often than it is used in the New Testament. We would like to point out two places in the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch, especially in Exodus, the word testimony is used quite frequently. (The word covenant in the phrases the ark of the covenant and the tablets of covenant is testimony in the original language.) The other place is in Psalm 119. The uses of the word testimony in Psalm 119 and in the Pentateuch open our eyes to see its meaning. Psalm 119 often speaks of the word

of God, His laws, statutes, ordinances, and commandments. At the same time, it also frequently speaks of God's testimony, which is placed side by side with His word, ordinances, statutes, and commandments. We should keep God's word. We should keep His laws, ordinances, statutes, and commandments. Psalm 119 also shows that we should keep God's testimony. This expression sounds unfamiliar, and it is difficult to understand. But in God's Word and in His mind, His testimony is the same as His word; it is the same as His ordinances, laws, statutes, and commandments. A testimony is the same in nature as an ordinance, etc.

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers not only show that God's testimony is equal to His word and ordinances, but that the two tablets of stone, upon which the laws were inscribed, were called the tablets of testimony. The two tablets were placed in the ark, and it was called the ark of the testimony. God inscribed the law on two tablets of stone and called them the tablets of testimony. He also called the ark the ark of the testimony.

This shows us what a testimony is. A testimony is a law. It is God's heart, demand, or standard. The two tablets of testimony in Exodus are a good picture; they were set before men to show them God's standard. What is God's standard? God's standard expresses God Himself; it shows the kind of God that He is. God's testimony is made for Himself; it manifests God's absolute standard.

When this testimony is manifested among men, it becomes the law. With God it is a testimony, and among men it is the law. It testifies to God's demand on His side, and it dictates to man what he should keep on his side. In God's hand it is the testimony, and in man's hand it is the law. In God's hand it is His demand, and in man's hand it is his duty. When it is put before man, it tells him what he ought to do; it also testifies of what man has done wrong and what the nature of God is. When this testimony is placed in man's hand, it testifies of his wrongdoings, showing how much he has come short of God's standard. When this testimony is in God's hand, it testifies of the kind of God that He is. A testimony is God opening His mouth to declare what He is in Himself.

In the New Testament, this thought is more obvious. The Lord Jesus came as a testimony to the Father, while the Holy Spirit came as a testimony to Christ.

The church maintains the testimony of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. To testify Christ means to tell others about who He is and what He is. This is a testimony. On God's side, the testimony is God Himself, and on man's side, the testimony is a tremendous matter—it is the law within man. We should not offend this testimony, and God will not lightly regard any offense to this testimony.

## ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW GOD CAN TESTIFY FOR GOD

A testimony is a tremendous matter. We must realize that the central meaning of testimony is God's declaration of Himself; it declares that God is a God of life. In order to testify of Himself, He came among men and declared what He is. This testimony is a spiritual fact; it is the ultimate reality. If anyone has not touched this ultimate reality, he has not touched the testimony. Strictly speaking, no one can testify of God, because from eternity to eternity, only God can testify of Himself; God Himself declares who He is. (The testifying that we are speaking of here is different from the testifying that we understand in ordinary terms.)

There is much that we can say about God; we can testify for God and speak of the kind of God that He is, but our words are useless. We can recite one, ten, or a hundred speeches concerning God, but we must realize that the testimony is not given by man; the testimony is what God tells us about Himself. Therefore, if God does not speak, there will be no testimony. Do you see the significance of this? If God does not speak, there will be no testimony. If God does not tell men about Himself, no one can testify for Him. We can talk and speak, but talking and speaking are useless because only we are talking and speaking. If God does not speak, everything is vain. For example, I may try to defend someone in court by witnessing for him, and I may be very eloquent. If the defendant, however, will not testify or say anything, what are my words worth? God's testimony is His declaration about Himself. If God does not speak, there is no testimony.

Therefore, anyone who testifies for God must touch God and speak what God wants to speak. A man will not have anything to speak for God until he has known God, seen God, and received revelation from God. When he touches the ultimate reality, he will have something to say, and he will be able to testify for

God. If we have not touched this reality, we will have nothing to say, and we will have no testimony. We can convey God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances to others, and we can preach the word of the Bible. But these are not the testimony. The testimony is something else. Even though man can receive ordinances, statutes, and commandments, the testimony remains with God. These are outward things, but the testimony, the ultimate reality, remains with God. Consequently, Christ needed to come from God to testify for God. Similarly, only the Spirit which proceeds from Christ can testify for Christ, and only those who know this Christ and this Spirit can testify for God and Christ. This has nothing to do with what man can say; it is not a matter of his doctrines or his teachings. It is a matter of Christ being released.

The testimony can become a doctrine, but a doctrine can never be the testimony. The testimony can make demands on man, but a demand can never be the testimony. The testimony is something entirely different; it is something absolutely different from what we ordinarily think of as a testimony. We often say that we cannot testify because we do not have the experience. But even if we have experiences and personal encounters, these things are small in the context of the testimony; they do not fit into the testimony. The testimony is not a matter of experiences and personal encounters, but a matter of touching the Lord. From man's point of view, a testimony is an experience, but terms such as experience and personal encounters are too small; they are not great enough and cannot be compared with the testimony. The testimony is man touching the Lord. Only God can testify for Himself, because no one is greater than God. Only God can testify for God.

The greatest problem in the church is that there are too many doctrines from man. Man comes up with many doctrines and biblical teachings; he tells others what they should do, what is scriptural, and what is unscriptural. Man pays attention to all these matters, but a genuine testimony touches the ultimate reality. Only that which touches God constitutes a testimony. I do not wish to say too much concerning this point, yet I would like all of us to ponder this matter before the Lord. Brothers and sisters, if we read the Pentateuch and Psalm 119 again, we will realize that God uses the term testimony differently than we do. A

testimony is too great a thing; it is something that our mind cannot fathom. The testimony is the speaking of God concerning Himself and His demands. Those who have touched God's testimony surely have touched God Himself.

## OFFENDING GOD BEING TO OFFEND THE TESTIMONY

What does it mean to offend the testimony? To offend the testimony is to offend God Himself. Anything that touches God's attributes and ways touches God's testimony. God intends to express His absolute attributes. Anything that improperly expresses them or improperly represents them is an offense to God's testimony. God is very unforgiving about some things, because they touch His testimony. Whenever something touches His testimony, He will not bear with it lightly. He is very uncompromising with anything that improperly expresses Him or that affects His attributes, position, or person.

## THE ISRAELITES NOT BEING ABLE TO ENTER CANAAN

There are a few sobering cases in the Old Testament. In Numbers 13 and 14, God did not allow the Israelites to enter Canaan. Before Kadesh-barnea, the Israelites committed many sins. They often tempted God and often offended Him, but God forgave them. However, after the incident at Kadesh-barnea, God decided that they could not enter Canaan. His decision was firm. Why? When they reached Kadesh-barnea, the Israelites had experienced many miracles already, and they had witnessed that Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey. However, they believed that the people in the land were too strong and the cities too big. They thought that the sons of Anak were giants and that they themselves were but grasshoppers. They were afraid and wept, and they would not enter the land. Their fear and tears were an insult to God; it affected God Himself.

When the Israelites cried and murmured for food and drink, it did not seem that serious. Some sins are caused by human weaknesses, and God is quite forbearing with them. For example, the Israelites craved their favorite food and spoke against God, saying, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" (Psa. 78:19). This did not affect God's attributes, because He knew that they were lustful. He punished them a little and then let them go. However, the incident at

Kadesh-barnea did not reflect upon human weaknesses but upon God's power. Being fearful, weeping, and refusing to enter the land were the same as saying that God had brought them to a place of death; it put a question mark on God Himself. When this happened, God could no longer be forbearing. In relation to His government, He could not forgive them. Those who arrived at Kadesh-barnea and refused to go in were not allowed to enter. This was the end; there was no further possibility of repentance. They asked to enter a second time, but God would not relent; He could not relent when His government was concerned. Once His decision was made, it was final. When He said that they could no longer enter, He was firm in the matter because they had offended God Himself. This is the meaning of offending God's testimony.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE COMPANY OF KORAH

In Numbers 16 and 17 we see the judgment on the company of Korah. They reviled Moses and Aaron, saying that they had gone too far and had exalted themselves above the congregation of Jehovah. God punished the company of Korah; the ground opened its mouth and swallowed them. The next day the congregation of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying that they had killed the people of God, and God's wrath fell upon them also. Later God told Moses to call the leaders of the twelve tribes together and put twelve rods in the tabernacle before the testimony (17:4). The one whose rod budded was the one chosen by God.

We can see a great principle in this severe judgment. If men are just arguing about who is the greatest, God will still let them go. John and James argued about who was the greatest, but the ground did not open its mouth to swallow them up. Even at the last supper of the Lord, the disciples were still arguing about who was the greatest, and the ground did not open its mouth to swallow them up then. The consequence was much more serious in Numbers because they had offended God's testimony. The testimony says that only those in resurrection can serve God; dead ones cannot serve God. A man can only serve the Lord in resurrection.

Today outside of resurrection, there is no life. In the garden of Eden, we see

the tree of life. But today life is in resurrection because death came in. Today life is represented by resurrection. If a man has not entered resurrection, he cannot come before God. Today this life has passed through death. This is why it is called resurrection. Revelation 1:18 is excellent; it says, "And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever." Today it is not just a matter of living but a matter of becoming dead and living again. Today our Lord is standing on the ground of resurrection. We also have to stand on the ground of resurrection. Anything that is not standing on the ground of resurrection cannot come before God. Only that which has passed through death and resurrection can stand before God. Many people have not brought their eloquence, thought, ability, power, and wisdom through death; these things are not on the ground of resurrection, and they cannot come before God.

In Aaron we see a great testimony—only one who is in resurrection is qualified to serve God. The budding rod tells us that the only one who has a ministry is the one who is in resurrection. Without resurrection, no one can serve God. This is the testimony! This incident speaks of a principle—man can only come before God through resurrection. When man was first created, he could come before God freely. But since man fell, he can only come before God through resurrection, because all sinners are dead before God, and no one can come before Him without first going through resurrection. Resurrection is the unique requirement for service today.

Of course, this resurrection does not mean the resurrection life that we have received. It refers to the work of the cross in us. The cross was a "taking away" for the Lord Jesus, and it is also a "taking away" for us. When men crucified the Lord Jesus, they cried, "Take Him away! Take Him away!" (John 19:15). Everyone cried to remove Him. The cross is a great removal; all the old creation has to go. If the old creation does not go and the rod does not bud, God's testimony cannot be maintained. In other words, God has only opened one door. Those who do not enter through this unique door are dead.

The company of Korah suffered severe judgment because they offended God's testimony. God will allow you to get by with some matters, but He will not allow you to get by with matters that offend His testimony. We must realize that

the fundamental reason that God disciplines is to maintain His own testimony. In other words, God does not want to be misunderstood by men. When many people sin, others will only say that the sinners are poor, but not that God is poor. But when a man does certain things, others will say that God is poor; these things affect God Himself. God will not allow you to get by with things that affect God Himself, because these things offend the testimony; they offend God Himself.

## MOSES NOT BEING ABLE TO ENTER CANAAN

In Numbers 20, Moses smote the rock at Meribah, and God forbade him from entering Canaan. Although Moses later pleaded, "Let me please cross over" (Deut. 3:25), God would not answer his pleading. When God said that he could not enter Canaan, it meant that he could not enter it. We know it was wrong for Moses to lose his temper and smite the rock with his rod. But we do not realize the gravity of the mistake he committed. We think that Moses was a meek person and that he unfortunately lost his temper. We may have seen many gentle persons lose their temper, yet God did not deal with them severely. Why was God so severe toward Moses? Let us see what God said.

He said to Moses and Aaron, "You did not...sanctify Me in the eyes of the sons of Israel" (Num. 20:12). What does it mean to not sanctify the Lord? It means that we have implicated the Lord. To sanctify God is to set Him apart, to express His distinctive character. This is to sanctify the Lord. Even if Moses lost his temper ten times, others would only say that Moses had a quick temper, and the consequence would not be great. But when Moses lost his temper this time, it affected God Himself. God said that by losing his temper this way, Moses had involved God. He did not sanctify God; he did not put God in His rightful place. The problem with Moses' temper was that he lost his temper on the one hand, and water came out of the smitten rock on the other hand. God's work was evident. This made it difficult to distinguish who was involved. Moses involved God, because the Israelites might have thought in their hearts, "Now we know that God is this kind of God. He is a God who loses His temper and reviles." God was implicated through Moses.

If Moses lost his temper and men only saw his bad temper, the consequence

would have been small, and God would not have needed to seriously deal with him. God paid attention to this incident because Moses performed a miracle on the one hand—water came out and God's power was manifested—and lost his temper on the other hand. The Israelites could not distinguish the difference. They might have said that God caused the water to flow out for their drink and that God also lost His temper and reviled them. Moses dragged God into this confusing picture and did not make a clear distinction. This offended the testimony. The consequence was serious; God could not let him off easily; He had to disqualify Moses from entering the land.

## UZZAH BEING KILLED

In considering the matter of offending the testimony, we cannot help but recall the hand of Uzzah. Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God to take hold of it, and he was smitten by God and died by the ark (2 Sam. 6:1-7). God did this to vindicate Himself. We have said in the past that Uzzah tried to take hold of the ark with hands of flesh, but this is still not clear enough; it does not convey the seriousness of the matter. We must see that the ark is the ark of testimony. Before David became king, the ark was captured. At that time there was no Uzzah to protect the ark, yet the ark was able to protect itself. The ark was among the heathens, and it was moved from one place to another. There was no Uzzah or even a single Israelite to protect the ark, yet the ark did not fall. It had never fallen, and man could do nothing about it. When David moved it back, it was among God's people. Did it need someone to take hold of it? Here we see the sin of Uzzah. When the ark was among enemies, it protected itself. When it was among God's people, did it need someone to protect it? God wanted the Levites to lift the ark, yet they put it on a cart drawn by oxen. If the ark fell, that would be God's concern. But the use of man's hand to aid His will damaged His testimony. This is why God would not let this matter go.

We have to learn the lesson of allowing God to do many things. Those who do not know God's will try to help God. But if we spend some time before the Lord to consider the end of many men in the past, we can identify a principle: no one is allowed to offend God's testimony. Whenever anything offends God's

attributes, His authority, His way, His plan, or His testimony, His disciplining hand will quickly come. God cannot allow His testimony to be damaged. He will demonstrate that He is a God of holiness, a God of power, and a God of life. Therefore, we must stand before Him in fear and trembling and not be careless or foolish at all.

## OFFENDING GOD'S TESTIMONY BRINGING IN HIS DISCIPLINE

God often disciplines His children for the purpose of vindicating Himself. God wants to let men, as well as the devil, know that He has no part in a certain matter, that it is something done by man himself. If man cannot maintain God's testimony, He has to step forward to maintain it. God will maintain His testimony, even if man cannot; He will maintain it by Himself. If a man does not maintain God's testimony, he will suffer God's discipline. There are many kinds of sins. Some sins are related to ourselves alone; God pays less attention to them. But if anything that is related to God offends Him, He will step forward and immediately discipline us. He has to immediately declare that He has nothing to do with the matter.

Therefore, we have to be very careful before the Lord. It is wrong to commit any sin in general, but in particular, we should not commit the sin of offending the testimony. In general we have to ask God in fear and trembling to keep us from sin. In particular we have to ask Him to keep us from the sin of offending the testimony. We have to learn to know God and learn to not offend Him. Whenever God declares Himself as God, He will not compromise nor implicate Himself with man. Man can fail, but he can never offend God's testimony. We can look at the stories of many men in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. They were chosen by God, and God delighted in them. Their histories also show failures and shortcomings. Yet God judged them only briefly, and then He dropped the matter. Have you ever wondered why God behaved in this way? This was because the wrong things they committed did not offend God's testimony. Whenever God's testimony is offended, the consequence is grave and terrible. This is not a distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is a distinction between offending the testimony and

honoring the testimony. It is a tremendous thing, a terrible thing, to offend God's testimony; God will not allow us to get by. We must learn to fear God in this matter.

Hebrews 12:10 says, "For they disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness." God disciplines us for our profit, which is our participation in His holiness. God wants us to partake of His holiness. Whenever God disciplines, He disciplines for the purpose of vindicating Himself.

Have you ever realized that Satan's mouth is stopped whenever God disciplines us? Once God disciplines us, Satan has nothing more to say; he cannot accuse us any longer. The discipline from God is for the purpose of maintaining Himself; it maintains His own holiness. As a consequence, the enemy sees that God has no part in a certain matter. When you are under discipline, the first thing you should pray for is God's vindication, not your deliverance from the discipline. Whenever you are disciplined, you have to tell the brothers and sisters that you were disciplined because you offended God in a certain matter. It may be a simple word, but it will testify to the fact that God has no share in the matter. Some brothers and sisters have clearly done something wrong and experienced God's discipline, yet they continue to cry because the discipline is too severe and because they are in trouble. Yet they should not cry about this. God's discipline is for the purpose of absolving Himself in a matter; it is for the purpose of vindicating His name. His name is upon you, and if you are not careful, you will implicate Him. Therefore, He has to vindicate Himself. When you are disciplined, you should bow down and worship the Lord, saying, "I will gladly accept this discipline. I will gladly stand in this position. I will gladly let the devil, the church, and the world know that God has no share in this matter and that the wrong is all on my part." The more you submit to His disciplining hand and the more you vindicate God, the easier it will be for you to go through the discipline. But the more you try to run from the discipline and the more you struggle, the more you will not get away.

This matter has a great deal to do with God's way. We have to learn to know God in this matter. This will deliver us from many cumbersome things. At the

same time, we must allow God to be glorified through our failures. If we do well and glorify God, we should thank God's grace for it. If we do not do well, we should still glorify God in the things which He uses to vindicate Himself. May the blood cover us in saying these words and may the blood cover all those who read these words. This is a sober matter, and we should pay much attention to it.

## MESSAGE TWO

# THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD JESUS BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST AND PONTIUS PILATE

## •Outline

### •One—Three

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:57-66; 27:1-2, 11, 18; John 18:28-40; 19:7-8, 12, 15

Matt. 26:57-66 "And those who seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. And Peter followed Him at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest; and entering within, he sat with the attendants to see the end. Now the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death, And they did not find it, though many false witnesses came forward. But later two came And said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and build it up in three days. And the high priest stood up and said to Him, Do You answer nothing? What is it that these testify against You? But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to Him, I charge You to swear by the living God to tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You have said rightly. Nevertheless I say to you, From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? And they answered and said, He is worthy of death."

27:1-2 "Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death. And having bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor."

11 “And Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, Are You the King of the Jews? And Jesus said, It is as you say.”

18 “For he knew that it was because of envy that they had delivered Him up.”

John 18:28-40 “Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the praetorium, and it was early morning. And they themselves did not enter into the praetorium, so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the passover. Pilate therefore went outside to them and said, What accusation do you bring against this man? They answered and said to him, If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered Him to you. Pilate said then to them, You take Him and judge Him according to your law. The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to kill anyone, That the word of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was to die. Pilate therefore entered again into the praetorium and called for Jesus. And he said to Him, You are the King of the Jews? Jesus answered, Are you saying this of yourself, or did others tell you about Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your nation and its chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My attendants would be struggling so that I would not be delivered to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not from here. Pilate said therefore to Him, So then You are a king? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. Pilate said to Him, What is truth? And having said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them, I find no fault in Him. But you have a custom that I release one man to you at the Passover. Is it your will therefore that I release to you the King of the Jews? Then they cried out again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.”

19:7-8 “The Jews answered him, We have a law, and according to that law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard this word, he became frightened the more,”

12 “From then on, Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar; everyone who

makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

15 "They cried out then, Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king except Caesar."

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## ONE

On the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, He was seized and taken to Caiaphas the high priest. Although the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin sought false testimony against Him and sought to put Him to death, they could find nothing to use against Him. Some false witnesses came forward to testify against Him, but their testimonies did not match; in the end, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin found nothing. The interesting thing is that under these circumstances, when so many people asked the Lord Jesus questions and brought false witness against Him, He did not answer at all. But when the high priest asked, "I charge You to swear by the living God to tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God," He answered, "You have said rightly." Then the high priest condemned Him based on this word. In the morning, they bound up the Lord and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. When Pilate asked, "Are You the King of the Jews?", He answered, "It is as you say." It is strange that after His response Pilate declared that He had no sin and was about to release Him. When He answered the high priest by saying, "You have said rightly," He was condemned, but when He answered Pilate by saying, "It is as you say," He was declared to be without guilt. The two reactions were exactly opposite. Before Caiaphas the high priest, the Lord's interrogation concerned the matter of being the Son of God, not of being King. Before Pilate the governor, the Lord's interrogation concerned the matter of being King. Outwardly, there is a big difference between these two matters, but in the eyes of God, they are linked together. In God's eyes the Jews did not have a king, and the Son of God came to be their King. Therefore, the Lord Jesus did not answer any other questions during the course of His trial other than the two which concerned His person and His work.

## TWO

We would like to turn our attention to the matter of the Lord's testimony. Before Caiaphas the high priest, the Lord acknowledged that He was the Son of God; He was testifying for Himself. Before Pilate, the Lord acknowledged that He was the King; He was also testifying for Himself. When the high priest heard the Lord's testimony about being the Son of God and that He would be "sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven," he tore his garments and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is worthy of death." Why did they refuse the testimony of the Lord Jesus? What was their intention? They were not trying to prove whether or not He was the Son of God. To them it would prove that He had sinned if He said that He was the Son of God. They had no intention of determining whether He spoke the truth; their goal was to find an excuse for condemnation. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus acknowledged that He was the Son of God, they immediately condemned Him by saying that He had blasphemed. They were not interested in knowing whether this man was indeed the Son of God. Their only interest was in getting Him to say some words that could be used as an excuse for killing Him.

They were the prominent ones among the Jews, yet they were not concerned about the things of God. Their only concern was that this Jesus, who called Himself the Son of God, was threatening their position by what He did and said. If they allowed Jesus to go on, their position would be in jeopardy, and their dignity would be bankrupted. Therefore, they hastily tried to remove Jesus so that they could maintain their personal prestige. They twisted the Lord's word, saying, "This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and build it up in three days." (Actually, the Lord Jesus did not say this. See John 2:19-21.) They said this to show their concern for the temple. But by that time the temple had become a den of robbers; they were not concerned about it. When the Lord Jesus came to cleanse the temple, they even tried to kill Him (Mark 11:17-18). They only cared for the outward appearance of the temple, and they were using it as a means to add to their base gain. They did not want the reality of the temple, and they feared that it would expose their sins. They kept the form of religion but

denied the truth; they even tried to do away with the truth. Therefore, when the Son of God came to the world and declared that He was the Son of God, they regarded it as a sin. They thought that no one should say this even if it was true. The Lord Jesus was condemned by the high priest because He testified that He was the Son of God, not because He was the Son of God. They thought that this statement should never be made. They thought that the truth should never be testified. They tried everything they could to overturn this testimony. Finally, they appealed to the political power of Rome to kill the Lord Jesus.

## THREE

In the morning, they brought the Lord Jesus before Pilate the governor, and Pilate asked the Lord, "You are the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this of yourself, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate said, "Am I a Jew? Your nation and its chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My attendants would be struggling so that I would not be delivered to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not from here." Pilate then said, "So then You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate then asked, "What is truth?" After Pilate said this, he did not wait for Jesus' answer but went out to the Jews and told them, "I find no fault in Him." This was the Lord Jesus' testimony before Pilate.

Many people think that the question of being the King of the Jews referred to the Lord becoming the King of the Jews then. They think that it was a political question. But the Bible shows that when Pilate asked the question, "Are You the King of the Jews?", the Lord Jesus responded by asking him about the source of his question. This is the same as saying, "You have asked a question, but how much do you know about it? What is your understanding concerning it? Does your question represent your own view, or is it just hearsay?" This is very important. The Lord Jesus did not hide from Pilate the fact that He was the King of the Jews. He testified that He was the King of the Jews. But His testimony was

different from the accusation of His plotters. A king is always related to a kingdom. Therefore, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Since His kingdom is not of this world, His attendants did not need to fight for Him. If His kingdom had been of this world, there would have been a need for war. His kingdom was from God and from above. Therefore, there was no need to fight. Warfare in the flesh was unnecessary. He was the King of the Jews and a King out of the Jews. It had nothing to do with world politics.

Among God's children, some only know the material world. They think that not being worldly means being unattached to material things. I am not saying that we should be excessive with material things. But the greatest matter relates to the source. The word "of" is fundamental. "My kingdom is not of this world." In other words, it is not from this world and does not belong to this world.

Among God's children, there are many things which seem spiritual. But if we trace their source, it is still the world. Although many terms are biblical, when we trace the source of their manifestation, it is the world. For example, we often say that humility is a virtue, and we admit that humility is something from the Bible. Yet the humility the Bible speaks of and the humility we have are not the same; this is where the problem lies. When we trace the source of our humility, we often find that we are humble because we are trying to avoid certain things. We are humble because we do not want to hurt others' feelings or invite others' criticisms. This humility comes from diplomacy. A humility that issues from diplomacy can be considered only as a superficial virtue. But when we trace its source, we cannot say, "My kingdom is not of this world." This kind of humility is of the world; it comes from a fear which is of the world. Brothers and sisters, if a Christian lives according to God, he can be gentle and strong at the same time because he does not have any worldly considerations and fears.

God's children often talk about being heavenly. But what does it mean to be heavenly? Those who are always in contact with heavenly things are not necessarily heavenly. Only that which comes from heaven is heavenly. In the same way, what does it mean to be worldly? It does not mean that a person who is in constant contact with the world is worldly. Being worldly means to come from the world. It does not mean that a person will not be worldly just by

avoiding contact with the world and its things and affairs. Can you not be of this world simply by escaping from reality and changing your lifestyle? No, this is not the meaning of being not of this world. We are fundamentally of this world. This is why we need God's light. When God's light shines in us, we will realize that much of our goodness has its source and rationale in the world. We do certain things because of certain reasons, and these reasons are of the world. All of our virtues are apparently spiritual, but actually this "spirituality" is of the world. They do not constitute a testimony, and there is no spiritual reality behind them.

The Lord Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world." He is reigning in a realm that is not of this world. His kingdom is entirely different from the kingdom of this world. Hence, the question is not whether or not we have left the world but how many things in us are of the world. May the Lord be gracious to us and help us to not come under the influence of the world in spiritual matters.

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When the Lord Jesus came to the earth, He came to testify for the truth. The hypocritical ones did not prefer light; instead, they preferred darkness because they did evil works; they wanted to do away with the Lord Jesus. But the Lord did not bow to the evil powers. When men reviled and accused Him, He did not answer, but when they came to the question of His person and His work, He made a good confession for the truth. The Lord traveled an uncommon pathway while He was on earth. In man's eyes He gained nothing, but He is now sitting at the right hand of Power, and He will come on the clouds of heaven. Praise the Lord! All those who follow Him should pay attention to His testimony!

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

### •Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:2

Rev. 1:2 “Who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all that he saw.”

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The book of Revelation speaks of "the testimony of Jesus" several times. The apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos for "the testimony of Jesus" (1:9). The saints of old were slain because of "the testimony" (6:9). The kind of people Satan attacks the most are those who "have the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). When the Lord Jesus comes back again, those who will reign with Him are the saints who have maintained "the testimony of Jesus." The angel said to John that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy" (19:10). Paul said in his Epistles that "the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (1 Cor. 1:6). What is the testimony of Jesus?

It would require a considerable amount of work to answer this question fully. We can only explain it in a brief and concise way here. The testimony of Jesus includes four aspects: (1) who He was and who He is, (2) His relationship with man, (3) His accomplishments on the cross, and (4) His relationship with God's eternal plan. These four aspects include everything about the testimony of Jesus. Many things are included in these four points, and we can only cover them briefly.

First, who was Jesus, and who is Jesus now? This has everything to do with Himself; it relates to the person of Christ.

We must realize that the person of Christ occupies a very important place in theology. Do not think that theology is merely an exercise in fine technicalities. The deepest, craftiest, and most penetrating deceptions of Satan are directed

against the person of Christ. Satan has many ways to lead men into some type of esoteric or philosophical interpretation of the person of Christ. Once he stumbles a devout believer with this question, he will destroy the ministry of that person for his entire life. We should always bear in mind that the devil will use any means to subtly set traps to stumble and ensnare God's children with doubts about Christ's person. The more we follow the Lord, the more Satan will try to ensnare us and create doubts in us about this matter. Satan knows that the minute he strikes this matter, he has struck the center of all matters. As long as he can put doubts and questions about the person of Christ within us, we are finished in the eyes of God. As long as there is a little doubt or error in our teaching about the person of Christ, we are finished in God's hand. Satan is intent on attacking those who have a heart to consecrate themselves to the Lord; he wants to distract them from the orthodox way of the truth concerning the person of Christ. We have to discern clearly the different so-called theological thoughts and must not be deceived or follow blindly to the extent that we fall into Satan's snare.

Who is Jesus? This is the foundation of our testimony. All false teachings and heretical doctrines directly or indirectly take this central question as their target of attack. They all try to tear down the person of Christ. Many people try to explain Christ in a roundabout way. In the end they do not acknowledge that Christ is God and do not want others to acknowledge that Christ is God. The first point concerning the testimony of Jesus Christ is the person of Christ.

What is Jesus' relationship with man? One term explains and expounds His relationship with man: representation. He did things that were absolutely superhuman, things that no man could ever do. This is because He is God, and He acts as God. Yet at the same time, everything He did represented man. He was joined to man, and He became flesh. He is the "mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). He has physical organs and limbs like we do; He is man among men. Hence, He is a representation of man. His human living on earth, His work, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and His position and work in heaven today are all representative in nature. The testimony of Jesus includes His relationship with man. It speaks of His representation then and now.

What did Jesus accomplish on the cross? He accomplished death, burial, resurrection, and kingship. This is universal and all-inclusive—involving His all-inclusive death, all-inclusive burial, all-inclusive resurrection, and all-inclusive kingship, reign, and subjection of all things. This is the testimony of Jesus.

What is Jesus' relationship with God's eternal plan? God ordained in eternity past that the Lord Jesus be Head over all things. He is the King of kings. This is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We believe the above four points are the testimony of Jesus; they include the whole scope of the Bible. You can trace a line from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation, concerning these things. Today this testimony is contained within a vessel. This vessel is the church, His Body. This testimony is contained within this vessel and is manifested in two ways: (1) It is the sum total of all the truths that are revealed, and (2) it becomes the power of the truths that are constituted in this vessel. It is true that the testimony of Jesus is contained within this vessel; this truth was created in Jesus through the Spirit. Hence, it is not merely an objective truth that can be understood by the mind. This truth has to become our life, our nature, and part of our experience through the Holy Spirit. The testimony is found in the vessel, and the vessel is the church, His Body, of which we are the members. The Holy Spirit is revealing this testimony and constituting it into the church.

Has the Holy Spirit revealed the Lord Jesus to you? You must not confess that Jesus is the Son of God simply because you agree with others who say that He is the Son of God. You must believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God because of the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This is something that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Do we see the representative work of the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit? Is the vision continually clear that Christ was and still is our Representative? Has our vision become part of our life? All these matters need to be examined carefully. The Lord Jesus is our Representative at the right hand of God. The Lord Jesus represents us in His moral and spiritual perfection to meet all of God's demands. Before God, we are perfect in Him (Col. 1:28). Within the man Jesus,

God has found human perfection. God reckons His perfection as our own. He no longer needs to find another perfect man; He has gained One already. Now God is sharing Christ's perfection with us. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit dispenses the Lord Jesus to us through our faith and obedience. Has this become a part of us yet? This requires the revealing and constituting work of the Spirit. It is not a theory, concept, or creed. When we truly see it, we will know the difference between the two. This is why we say that we need the revelation and constitution of the Spirit.

We need the Holy Spirit to reveal what the Lord Jesus has done on the cross before His work can become a part of us. The Lord Jesus not only died for us; He died as us. When He died, we died also. When He was buried, we were buried also. When He resurrected, we appeared in Him also. Has the Holy Spirit shown us these things, and do we know them? With resurrection as our position and foundation, judgment is over. There is now no more condemnation, and we are no longer condemned. This may be only in the Bible, or it may truly be a part of our life as a revelation in us. This is what it means to have the testimony of Jesus contained in the vessel, which is the church, the Body of Christ, of which we are the members. We are called to testify of the truth that is contained in this vessel so that the testimony of the truth will be constituted in us through revelation. Hence, we must "earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who of old have been written of beforehand for this judgment, ungodly men, perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4).

# MESSAGE FOUR

## ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN GOD HAS SHOWN ON THE MOUNT

## •Outline

•One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 8:5; Psa. 19:13

Heb. 8:5 “Who serve the example and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to complete the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He said, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern that was shown to you in the mountain.’”

Psa. 19:13 “Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; / Do not let them have dominion over me; / Then I will be blameless and cleared / Of great transgression.”

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### ONE

The most important thing in our spiritual work is a knowledge of the "pattern on the mount." In our spiritual work, many things are important, and if we come short in any of them, our work will lose its spiritual usefulness and not please God. Of these important items, the most crucial one is "the pattern on the mount." The pattern on the mount is God's plan. If we do not understand God's plan, it will be impossible for us to do God's work.

The book of Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle was made according to God's revealed pattern. Before Moses built the tabernacle, he remained on the mountain forty days and nights, in order to give God time to show him the pattern and method of construction for the heavenly tabernacle. There were

prescribed patterns for everything from the Holy Place to the altar, including the material and color of each layer of the tabernacle's covering. Nothing was left to random design; there were prescribed plans and standards for everything. The altar, laver, table, lampstand, incense altar, ark, and everything else were made according to God's prescribed pattern, which even specified the kind of metal or wood to be used and their measurements and colors. Nothing was left to Moses' design.

God's building of the church is the same as His building of the tabernacle; He works according to a prescribed plan. No matter how great or how small a matter is, God has an ordained way. Moses was not responsible for the design of the pattern of the tabernacle; he was only responsible for carrying out the pattern according to instructions he received on the mount. The glory of a servant of Christ does not lie in his ability to come up with new designs for God but in his faithfulness in carrying out the will of God as he understands it. Understanding God's plan and working according to His plan are the glory of a servant of Christ.

A sister who has been serving the Lord for many years once said that man does not have any liberty at all in the work of God. When Moses built the tabernacle, he did not have the liberty to determine whether gold or silver should be used for even the smallest nail; everything had to be done according to God's instruction.

Moses was a meek person (Num. 12:3). What does it mean to be meek? It means to be pliable and yielding. He did what God wanted him to do. God prescribed the materials, colors, designs, and measurements, and Moses carried out the work according to God's instruction. He did everything according to God's command and did nothing according to his own will. This was Moses' meekness.

Moses' building of the tabernacle gives us much spiritual light. It shows us the proper standing of a servant of God in spiritual work. God prescribed everything concerning the tabernacle; He did not leave one single feature or small detail for Moses to design. God did not allow Moses to propose anything. He told Moses not only the general features of the tabernacle but the details as

well. Not only were the patterns, materials, colors, and measurements of every item determined by God, but even the way they were to be made was determined by God. It was not enough for Moses to make them according to God's prescribed measurements and pattern; he even had to make them according to God's prescribed procedure. For example, the veils had to be made not only of fine linen but of fine linen that was twined. The lampstand had to be made not only of gold but of one piece of gold of beaten work. God did not leave any room for Moses to make any proposals. He knew what He wanted. He did not need man to be His counselor, and He would not allow His servants to follow their own ideas in carrying out His work.

The greatest blessing a servant of Christ can possibly have is to receive God's instruction on the mount, to know the kind of work God has assigned for him, and to know the prescribed pattern concerning the work. Servants of Christ, are you coming to God to ask for your assigned work? Are you coming to God for His instruction as to the time and method of your work? Or are you conducting your work according to human reasonings, plans, schemes, and decisions? Many people think that God has no detailed prescriptions concerning His work and that many things are left to their own design. They have not seen that they are but a servant in God's work, and they can only do as they are told. They forget the words: "Whatever He says to you, do" (John 2:5). They forget that they are but a member in the Body of Christ and that they have to hold the Head (Col. 2:19) and be under the direct control of the Head. They presume that God needs their fleshly life and natural strength to fill up the lack of His plan. May God show us that Christ is the absolute Master in God's work. Everything related to God's work must first pass His authorization. The power of Christ's servants and the fruitfulness in their spiritual service can only be secured and manifested through singleness in pursuit of God's will and adherence to His plan. Otherwise, a worker's work may appear exciting, and the outward accomplishments may be great, but before the judgment seat of the Lord, all of these works will be shown by the trying fire to be nothing but wood, grass, and stubble.

## TWO

Psalm 19:13 says, "Keep Your servant from presumptuous sins;/Do not let them have dominion over me;/Then I will be blameless and cleared/Of great transgression." This tells us that God's servants have two kinds of sins before Him. One is the sin of rebellion, and the other is the sin of presumptuousness. If you do not do what God wants you to do, this is the sin of rebellion. We all know that this is a sin, and we are all willing to remove this sin. None of us wants to commit this sin. But brothers and sisters, please remember that not only is rebellion a sin; presumptuousness is also a sin. If we do what God has not commanded us to do, we are committing the sin of presumptuousness. Rebellion is to refuse to do what God commands us to do, whereas presumptuousness is to do what God has not commanded us to do. Any activity outside of God is presumption. God says that one should not commit fornication or steal. If a man transgresses in any of these things, he has sinned. This is something we know. But we also think that we can do what God has not commanded us to do. We do not realize that this is sin also. If God has not commanded you to do something, yet you do it according to your own will, you have committed a sin before God even though you may think that you have done a most wonderful work. David's prayer was excellent; he prayed that God would keep him from the sin of presumptuousness.

God knows what He wants, and He reveals what He wants through the Bible or through the Spirit. Spiritual work is not a matter of quantity but a matter of being according to God's use and will. The most important thing for a servant of Christ is to know what God wants from him. A characteristic of the new covenant is that man can know God's will. A servant of Christ can receive the revelation of the Holy Spirit within himself; he can know clearly God's requirement. This kind of knowledge is real; it does not come from one's imagination or from others' persuasion or instruction. This kind of knowledge cannot be learned from the letter of the Bible. These commandments from God are revealed by the Holy Spirit to a person's spirit, in the deepest part of his being.

How many today truly understand spiritual revelation? How many can truly say, "I have seen it"? Many people have replaced God's own work with things they consider to be good and spiritual, things that they zealously pursue after,

and things that they consider to be beneficial. There are more volunteers in God's work than called ones. Many people can only say, "I have come"; they cannot say, "I am sent." This is why many of the so-called works of God are filled with deadness. Many works are not approved by God; they are merely the result of man's zeal for God. Man does them because he thinks that God needs them, and he calls them the works of God. Actually, in this kind of work the element of God is almost nonexistent; there is almost nothing that is from God.

Genuine spiritual work is not initiated by us, but by God. Our only responsibility is to discern God's will. Any work that has any genuine spiritual value finds its source in the heart of God; we work only when the Holy Spirit puts a revelation in us and gives us the understanding of His will. In spite of the vast differences in outward appearance and results, there are only two kinds of service to God—that which has its source in God and that which has its source in man. One is what God wants, and the other is what man thinks God wants. Dear brothers and sisters, what kind of work are you doing?

It is unfortunate that many servants of Christ do not pay attention to the sin of presumptuousness, or shall we say, are not thoroughly clear about the nature of presumptuous sins. They have not allowed the Holy Spirit to bring them to the point where they deeply judge themselves. They have not yet realized that God is the only Master and that there is no place for them to propose anything. We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to show us the sin of presumptuousness and God's hatred toward such sin. We should realize that it is a sin for us to not do what He has commanded, and equally a sin for us to do what He has not commanded. We should not say, "Since God has not stopped me, why can't I do it?" Rather, we should say, "How can I possibly do what God has not commanded me to do?" Those who do not know the Lord deeply will think that they can do what the Bible has not forbidden them to do. But those who know the Lord deeply realize that even though the Bible does not forbid them to do many things, they are committing a presumptuous sin if they do anything without God's explicit command. Brothers and sisters, God will bring us to a deeper place one day, and we will realize that it is not enough to refrain from rebellion against God; it is not enough to refrain from doing what He forbids us to do. We also have to

refrain from doing what He has not commanded us to do. If we can stop our self-will from doing what God has not commanded, we will be perfected, and God can use us. A perfect man is one who will not work when he has not received God's command; he is one who does not commit the sin of presumptuousness. If God has not told us to do anything, we should stand still and not move. God can use only this kind of people; only this kind of person can work for God.

In God's work we see many people working according to their self-will. If a man does not care for God's will, God's timing, and God's method, even the best work will be just the zealous activity of the soulish life. We must realize that the flesh not only opposes God, but it also tries to help God. Our soulish (fleshly) life may have much natural merit. The soulish life can become zealous for God, thinking of this and that way to revive the church of God, coming up with this and that way to increase the kingdom of God, or laboring this and that way to save many sinners. Soulish believers have good intentions and motives, but they do not realize that the fleshly life is bringing about all their zeal, planning, design, and labor. They do not realize that only what God has commanded is worthwhile. They think that nothing can be better than engaging oneself in the work of God. They do not know that the fleshly life, even if it comes with good motives, wonderful goals, or laudable results, is not pleasing to the Lord, because it is not according to God's will and not suitable for His use. They also do not realize that God will not lend His strength to any work that is not done according to His will. They think that the zeal, noise, emotion, energy, and tears of their work are being supplemented by God's power. Little do they realize that they are drawing from the power of their natural life to supply a work that issues from their natural life.

What is the reason for such presumptuousness? It is nothing other than a desire for the expression of the self-life. Many people obey God's command when they know of it, yet in their heart, they do not have a desire for His will; they still prefer their own will. Therefore, when God is silent and does not speak, they become presumptuous. Brothers and sisters, if we do not judge the flesh and take up our cross to deal with the self-life, we may obey reluctantly when God's command comes, but when we have no command from Him, we will act according to our own will.

In God's work, those who are presumptuous do not necessarily have a bad motive. Before we turned to God, our self-life did not have any desire to serve God. But after we turned to Him, we began to have a desire to serve Him. This is the most dangerous period. In the past we had absolutely no desire to serve God, but now we want to serve Him. However, we want to serve according to our own way. But God demands that we not only serve Him but also serve Him according to the way He approves. Man frequently makes the mistake of thinking that God only wants our service and that we can choose the way to serve Him. We have to realize that God does not approve of any service that is not done according to His direction. Therefore, not only must our work be ordained by God, but also the method, timing, and procedure of the work must be determined by Him.

No matter how good man's motives are, these motives cannot replace God's will. No matter how successful man's work is, no success can replace God's approval. Too many works are done solely for "meeting the needs of the circumstances," for "edifying the spiritual life of the believers," or for "saving sinners' souls"; they are not done out of obedience to God's will. We cannot say for sure that these works have not produced any result. But these works and these workers are of no use in the sight of the Lord. Our primary concern should not be the outward needs of the sinners and believers but God's need of the hour. Our work should first meet God's needs, not the needs of the sinners or the saints. We are God's servants, and although He has entrusted the responsibility of the work to us, He reserves the authority to direct the work for Himself. Although the Holy Spirit summoned God's servants to their work, Paul and Barnabas could not go to Asia according to their self-will. The matter depended on whether or not God had a need at that time in Asia. The Acts of the Apostles wonderfully shows that the One who gives the power for work and the One who dictates the direction of the work is the Spirit. The responsibility in our work is to meet God's need in this hour.

The Bible shows us that we are not hired but bought by God with the blood. God has the absolute, sovereign right over us. Therefore, we cannot do anything according to our own will. God has not entrusted things to us so that we can make proposals according to our own view. He does not do things this way. God

has specific instructions for us concerning every work of His. If we act presumptuously without waiting for His command, we will not be approved, and He will not use us. Our work will not stand the fire and will be burned.

The Bible shows us that God wants to manifest His work not only in big things but also in small things. Therefore, we have to allow Him to have preeminence in all things. We must acknowledge God not only as the Lord of big things but also as the Lord of small things. He is through all and in all. If our work is not according to His will, we may win man's praise, but God will not be able to use us.

## THREE

The Bible has many examples to illustrate this point. Leviticus 10:1-2 says, "Now the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer and put fire in it, and placed incense upon it, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from before Jehovah and consumed them, and they died before Jehovah." The law concerning the offering required that every time one burned the incense, the fire had to come from the altar. The failure of Nadab and Abihu lay in their failure to use the fire from the altar. They used a different fire for the incense, and the result was death before Jehovah.

The altar is a type of the cross, whereas the incense is a type of our service before God. The zeal of our service must come from the altar of the cross. Those who do not offer according to this rule will die. What is the cross? It is the place where the self is put to death and the place where we allow the Lord to live. It is the experience of Galatians 2:20, which says, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." The cross deals with the self's wisdom, opinion, energy, zeal, hope, and desire. After we have been dealt with in this way, we are qualified to serve before the Lord.

The zeal of many is but strange fire! Men often do not go through the dealing of the cross; they do not reject their own will and wisdom, and they act according to their flesh. Yet they think that by so doing, they can please God and revive the Lord's work. This is zeal to be sure, but it is not zeal that comes from God. It is fire to be sure; however, it is not fire from the altar but strange fire.

Anything that is not from the altar of the cross of self-denial is strange fire. Strange fire is fire of the self; it is fire that issues from the soulish life, the fleshly life, and the natural life. Strange fire means that the self-life interferes with the works of God. Although the works are God's, the self-life wants to dictate the way the works are carried out. Offering up strange fire is employing the self's methods and wisdom and insisting on the self's proposals in the works of God. Strange fire will not win us God's acceptance in the incense of our service but will cause us to die before the Lord.

Nadab and Abihu were two sons of Aaron. Aaron was the high priest chosen by God. What the two men did was not rebellion against God; they burned incense to serve God and please Him. Yet they did what God had not commanded them to do. They did not act according to God's command and were judged by Him. Aaron's sons might have thought that since God had not explicitly forbidden them to use other kinds of fire for the incense, they could use strange fire. They did not realize that in God's service, anything that He has not explicitly commanded us to do should not be done at all. They did not see how strict our God is. In God's work, anything that He has not commanded is forbidden by Him, and if man does any of these things, he errs and has sinned. God sent fire to Nadab and Abihu and burned them to death because they committed the sin of presumptuousness. Although they were the sons of Aaron and were priests rendering service to God, God did not tolerate their actions.

They did not commit any treachery, fraud, fornication, or robbery like the sons of Eli. They did not rebel against any of God's explicit commandments and did not do anything that God forbids men to do. They were there specifically to serve God and please Him. They purposefully prepared two censers and burned incense with their own fire. They thought that they would please God. Little did they realize that even though their motive was good, they were serving the Lord according to their own will. They did what God had not commanded them to do; they did something outside God's will. This offended God. In all of our service to God, we cannot presume that God will approve our work just because we have a good motive. Our motive may be good, but if we are presumptuous, God will still punish our sin of presumptuousness. Today we may not see God's severe

judgment immediately upon our work, but we must realize that all the work that comes from strange fire will be judged at the judgment seat on that day. May the Lord open our eyes to see what sin is. Not only are fornication, robbery, deceit, extortion, unrighteousness, and filthiness sins, but even "working for God," "preaching," and "helping others" can be sins if we are not doing them according to God's direction. God will judge the sin of presumptuousness also. All those who work by themselves without God's command are offering a service of strange fire and offending God.

First Samuel 13:8-14 records the story of Saul offering the burnt offering by himself. It serves as a big warning to us. Saul had three great reasons for offering the sacrifice by himself. First, he saw that the people were leaving him. Second, Samuel had not come at the appointed time. Third, his enemy, the Philistines, had gathered in Michmash and were going to come down to Gilgal to attack them. Therefore, he "forced" himself and offered a burnt offering (v. 12). Saul did not do anything evil; he was offering a sacrifice to Jehovah. He thought in his heart that God might not be pleased if he did not pray and that God would be pleased if he prayed more. He thought that he would save the people from the enemy's hand by rendering a little more service to Jehovah. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Samuel said to Saul, "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (vv. 13-14).

Saul said, "Therefore said I" (v. 12). That was not a command from the Lord. Brothers and sisters, God wants us to serve Him according to His instruction; He does not want us to serve according to what we think or presume. Every work that originates from our thinking and presumption is rejected by God. God is after those who are after His heart. God's heart is not on what we do but on our obedience. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (15:22). This is something that every servant of the Lord should remember.

Many times we are like Saul; we cannot wait to engage ourselves in many

works. We find it hard to believe that God is ever late, and we cannot wait for His timing. We only see our needs and the needs of the environment, and we forget to wait on God's timing. As a result we do what God has not commanded us to do.

Saul was rejected by God for his over-zealousness and his over-eagerness to offer sacrifices and to pray. He had many reasons for doing this, but God found a man after His own heart, whom He could appoint to be the ruler of the people. The man God is after is not one who is impatient; he is one who is after His heart. If we were there, we would surely have loved a man like Saul because he was an outstanding person. When Saul stood among the people, he was a head taller than the others. But God is not after outstanding persons; He is after those who are after His heart. May the goal of our service not be a great work or our own or others' approval but the heart of God and His acceptance. God can only use such people, and He is looking for such people.

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-7: "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark....And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." When they read this portion, many people ask why God did this. Uzzah stretched out his hand to uphold the ark of God. He should have been rewarded. Why did God immediately kill him instead? God's glory was with the ark. Was it not a good thing for Uzzah to uphold the ark? Why did God smite him instead? The only reason is that God cares for obedience to His will more than help in His work. God does not need anyone to uphold His glory. Whoever touches the ark is smitten by the Lord. The issue here is not the consequence of the ark falling down. The issue here is whether or not God has commanded a

person to do something. Man thinks that the ark should not be touched at ordinary times but that it is all right to touch it and keep it from falling when it is in peril. He thinks that he will not be punished by death, because this is a provisional move. But with God there are only eternal edicts; there is no such thing as provisional measures. If a man does what God has not commanded him to do, he dies either physically or spiritually.

God did not ask whether the work was good or bad. He did not ask for help; rather, He said that man's hand should not touch the ark and that whoever touched it would die. God would rather see His ark fall than have men help Him without His command. Many times when we see outward needs, we try to help God. How terrible it is when God's servants try to do what Uzzah did; they try to help God's work with a fleshly hand. The result is God's judgment! Brothers and sisters, we must remember that we should only pay attention to God's command. Those who make provisional moves because of circumstantial needs and who do not wait on God's command will never please God in His work. We can allow our work to temporarily (and superficially) fail, but God's sovereign right cannot be set aside, and man's flesh cannot be left unchecked. He has no need for man to uphold His work with the flesh. His intention is to judge all fleshly activities.

Some people try to do what God has not told them to do. They try to please God according to their own will. They strive to do what God has not commanded them to do and do not realize that they are not pleasing God but rather are inviting His condemnation. When we were sinners, we walked according to our own wisdom and did many things contrary to God's nature. Now that we are saved, we still think that we can exercise our own wisdom to serve God and help Him according to what we think is right. Little do we realize that when we were sinners, it was a sin for us to oppose God with our own wisdom, and now that we are saved, it is equally a sin to help God in His work with our own wisdom. God does not need us to help Him with our own wisdom. God does not like to see man opposing Him with his own wisdom, and He does not like to see man helping Him with his own wisdom either. God does not need man to help His work. We must accept the principle of the cross and deny the activities of the self-life. We must be willing to put our flesh to death and lose our own will.

Whenever we act according to our own will and think that by so doing we will revive God's work, it shows that we have not denied the self and do not know the cross. A man must be brought to a "zero" position before God can use him.

May none of us be presumptuous, and may we not disrupt God's work. We should only care for God's command. Even if the work falls, we cannot uphold it with the hand of flesh. We can only do what God wants us to do. God does not want us to be responsible for what is not our responsibility. Even if everything falls down beside us, God will not rebuke us for it.

Strictly speaking, presumptuousness is the result of human wisdom being unchecked by the cross. What God requires today is for us to hold fast to this fact: We should only do what God commands us to do and not do what He has not commanded us to do. We have to maintain this stand.

Perhaps some will think that this way is too narrow and that their work will become too common. But brothers and sisters, that day will show whether or not this is the right way. When that day comes, we will see that all works apart from God's will are unapproved and worthless. The judgment seat will reveal all works apart from God's will to be nothing but reasons for rebuke.

Second Chronicles 26:16-21 tells the story of King Uzziah entering Jehovah's temple according to his own will and burning incense on the altar of incense. He was subsequently punished by the Lord. God's ordinance allowed only the sons of Aaron to inherit the holy office and be priests; only they could enter the temple to burn incense. No one else was allowed to do this. But Uzziah insisted. He was proud to enter the temple and burn incense. God punished him, and leprosy broke out in his forehead. This story is a big warning to us. We can never rashly do what God has not commanded us to do; otherwise, we will suffer God's punishment. Spiritually speaking, leprosy signifies the filth of sin. All those who act presumptuously without God's command have committed a filthy sin before the Lord. Man's zeal is useless in God's work. Man cannot direct God's work with his zeal. It was a good thing to enter the temple and to burn the incense, but since it was not done in accordance with God's will, it became a punishable sin. King Uzziah entered the temple presumptuously to burn the incense. He offended God and was struck with leprosy until the day he died. This is a serious

warning for our consideration.

## FOUR

Paul was an apostle of deep spiritual stature. He wrote to the Corinthian saints, saying, "But we will not boast beyond our measure but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach even as far as you. For we are not extending ourselves beyond our bounds, as if we did not reach you...but have the hope, as your faith is increasing, to be magnified in you according to our rule unto abundance" (2 Cor. 10:13-15). Paul's word was a word of experience. He said he was not willing to extend himself beyond the bounds which God had measured for him. He would not go to the places which God had not measured to him. He felt it was his responsibility to take care of the places God had assigned to him. But he would not extend beyond his measure to try to take responsibility for the places which God had not assigned to him. If every servant of God had done the same thing, there would not have been so many disputes and sects. Every servant of God has a specific work that God has assigned to him. Every believer has a way that God has ordained for him. If everyone would stand in his proper position, do his proper work, and walk his proper course, the result would be a real glory.

We should not work because we reckon the work to be good or because a work can save men or render help to others. Our only concern should be whether or not our work is within the bounds of God's measurement for us. The main pillars in a house are important, of course, but all the little nails are equally indispensable. If everyone in the church wants to be a great revivalist or evangelist, how can the church be built up? We should choose the course that is according to God's will. We should not aspire to do only great things; we should stand firm in the position that God has measured to us. We should be willing to become calm and do small works. God is not after great gifts; He is after those who can be used by Him. May we be willing to remain in the position that He has measured to us; this is the proper ground. Strictly speaking, all thoughts of change for the better and all kinds of ambitions and aspirations are worldly, soulish, and fleshly, and we should guard ourselves against these thoughts. Once

we are clear about this, we will not dare to touch God's work either lightly or rashly.

Paul said, "I have finished the course" (2 Tim. 4:7). What course was that? Mrs. Penn-Lewis said the following in her autobiography: "There is a `course' prepared for each believer from the moment of his new birth, providing for the fullest maturity of the new life within him and the highest which God can make of his life in the use of every faculty for His service. To discover that `course' and fulfill it is the one duty of every soul. Others cannot judge what that course is. God alone knows it, and He can make it known and guide the believer into it, as certainly today as He did in the day of Jeremiah and other prophets, and of Paul and Philip and other apostles." The most glorious thing for a child of God to do is to fulfill what God wants him to do within the bounds of God's assignment. God has a preassigned course for every believer to take.

God uses only those He has chosen for His work; He does not want any volunteers. Those whom God has chosen have no liberty of their own. If you want to be free and take your own course, you will end up with nothing but failure and suffering. If God does not use you, nothing more needs to be said. But if God uses you, you cannot escape from His assigned course. Even if you escape to Tarshish, the waves will still bring you to the sea, and the fish will still bring you back. You cannot run away. God's servants can never act according to their own will. The men God is after are those who carry out only God's assigned work, who run only God's assigned course, and who do not walk according to their own will.

When Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, God told them not to work on the Sabbath. When someone reported to Moses that someone had picked up sticks on the Sabbath, Moses did not decide on his own to deal with him. God had not told him what to do. Only after God gave him the clear command to stone the Sabbath trespasser did he dare to order him to be stoned (Num. 15:32-36). Moses would only act after he had received God's command; he dared not do anything on his own.

If we do not wait, God's work will suffer great loss! How impatient is our disposition! We always feel that God is too slow. We cannot follow God's leading

patiently, step by step. Anything we think of as good we jump into hastily, and whenever we see a lack we try to fill it up immediately. We think that if we have to wait in everything, our whole life will be wasted in waiting, and we will not be able to accomplish anything. We have forgotten the fact that those who wait before God and who work according to His command are blessed.

## FIVE

The one great responsibility we have to bear is to be clear of God's command and carry out His work accordingly. Before we have His command, we should never do anything. God's command expresses His heart's desire. If we want to become a useful vessel in God's hand, we must move only after we have His command. We do not please God by doing what He has not told us to do. Whenever a work is placed before us, we must first ask whether or not such a work is according to His heart and whether it will please His heart. May we seek only after God's will. We should not engage ourselves in a spiritual work just because it is a good piece of work or because the circumstances require our help. Our foremost responsibility in our work is to seek after God's will. If we want to be useful in God's hand, we have to walk according to His will.

Man cannot randomly change God's pattern on the mount; he must work according to the pattern. Will you say that this is your work and that you can accomplish it without God's will? Or will you say that this is God's work, and you will act only according to His will? It is lamentable that many times God's work has been spoiled under man's fleshly hands!

Brothers and sisters, we should remember that unless our wisdom is first judged and our will first put to death, we cannot do God's work. May God guide us to the point where we are free from the self and our own thoughts and where there is only God's will. Before we engage ourselves in a work, we must first find out whether or not this is God's will. Once we know God's will, we should work according to the pattern that He has shown us.

# MESSAGE FIVE

## BURDEN AND PRAYER

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Jer. 33:2-3; 1 Thes. 5:19

Jer. 33:2-3 "Thus says Jehovah who does it, Jehovah who formed it to establish it-Jehovah is His name - Call unto Me, and I will answer you and tell you great and hidden things, which you do not know."

1 Thes. 5:19 "Do not quench the Spirit;"

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### ONE

Every child of God should have some God-given burden. No child of God can say that God has never given him or her a burden. However, burdens can only be received from God when our spirits are open to Him. An open spirit to God is the condition for receiving burdens from God. Having received a burden, we must learn to discharge it faithfully through prayer. When we have discharged the first burden, we will receive a second, and when the second is discharged, we will receive a third. Therefore, the most important thing is to open our spirits to God. We should say to God, "I open myself before You to pray."

Because of our unfaithfulness we often do not receive any burdens; therefore, if we want to be those who bear God's burdens, we must be very sensitive and not reject any feeling that comes from Him. If we feel we should pray for something, we should do it immediately. At the outset, these feelings may be faint, but they will gain in strength as we go on. If we quench the Spirit and do not release our burden through prayer, we will lose our burden. Then the only way to recover it is to confess our sin and thereafter faithfully respond to

every God-given feeling. As soon as we are moved to pray, we should pray. As we faithfully discharge the burdens we have, God will continually give us further burdens to bear. The sole reason for not receiving further burdens is that we have not released the burden we already have, and the unreleased burden has squelched us. If we unload the burden, a second burden will follow. A burden may be very faint at the beginning, but we must be faithful to it. If we are faithful to do this repeatedly before the Lord, God will continue to dispense burdens to us one after another. O brothers and sisters, if we hope to be of any use to God, we must recover our lost burdens.

Burdens are especially related to the work of God. Therefore, we must seek to do His will in everything and wait on Him in His work until He communicates His burden to us. His burden is the manifestation of His will. The burden we receive is the very will of God, and it is also the means by which God manifests His will.

For example, God may give you a clear and strong burden to preach the gospel. If you go along with it and act according to God's will, the more you preach, the more the burden will be released. The burden may be heavy at the beginning, but the more you preach, the lighter the burden will become. However, if you fail to discharge your burden, it will weigh down heavily on your spirit, and you will feel its weight becoming heavier and heavier as time goes on. Eventually, your feeling will become numb, and you will no longer feel the burden. The life within will seem to perish, and there will seem to be a barrier between you and God. (This does not mean that you will eternally perish, as in the case of eternal perdition; it merely means that you will feel as if your life has ceased.) It will seem as if you can no longer touch God and that the burden has crushed you. All spiritual work issues from such burdens. If you try to work without a burden, your work will be ineffective. But if you work in accordance with the burden that is upon you, your whole being will be increasingly liberated as you advance. You may start off by having a heavy burden, but as you go on, the burden will be released, and you will be uplifted. The value of your work depends on the burden you bear in connection with it. Without a burden, there is no spiritual value to your work. But with a burden, there is spiritual value. Every

time you work according to a burden, you will be refreshed and edified. As your load is discharged, you will be edified in the process. If you work without a burden, you will sense that you are laboring in vain and may even be conscious of reproof as you labor. In relation to all spiritual work, you should wait on God for His burden and then set out to discharge it in a conscientious way.

## TWO

But this does not mean that we need to constantly look within to discover whether or not we have a burden. Among God's children, there is nothing more damaging than introspection. Let us bear this in mind—the most damaging thing is to turn our gaze inward. This may be even more serious than sin. Sin is readily recognized as such, but introspection is not detected so easily. An unsuspected disease is always more serious and damaging than an apparent one. If you were asked whether it is wrong to be proud, you would immediately answer that it is obviously wrong. If you were asked whether it is wrong to be envious, you would know quite well that it is wrong. These flaws are obvious. But you can become introspective twenty times in a single day without any sense of wrongdoing. If you quarrel, you soon become aware that you have done something wrong; you quickly identify your sickness. But you can be introspective and be totally unaware of its evil. Looking within is the most hurtful thing in the Christian life. Many Christians are given to introspection, and they are living a life of false spirituality. Before doing any work, they stop and ask, "Do I have a burden for this? Is the feeling I have a burden or not? Is this a burden? What is a burden?" If a man continually asks these questions, he does not know what a burden is.

Suppose someone asks you to help him carry a table from one room to another. While you are doing it, do you wonder whether this is a burden? Would you say that it is not a burden if it were lighter and that it is a burden if it were heavier? No. As long as something is burdening you, it is a burden. Remember that a burden is what you know, not what you have to discover. If you have a burden, you know it. It is wrong to look inward to see whether or not you have a burden. A burden is known rather than found. It is of great importance to recognize this fact. There is no profit in introspection. The greatest damage a

Christian can suffer comes from introspection; it will cheat you. It is not necessary to look for a burden day and night. If you feel that you should preach the gospel to someone and you stop to ask whether or not you have a burden, the opportunity will disappear while you are asking your questions. O brothers and sisters, it is unprofitable to look within. Whether or not you have a burden will be apparent—either you have a burden or you do not. In both cases you will know; there is no need to discover one. If you have to turn inward to find one, you do not have a burden. There is no need to ask anything. If you have it, you will know. If anything weighs upon you, that is your burden.

If you feel heavy within, you have a burden, and if you act in accordance with it, you will be liberated. Then you will be free to receive further burdens from God, and you will be edified in the process. All the work of God is done this way. The ministry of prayer is carried on this way. Prayer and work are inseparable. Without prayer, there is no work. Therefore, you have to learn to pick up burdens as well as release burdens through prayer. The Lord may put a certain matter within you and give you a burden for it. If you pray, it will be released, and you will be refreshed. But if you do not pray, you will be crushed beneath the burden. If you do not pray today, tomorrow, or the next day, you will feel bothered whenever you think about it, and the burden will become heavier and heavier because you have not done what you are supposed to do. After setting it aside once or twice, eventually, you will not feel it anymore. If you repeatedly act contrary to your feeling, at a certain point you will not feel it anymore. You will lose touch with God and no longer be able to fellowship with Him. A barrier will develop between you and God because you have betrayed the burden and not acted according to God's direction. Every work has to be conducted with a burden, whether the work is directed toward God or toward men. At the same time, once you have a burden, you should act according to the burden. If you do not act according to the burden, you will become deadened because you have violated God's will. A burden is a necessary requirement in God's work. Once you have a burden you have to work accordingly.

## THREE

While it is true that the burdens we have are from God and that our burden is God's will, it is also true that our knowledge mainly governs our burdens initially. There are exceptions. For instance, God may call certain things to our remembrance and may ask us to pray for them, or in the middle of the night God may call us to get up and pray for a brother in a remote place. These experiences do occur, but they are not common, and God does not do this kind of thing very often. Sometimes God cannot find anyone nearby, and He has to go to someone far away; however, these are exceptions. Under ordinary circumstances, God directs men according to their knowledge. This is why we say that knowledge governs a burden in its initial stage. However, after one has knowledge, it does not necessarily mean that he will have a burden. We may know about the condition and everything else related to certain brothers and sisters yet not have any feeling for them or be stirred up within. We have the knowledge, but we do not have the burden. Therefore, burden does not come ultimately from knowledge. Yet knowledge does govern our burden in its initial stage.

For example, God may give you knowledge of certain matters and the burden to pray and help out the situation. In this way, the burden comes. A burden can be formed at the beginning through knowledge. Most burdens even have knowledge as their starting point. It is rare for God to start a burden without giving any knowledge of it. There are exceptions. Sometimes God may give you a burden to pray for a brother. He may be sick or he may be in difficulty, but you know nothing about it; you have not received any news from him. Yet God puts a clear burden within you to pray for him. Perhaps after a few weeks or a few months, you may receive a letter from him and find that he was indeed sick and in difficulty. There are cases like this, but they are exceptions. They may happen once in a thousand times. Generally, burdens start from knowledge. Yet this does not mean that knowledge is burden.

## FOUR

Since prayer is a Christian ministry and an important ministry, a question arises: When there is a heavy burden to pray, do we express it through words, or should we be quiet and silent? Can we just bear our burdens silently before God?

We believe that if God gives us a prayer burden, then He wants it to be uttered. If we have only a few disjointed words, we should express ourselves with these words. Burdens are released only through utterance. If we remain silent before God, the burden will not leave; rather, it will become heavier and heavier upon you. Brothers and sisters, in the spiritual realm, it is an amazing principle that utterance counts. God takes account not only of what we believe but also of what we say. He is mindful not only of the intents of our heart but also of the words in our mouth. Our Lord said to the Canaanite woman, "Because of this word, go. The demon has gone out of your daughter" (Mark 7:29). The few words the woman uttered caused the Lord to work. We may make a request in our hearts, but there is more effect in an uttered request. God seems to require that we speak what is in our heart.

The Lord's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane was a crucial prayer, but it was a prayer with "strong crying" (Heb. 5:7). We do not insist on loud prayers. Sometimes there is no need to pray in a loud way. But if there is a heavy burden within, there should be a correspondence between the inner burden and the outward expression. If the burden within is not strong, loud prayers are nothing but noise. But if the burden within is heavy, it must be uttered with audible sounds. If we cannot pray aloud in our homes, let us find a place where we can utter our burden as the Lord did. At times He went to a deserted place (Mark 1:35) and at other times He went to the mountain (Luke 6:12). Even if we cannot go to the wilderness or the mountain, we should pray audibly even if it means praying in a low voice. The important thing is that our prayers have to be audible. If our burden is strong enough, we can find a suitable place to pray. God wants our burdens to be articulated. If we have not articulated our burden, the burden will remain. Some say that they pray silently and that it matters little whether or not the burden is released. This is not true. If a man has not finished the work he has in his hands, he cannot go on to more work. In the same way, if our burden is not released, God cannot give us another burden. We have to discharge our burden with our words so that God can give us a fresh burden.

But very often our difficulty is that even when we are conscious of a burden to pray, we do not know how to pray when we kneel down. We know that

something is weighing within us, but we do not know how to pray. There is a burden in our spirit, but we do not know what to pray. We need to realize that our burden is a matter of the spirit, whereas our comprehension of the burden is a matter of the mind. When our spirit touches our mind, we will understand the nature of the burden in our spirit. When the spirit and the mind touch, both will become clear. Some people feel that they have a burden but do not know what it is. This is because their spirit has not yet touched their mind. Therefore, when their spirit has a burden, their mind does not comprehend the burden.

How can contact between the spirit and the mind be established? It is quite simple. If you want to find anything, how should you go about it? If it is to the west and you go east, how would you find it? You would have to circle the globe before you found it. The object may be only a mile away, but you would have walked around the globe before you found it. You should take the point where you are as the center and look around in a circle, moving out steadily from the center to the circumference, expanding the circle as you move. In this way, you can cover all four directions. This is the best way to look for things. When your spirit has lost touch with your mind, you should do the same thing. When you kneel down to pray, do not hold on tenaciously to one thing. That would be like walking in one direction, and you will not find what you are looking for easily. Pray for many things and from many directions. After praying a few sentences for one thing, you may feel that it is not the right thing to pray about. You should drop it and change to another subject. You may have to change your subject two, three, or four times. Or you may become clear after you come to the second subject. You may also have to mention five or six things before you feel that you have touched something that releases your burden; once you pray for this, your mind and your spirit become linked together. You should then pray specifically for that matter in order to release your burden. Once you pray this way, you will feel released, and when you have released your first burden, you will be ready to receive a second burden from God.

## FIVE

Many Christians cannot be used by God in the prayer ministry because they

are over-burdened. They have never released any of their burdens. God gives them a burden to pray, and they may know what it is; their mind and their spirit may be connected, yet they do not pray. Instead, they allow the burden to become heavier and heavier until they are so crushed that they cannot bear it any longer; the feeling for the burden will be gone, and they can no longer pray. Oh, brothers and sisters, the work of God will be seriously hampered if we do not have a free spirit to serve as instruments for His use. If we asked someone to help us with a certain job but found that his hands were full, it would be useless to seek his aid. In the same way, if we are weighed down by many burdens, how can God commit anything further to us? This is why we must release our burdens. The release of the burden will set us free, and God will be free to give us additional burdens. Without this, we will not be able to fulfill a ministry of prayer before the Lord. The ministry of prayer requires a liberated spirit. If we have a burden in our spirit and do not pray for it, we cannot go on to a second thing. If we have a burden but are not faithful to pray and take up the ministry of prayer before the Lord, we will feel heavy the first day, heavier the second day, and still heavier the third day. After a few more days, the burden will gradually go away, and the strength to pray will be gone as well.

If we have a burden and do not pray, eventually it will cost us our prayer ministry. We must, therefore, devote time to fulfill our ministry of prayer. The best way to pray is to pray with two or more people; this will save us from being individualistic. Many people have not learned to pray together with others. In praying with others, we must not only pray with our mouths but listen with our ears. If we learn to pray in this way, the "spiral" prayer that we mentioned earlier, praying from the center to the circumference, will come into effect. Through prayer, we can release the burden that God has given us. Prayer frees our spirit and liberates our being. This will allow God to commit fresh burdens to us continually. Today God needs the cooperation of His church on the earth, and we can cooperate with Him through prayer. May there be a way for the working out of His will!

# MESSAGE SIX

## THE KEY TO PRAYER

## •Outline

- **•Abraham's Prayer For Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33)**
- **•Joshua's Inquiry About The Failure At Ai (Joshua 7)**
- **•David's Inquiry About The Three-Year Famine (2 Samuel 21:1-9, 14)**
- **•The Prayers Of The Lord Jesus (John 12:27-28; Matthew 26:39-46)**
- **•The Prayer Of The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:22-28; Mark 7:24-30)**

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:8; Isa. 62:6-7

Matt. 7:8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened."

Isa. 62:6-7 "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, / I have appointed watchmen; / All day and all night / They will never keep silent. / You who remind Jehovah, / Do not be dumb; And do not give Him quiet / Until He establishes / And until He makes Jerusalem / A praise in the earth."

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Prayer is a matter of great importance in the spiritual life of a Christian. Every true Christian realizes this and prays. However, even though some of the Lord's children spend time praying over many matters, they do not seem to get through in prayer. It seems as if they have not found the way to pray. This is because they have not discovered the key.

In whatever we do, we must first have the key, the secret. If we want to enter a room and the door is locked, we will not find the way in unless we possess the key. Suppose we need two people to carry a table through a door.

Some may do it without a problem; but others may do it awkwardly, bumping and banging it in a vain effort to get it through the door. The size of the table and the width of the door is the same; the only difference is with the people who are carrying the table. Some have the key to carrying the table, while others do not. People who have found the key do things well; they are able workers. Once a person gets the key, he can do things twice as fast as others do, while those who do not have the key labor in vain. The same principle applies to prayer. Matthew 7 speaks of principles relating to prayer, one of which is, "He who seeks finds" (v. 8). Seeking requires effort. Anyone who looks in a half-hearted, leisurely manner will probably not find anything. Seeking involves patience and perseverance, and unless we are thorough, we will not find what we seek. If God does not answer our prayers, we must exercise patience and diligently seek the key to prayer.

God answered the prayers of many of the saints in the past because they had the key to prayer. By reading the biography of George Müller, the one who founded a number of orphanages, we can see that he was a man of prayer; throughout his entire life, he was always receiving answers to prayer. George Müller had discovered the key. Many earnest Christians pray at great length; they pray wordy prayers, but they do not receive answers from God. In prayer, words are essential, but our words must be to the point; they should be words that touch the heart of God and move Him so that He has no alternative but to grant our requests. Words that are to the point are the key to prayer. These kinds of words match God's will, and He cannot but respond to them. Let us find the key to prayer from a few scriptural illustrations.

## ABRAHAM'S PRAYER FOR SODOM (GENESIS 18:16-33)

When God made known to Abraham that He was about to execute judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, Abraham waited before God. Then he began to pray for Sodom. He did not just open his mouth and say, "O God, have mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah!" He did not beseech God with great intensity, saying, "Oh, forbid that Sodom and Gomorrah should be destroyed!" Abraham laid hold of the fact that God is a righteous God (Gen. 18:25); this was

the key to his prayer. In deep humility and with great earnestness, he proceeded to ask God one question after another. His questions were his prayers. As he proceeded in prayer, he stood steadfastly on the ground of God's righteousness. At length he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there" (v. 32). Following this he did not ask or make any more requests. After God answered, we are told that "the Lord went his way" (v. 33). Abraham did not try to hold on to God; he did not try to go on praying. He returned to his place. Some people may think that Abraham should have continued beseeching God and that he should not have stopped with just ten people. However, the Scriptures show that Abraham knew God, and he knew the key to prayer. He heard the Lord say, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and...their sin is very grievous...the cry of it...is come unto me" (vv. 20-21). If there were not even ten righteous people in a city, what kind of a city was it? The Lord loves righteousness and hates lawlessness (Heb. 1:9). He cannot cover sin and refrain from judgment. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was the awful consequence of their sin, and it was the manifestation of God's righteousness. When He overthrew those cities, He did no injustice to a single righteous person; He "rescued righteous Lot, who had been oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless" (2 Pet. 2:7). Abraham's prayer was to the point, and it was answered. There was no unrighteousness with God. He did not "slay the righteous with the wicked" (Gen. 18:25). We worship and we praise Him.

## JOSHUA'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE FAILURE AT AI (JOSHUA 7)

When the children of Israel attacked the city of Ai, "they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck some of them, about thirty-six men; and they pursued them from before the gate unto Shebarim and struck them on the slope. And the heart of the people melted and became like water" (Josh. 7:4-5). After such a mighty triumph at Jericho, why did the children of Israel suffer such a dire defeat at Ai? The only thing that Joshua could do was to prostrate himself before God, seek after God, wait on Him, and inquire into the cause of the defeat. Joshua

was grieved on account of the danger that Israel had fallen into, but he was grieved more by the dishonor that was brought to the name of the Lord; therefore, he inquired, "What will You do for Your great name?" This was the key to his prayer. He honored the name of God. His concern was for what God would do for the sake of His own name! When Joshua came to this point, God spoke. He said, "Israel has sinned....Thus the children of Israel are not able to stand before their enemies....I will not be with you anymore, unless you destroy that which was devoted to destruction from among you" (vv. 11-12). God was concerned for His own name and could not tolerate sin among His people. He heard Joshua's prayer and instructed him to discover and do away with the sin that had caused the trouble. After Joshua was clear about the reason for Israel's defeat, he rose up early in the morning to deal with the matter and discovered that the trouble was Achan's sin of covetousness. When Israel had dealt with this sin, their defeat was turned into victory. To tolerate and hide one's sin is to cause God's name to be blasphemed and to give Satan occasion to attack God's people. Joshua did not just open his mouth in undiscerning zeal and plead with God to save His people and make them victorious once again. The dishonor that was brought upon God's great name grieved him, and his plea reminded God to take up the matter for His own name's sake. His prayer was to the point, and it brought an answer from God. Joshua had to first find the reason for failure. He had to discover the sin and deal with it before glory could be given to Jehovah the God of Israel.

## DAVID'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE THREE-YEAR FAMINE (2 SAMUEL 21:1-9, 14)

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord" (v. 1). David did not simply open his lips and pray, "O God, this famine has lasted three years; we beseech Thee to have mercy on us. Take this famine away from us and grant us a rich harvest this year." No, David did not pray in that way. "David inquired of the Lord." He sought to find the cause of the famine. David's inquiry was to the point; he touched the key. God said, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (v. 1). God will not tolerate the sin of breaking a vow, and David had to deal with

this sin. After he dealt with this, the Word of God records that "God was entreated for the land" (v. 14). David possessed the key to prayer; his prayer was to the point, and his prayer brought God's answer.

## THE PRAYERS OF THE LORD JESUS
## (JOHN 12:27-28; MATTHEW 26:39-46)

The prayers of our Lord were always perfect, and they always touched the key to prayer. When He refused to see the Greeks who sought Him, He said, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?" (John 12:27). He turned the matter over carefully and thought, "What shall I say? Father, save Me out of this hour." No, He knew He could not pray in that way. He realized, "For this reason I have come to this hour" (v. 27); therefore, He prayed, "Father, glorify Your name." This prayer was answered immediately. "Then a voice came out of heaven: I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (v. 28). If this is the way the Son of God, as the Son of Man, prayed to God on the earth, how dare we on the impulse of the moment open our lips and utter rash prayers! It is essential that we learn the key to prayer.

That night in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord Jesus was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. How did He pray under those circumstances? "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). He possessed the key to prayer. He had no fear of death, and He was not without His own will. But He did not choose to take His own will; He wanted to take the Father's will. So He prayed a second time, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (v. 42). He prayed a third time, "saying the same word again" (v. 44). When He was utterly clear concerning the Father's will, He said to His disciples, "The hour has drawn near....Arise, let us be going" (v. 45-46). If our Lord as a man on the earth mastered the key to prayer and set Himself aside in order to seek after God's will, how dare we randomly utter a few words in prayer and conclude we have discerned God's will!

## THE PRAYER OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN
## (MATTHEW 15:22-28; MARK 7:24-30)

When the Canaanite woman was in distress, she cried out in her need, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!" (Matt. 15:22). Was she earnest in prayer? Truly she was. But it is amazing that the Lord "did not answer her a word" (v. 23). The disciples seemed to be in sympathy with her because they said on her behalf, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us" (v. 23). But what did the Lord reply to them? He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24). The Lord's reply gave the woman the key to approach Him. She saw that the Son of David was related only to the house of Israel, not to the nations. So she came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" (v. 25). She called Him "Lord," not "Son of David." She realized that only the house of Israel had the right to use that title, so she forsook the wrong ground on which she had been standing and addressed her prayer to Him as Lord. This prayer brought His answer: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 26). The answer seemed so cold that it sounded as though the Lord was rejecting and embarrassing the woman. Actually, He was trying to show her where she stood so that she might know the meaning of grace. The woman saw her own place; she saw the Lord as well as His grace, and seizing the key to prayer, she said, "Yes, Lord, for even the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). This called forth the Lord's commendation, and He said to her, "O woman, great is your faith!" (v. 28). She had found the key to prayer, and spontaneously she had faith. In Mark 7 the Lord said, "Because of this word, go. The demon has gone out of your daughter" (v. 29). Her prayer was answered "because of this word." Her word touched the key to prayer. This is what we need to learn. Often we pray, yet our prayer seems to disappear like a stone dropped into the ocean; it goes away without any answer from God. We have not found the right key to unlock the door; however, we do not try to discover the reason that God has not answered our prayer. Brothers and sisters, how can we expect God to answer such foolish prayers? In all of our prayers we must first find the key; only as we do this can we expect to have constant answers from God.

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Having looked at these illustrations related to prayer, bear in mind that as we pray we should heed the inner voice and not be governed by our circumstances, thoughts, or affections. When that still small voice within tells us to pray, when in the depths of our being we have a sense that we should pray, then we should pray at once. Circumstances should only be a means of driving us into the presence of God to wait on Him; they should not be our master, and we should not be hindered by them from praying. Our mind should only serve to organize our inner feelings, which should be then expressed in words; our mind should not be the source of prayer. Prayer is the expression of the inner feelings through the mind; it does not originate in the mind. Prayer according to the will of God is only possible when we are in harmony with His will; it is not an exercise of forcing God to oblige man's emotions. Unless our emotions are dealt with, it is impossible for us to pray; prayers will not have a way to be released. Once we are under the control of our emotions, we will pray in a natural way according to our subjective desires; it will be hard to pray according to the inner leading. Therefore, we must touch the key to prayer. Whenever we find ourselves praying ineffectively, fruitlessly, and insufficiently, we must ask the Lord for light and seek to discover the cause. As we inquire of the Lord, we will reach a point at which we feel that we have gotten through, when something within clicks, and a still small voice within says, "That's it!" We have found the key to prayer. As we use the key and pray on, we can be assured that God will answer our prayer.

Isaiah 62:6 says, "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,/I have appointed watchmen;/All day and all night/They will never keep silent." These watchmen are men of prayer. They have to be on watch tirelessly in order to know if something is happening and cry out when it does. A man of prayer must be one who reminds the Lord continually. This is not the work of one individual or a few men; there is the need for a group of men to pray this way. "All day and all night they will never keep silent." These are companies watching together, and together they discover something, and together they pray unceasingly to God. Their prayers do not cease "until He establishes/And until He makes Jerusalem/A praise in the earth" (v. 7). We must persevere in prayer until the Body of Christ is built up. God needs our prayers. He wants us to have a spirit of

prayer, the atmosphere of prayer, and the key to prayer. Brothers and sisters, let us arise and learn to pray. Let us seek the key to prayer so that we may meet God's need today.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## SATAN'S WEARING-OUT WORK

## •Outline

- •Wearing Out Man's Body
- •Wearing Out Man's Heart
- •Wearing Out Man's Spirit
- •Wearing Out Man's Time
- •Wearing Out Samson's Consecration
- •Being Disgusted With Satan's Wearing Out

## •Scripture Reading: Dan. 7:25

Dan. 7:25 "And he will speak things against the Most High and wear out the saints of the Most High; and his intention will be to change the times and the law; and they will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time."

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Satan always works to attack God's children. His attacks are not sudden; they often come gradually. According to Daniel 7:25, Satan will wear out the saints of the Most High. One of Satan's strategies against the saints of the Most High is to wear them out. We must remember that Satan's work among God's children is not apparent; he works by wearing them out.

What does it mean to wear someone out? It means to exhaust a person minute by minute, some today and some tomorrow. The wearing out goes on invisibly, yet in a debilitating way; it goes on imperceptibly, yet the end is total depletion and waste. Satan works in God's children by the principle of wearing them out. He wears us out a little today and a little tomorrow. He causes us to suffer a little today and a little tomorrow. We may think that this is insignificant, yet the result of this wearing out by Satan is total depletion.

This is why the Bible says that the love of many will "grow" cold (Matt. 24:12). The girl who was possessed by a spirit of Python cried out "for many days" (Acts 16:17-18). When Festus wanted money from Paul, he sent for him "frequently" and conversed with him (24:26). Delilah pressed Samson "every day" with her words (Judg. 16:16). Satan wears out God's children gradually, repeatedly, frequently, and daily. The "evil day" in Ephesians 6:13 refers to Satan's wearing out. We must ask the Lord to open our eyes to see Satan's wearing-out work and how we can resist it.

## WEARING OUT MAN'S BODY

Satan is particularly good at wearing out the physical bodies of God's children. Job's body was stricken (Job 2:7-8), and Paul had a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). This was Satan's wearing out of their bodies. Some Christians had healthy bodies before they were saved. After they are saved they become sick, and their health deteriorates. If God opens our eyes, we will see that Satan is always plotting and planning to deal with God's children. Many of God's servants experience the same thing when they set out to preach the gospel. Before they set out to work and preach the gospel, they have no problems with their health, but once they start to work and preach, their health breaks down within a period of three to five years. This is Satan's wearing out of the saints of the Most High. He depletes men of a little food today and a little sleep tomorrow. He makes them a little tired today and a little tired tomorrow. The cumulative effect of this tiredness eventually destroys their health completely. This is Satan's work.

## WEARING OUT MAN'S HEART

Satan wears out not only man's body but also man's heart. When you first believed in the Lord, you may have been very happy, joyful, and peaceful. But if you are not watchful and do not know the work of Satan, you will suddenly become restless one day, unhappy another day, and depressed a third day. Little by little your peace will be lost, and your joy will be gone. You will become weary and discouraged. This is Satan's work in wearing you out.

## WEARING OUT MAN'S SPIRIT

Satan also tries to wear out man's spirit. He takes away your prayer little by little; he takes away your trust in God little by little. He causes you to trust in yourself more and more and believe that you are cleverer and cleverer. He causes you to trust in your gift and distracts your heart from the Lord little by little. If Satan struck God's children with a powerful blow all at once, they could withstand him because they would realize that it was the work of Satan. But his most evil work is not to strike just one blow but to wear you out over a long period of time. He causes God's children to fall behind little by little and backslide little by little. This is the way Satan wears out God's children.

## WEARING OUT MAN'S TIME

Satan also wears out man's time. For example, Festus sent for Paul to converse with him frequently. A man as powerful and as gifted as Paul preached to Festus for two years, yet he was still not saved. This is Satan's wearing out of man. Festus would send for Paul, and there would be no result. The next day he would send for Paul again, and there would be no result. He continually sent for Paul, but there was no result. Satan engaged Paul in work with no result. At the end of two years, there was still no result. This is Satan's wearing out of man.

If God's children do not know Satan's strategy, they will be deceived. We should redeem the time, and each hour should be counted as an hour. We must stop Satan from wearing out our time and engaging us in fruitless work.

## WEARING OUT SAMSON'S CONSECRATION

Samson's failure was not as serious as the loss of his consecration. He could not afford to lose his testimony of separation. Once he lost his consecration, he lost his power; once he lost his testimony, he lost God's presence. Samson was a Nazarite. Satan knew that the source of Samson's power was in his consecration; therefore, he focused his efforts on this very crucial thing—he tried to take away Samson's consecration. How did Satan do it? He used Delilah, who pressed Samson daily with her words. Eventually, Samson's soul was vexed unto death, and he told her all that was in his heart, revealing the source of his power. The result was that he fell into Satan's snare; he lost his consecration, his power, his testimony of sanctification, and God's presence. This daily, pressing work is the

work of the enemy.

If the Lord opens our eyes, we will see that Satan uses many methods to wear man out. He can wear us out physically, circumstantially, or spiritually. He does not attack fiercely; rather, he wears out slowly. Therefore, we have to be aware of his wearing out. We must not allow him to continue his wearing-out work; we must oppose it.

## BEING DISGUSTED WITH SATAN'S WEARING OUT

When Paul was preaching in Macedonia, he met a girl possessed by a spirit, who followed him, crying out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who announce to you a way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). She cried out this way for many days, until Paul felt disgusted at heart. He turned to the spirit and said, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" (v. 18). The spirit came out that very hour. Spiritually, we need such a feeling of disgust. We need to be disgusted not with men but with the demons. Paul was truly disgusted with the spirit; he was not disgusted with the girl. When Paul charged the spirit to come out of the girl, he was treating the girl as a third party. When the devil tries to wear us out, we should have the same feeling of disgust as Paul.

If you know that Satan is wearing you out, you have to pray for God to give you a feeling of disgust, that is, a feeling of disgust and anger with Satan! Many people can get angry at men, but they cannot get angry at the devil. If others offend them, they break out in a fit of anger, but when the devil wears them out, they do not feel a thing. Paul was worn out by Satan to the extent that he became angry. Once he opened his mouth to rebuke the spirit, the spirit went away. Hence, we must not keep our mouth shut all the time; we have to declare something. It would be wonderful if God's children would become angry with Satan and rebuke him. If anyone becomes angry with Satan, we will say, "Hallelujah, this is wonderful!" Some people are very weak; they allow Satan to wear them out. This is too poor. God's children should become angry with Satan. They need to be disgusted with him. Once they become angry and disgusted, everything will be set right.

We often keep silent and endure while Satan is wearing us out; we try to

suffer silently. But at a certain point, we become disgusted and angry, saying, "I do not agree with this! I do not want this!" This speaking and anger will deliver us and stop the wearing-out work. God's children should stand up to reject Satan in disgust; they should rebuke Satan. Some people have never experienced deliverance or release because they still have the "strength" to endure. A man who endures Satan's wearing out and allows Satan to waste his energy, joy, and spirit has fallen into Satan's trap. We are not saying that we should be angry with those men whom Satan has used; we must be patient with them and still love them. But we should oppose and reject the strategies and methods of Satan. If we oppose Satan's work, we will be freed and liberated.

The power to reject Satan comes from realizing his pressure. Some believers have been deceived and attacked by Satan. They withstand it and oppose it, yet they do not feel that they have any strength. This is because they have not seen the pressure of Satan. We often oppose and reject him, yet we do not have any energy to raise our voice. This is because we have not seen Satan's pressure. Whether or not we can reject Satan depends on whether we are disgusted with him. If we are not sufficiently disgusted with him, our speaking to him will be like speaking to the air; it will not produce any effect. But when we truly become disgusted and angry with him, the anger will become our strength, and the minute we open our mouth, he will go away.

Such a feeling of disgust comes from revelation. Once we see that Satan is wearing us out, we must oppose him. Once we see this, Satan cannot do anything more; he will realize his hopelessness. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we see Satan's wearing-out work. As long as we tolerate and endure him, his work will continue. But the minute we feel disgusted and become angry with him, Satan will go away. We must realize that no other kind of withstanding will work. Satan will withdraw only when we withstand him with our words. If we do not see this and allow him to go on, he will not stop. When we see that Satan is doing the work and plotting everything, we must say, "I do not want this. I oppose this." God will then bless our withstanding, and it will become effectual.

Finally, let us read Ephesians 6:13. Paul said, "Having done all, to stand." We must stand and not allow Satan to continue wearing us out. May the Lord open

our eyes to see Satan's wearing-out work on God's children. We have to reject this, and we have to speak up. We have to say, "I reject this. I oppose this. I do not accept this wearing out." We must not accept any kind of wearing out from Satan; we should oppose it and reject it. If we do this, we will witness the Lord's deliverance and release, and we will be freed from Satan's wearing-out work.

Such words require the covering of the blood. May God cover us with the blood.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

# WORDS

## •Outline

### I. Lies

- ▫**Being Double-tongued**
- ▫**Speaking according to One's Emotions**
- ▫**Adding One's Own Thoughts**
- ▫**Exaggerations**

### II. Idle Words

### III. Evil Words

### IV. Bridling Our Tongues

### V. Listening To The Words Of Others

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Words are one of the most important things in our lives. The Lord Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). This shows that words express a man's heart; they show what is within a man's heart. If a man does not open his mouth, it is not easy for us to know his heart. But as soon as he opens his mouth, his heart is exposed. If a man does not speak, no one will know his spirit. Once he speaks, however, others will touch his spirit through his words; they will know his condition before the Lord. We can judge a person by the words he speaks.

Therefore, a believer must be very careful with his words. He must learn to speak the proper words.

In the Bible, there are four or five places that tell us how to speak. Let us consider them one by one.

## I. LIES

First, we must not speak lies. John 8:44 says, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it."

When Satan speaks a lie, he speaks out of his own possessions, for he is a liar. He did not learn his lies from others. He is the father of lies. Satan damaged God's creation in the garden of Eden with lies. He has to lie in order to overturn God's work. Lying is a sin more common than any other sin. There are as many people who lie as there are people under Satan's hand.

As soon as man is saved by God, the first lesson he should learn is to reject any lie. He should reject inaccurate words, words that add to or come short of the truth, and intentional or unintentional lies. Lies should not be found in a child of God. If lies remain, it means that he is giving Satan the ground to maintain his grip.

If a man has never learned to reject lies, he will not realize how often he lies. The more a person tries to reject lies, the more he will find out that he is simply a lying person; even his heart is inclined towards lying. There are more lies in this world than we can think of, and there are more lies in us than we expect. If we have never learned to reject lies, we will not know how many lies there are. But once we resolve to reject lies, we learn how many lies there are in us. What a pity that among God's children, so many lies still exist! The Lord's word is clear and serious—Satan is the father of those who lie. In other words, all those who lie are the children of Satan. It is a pitiful thing for God's children to allow Satan's lying seed to remain in them! Brothers and sisters, we should not be believers for many years and yet never make a resolution to deal with our lies. Such a dealing is long overdue. As soon as a man believes in the Lord, he has to learn to speak accurately.

There are many kinds of lies; some are obvious, while others do not seem like lies at all. In reality, however, they are still lies. Some examples can be seen in the following:

## Being Double-tongued

Being double-tongued (1 Tim. 3:8) is speaking something in one circumstance and speaking something else in a different circumstance. It is saying that it is all right to do something to one person and not all right to do the same thing to another person. It is switching between yes and no and changing unpredictably. This kind of speaking is a lie.

## Speaking according to One's Emotions

Many people do not speak according to the truth or according to facts. Instead, they speak according to their likes and dislikes; they speak according to their emotions. If they like something, they speak a certain way. If they like a person, they speak a certain way, but if they hate something or some person, they speak another way. This is speaking according to our emotions rather than according to reality. This way of speaking is also lying. We must realize that we should not speak according to our feelings but according to facts. We should not speak according to our emotions. A Christian should learn to control his emotions to the extent that he will not speak according to his wish or imagination. Many people's words do not reflect facts; they reflect their imagination. When they wish that a certain sister would be good, they tell others how good she is. When they think a certain brother is about to fall, they tell others how bad he is. Actually, the one they say is good is not necessarily that good, and the one they say is bad is not necessarily that bad. Their words are based on their imagination rather than on facts. Man often speaks what he hopes to see and what he imagines to be true; his words do not reflect the true condition of a matter. We must learn to deal with this kind of speaking.

## Adding One's Own Thoughts

Many words are greatly twisted after they pass through a few mouths. A word may pass from one man to another and then to a third and so on. Three or four mouths will turn the word into something totally different from what it was originally. This is because everyone wants to add his own thoughts. When one adds a little and another adds a little more, the whole thing eventually becomes completely distorted. When one person conveys something to another and does

not speak according to the facts, adding some of his own thoughts into the speaking, he is lying. Therefore, when we report something, we have to learn to speak before the Lord according to the facts and not put in our own thoughts. If we want to speak our own thoughts, we should clarify that this is our opinion. We should separate our opinions from the facts and not mix them together. Otherwise, we are lying.

If you want to test a brother's heart before the Lord, all you have to do is tell him something and ask him to pass it on. You can easily find out how his heart is before the Lord. A person who fears the Lord, who has learned the lesson, and who has been dealt with by the Lord considers speaking to be a great thing. He will not dare speak rashly or pass on things lightly. He will always try to speak accurately. A person who has never been dealt with by the Lord and who has never been disciplined will pass on words enthusiastically. The way he relays the words will expose him as a flippant, vain, and dishonest person. As he passes words around, he adds his own words and says many things that should not be said. This kind of person can never preach God's Word. He cannot study the Bible properly, because God's Word is accurate to the last iota and serif (Matt. 5:18). A person who is careless will surely make mistakes concerning God's Word.

## Exaggerations

Another common lie is exaggeration. Exaggerations are manifested in inaccurate numbers or in the use of exaggerated words or expressions that are not true. These are lies. Sometimes a person likes to magnify the mistakes of others. A person may be wrong thirty percent, but those who exaggerate will say that it is fifty percent. At the same time these ones try their best to speak lightly of their own mistakes. This is also to lie.

After a man is saved, his speaking has to be severely disciplined by the Lord before he can become an honest person. Let me say a strong word to all of you: A man must reject lies again and again. Every time there are inaccurate words, he has to reject them. He may need to reject them for three to five years before he can be an honest person. A man who is careless in his speech cannot be honest. A common fault with many people is their lies; they speak inaccurate words. There

is no need for a person to learn to lie. As soon as a child is able to talk, he lies. Wise and foolish men alike lie; the only difference is that some are more skillful at lying, while others are less skillful at lying. But whether or not they are skillful, it is lying just the same. Since lying is so common, we have to learn to deal with it. Whenever there is a lie or we touch a spirit of lying, we should be aware of it.

## II. IDLE WORDS

Second, we cannot speak idle words. Matthew 12:35-37 says, "The good man, out of his good treasure, brings forth good things, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil things. And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

In verse 33 the Lord Jesus says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; for by the fruit the tree is known." Following this, He describes the way man speaks. This proves that the fruit spoken of here is not man's conduct but his words. If the fruit is good, it proves that the tree is good, and if the fruit is bad, it proves that the tree is bad. If a man is good, his words will surely be good, and if a man is evil, his words will surely be evil. Some people gossip, criticize, slander, and tear down others with their words all day long. They say all kinds of unclean, filthy, and evil things. This clearly proves that the tree is bad.

If God's children have such faults in themselves, it is impossible for them to help others overcome the same faults. If some brothers and sisters spread unhealthy, filthy, or sinful things all the time, there is no need to ask whether the things are true or false; the very spreading is in itself unclean. A man's words are his fruit. One cannot find a man with a pure heart spreading filthy things. Nor can one find a man with a loving heart spreading hate. The fruit proves the tree. This is not a matter of being true or false. A person may be speaking facts, definite facts, but the facts should not have come out of his mouth in the first place. The facts may be true, but they are not words that one should say. The issue is not whether something is true or false but whether or not one should say

it. It may not be a lie; it may be a fact, yet as long as it is an idle word, we should not speak it, and we need not speak it.

The Lord said, "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment" (v. 36). Brothers and sisters, idle words spoken by a Christian are not over once they are spoken; they will be repeated again a second time. Today you may have spoken something rashly. But one day, you will have to say the same thing again before the judgment seat. When you say it the second time, you will be justified or condemned according to your word. Hence, God's children should learn to fear the Lord and reject all inaccurate and idle words. A word that does not edify oneself or others should not be uttered.

Whether or not a man has been dealt with by the Lord can be seen from the words he speaks. Those who have been dealt with by God have their mouths checked. Those who lie and speak idle, careless words are of little use to the Lord. The only thing they can do is wait for the judgment to come. Those who speak filthy words are surely filthy in themselves. Those who speak corrupting words are surely corrupt in themselves. The kind of words you speak proves the kind of person that you are. One tells the tree by its fruit, and one tells a person by his words. From the day we are saved, we should learn to be dealt with by the Lord in our speaking.

## III. EVIL WORDS

Third, we cannot speak evil words. First Peter 3:9-12 says, "Not rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing one another, because you were called to this, that you might inherit blessing. For he who desires to love life and see good days, let him cause his tongue to cease from evil and his lips to speak no guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it; for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears incline to their petition; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

There is one kind of word which must not come out of a Christian's mouth—evil words. What are evil words? They are revilings and cursings. God's

children cannot render evil for evil or reviling for reviling. Many people say, "Since they said this, I can say it also." Men are concerned about who says something first, but the Lord asks whether you have said it at all. You may say, "Everybody is saying it. Can't I say it too?" Please remember that you cannot render evil for evil or reviling for reviling. It is not a matter of who spoke first but a matter of whether or not you said it. You have to control your temper before you can control your words. If you do not control your temper, many evil words will come out. When God's children become loose, they speak reviling words. If we speak reviling words, we will not glorify God, nor will we receive any blessing from Him.

## IV. BRIDLING OUR TONGUES

James 3 specifically touches the matter of our speaking. Let us read verses 1 to 12. We will highlight a few of these verses.

Verse 2 says, "For in many things we all stumble. If anyone does not stumble in word, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." If a man cannot bridle his words, he cannot bridle himself. In order to see whether or not a man has self-control as a fruit of the Spirit, all one has to do is see whether he is controlled in his speaking. For a Christian, self-control means to be able to control oneself. The ability to control oneself is a fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5 shows us that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. James 3 shows us that the most obvious manifestation of this fruit of the Spirit is in our speaking. If a man can control his tongue, he will be able to control his whole body. Those who speak carelessly must live a careless life. Those who speak in a disorderly manner must live a disorderly life. Those who are indiscreet with their speaking are surely indiscreet with the other faculties of their body. Whether or not a man is able to bridle his whole body can be seen from the way he bridles his tongue.

Brothers and sisters, if we want God to be merciful to us and touch us, we have to deal with our words. If God can deal with our words, He can deal with our whole being. With some people, their words are the center of their whole being; their words are their backbone, the hollow of their thigh. In order for God to deal with such persons, He must first deal with their words. Many people have

not been properly dealt with by the Lord because their speaking has never been dealt with. Nothing exposes a person more than his speaking. Once a man opens up his mouth to speak, his whole being is exposed. Whether or not a person is able to bridle himself can be seen from the way he bridles his tongue.

Verse 3 uses the bridle as an illustration, while verse 4 uses the rudder as an illustration. Man's tongue is like a bridle; it is also like a rudder. It is something very small, yet it can affect a great deal. Verse 5 says that a little fire can ignite a forest, then verse 6 says, "And the tongue is a fire; the very world of unrighteousness, the tongue is set among our members as that which contaminates the whole body and sets on fire the course of life and is set on fire by Gehenna." The tongue is a world of its own, a world of unrighteousness. Many people have not been dealt with in the matter of their tongue, and the tongue brings them into a world of unrighteousness; they spread death everywhere and set aflame the fire of Gehenna. There is a very strong word here: The tongue can set the course of life on fire. This means that it can produce many activities of the flesh. Man's flesh, temper, and anger can all be lit up by the tongue. The tongue can set aflame the fire of Gehenna. Many evil things are stirred up through one word; such a word is truly from Gehenna. The tongue is a fire and a world of unrighteousness. If we want to save ourselves from blemishes in our speaking, we must learn to bridle our words. Those who open their mouths often inevitably make mistakes. Many proverbs repeatedly advise men to be discreet with their words. It is foolishness to be talkative. The more foolish a man is, the more he has to say. But the more a man learns his lessons before the Lord, the more discreet he becomes and the less he has to say.

Verses 7 and 8 tell us that every creature can be tamed but no one is able to tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. We must realize how foolish it is to unbridle our tongue.

Verses 9 to 12 say that we cannot bless the Lord and curse the men whom He has created with the same tongue. We cannot bless and curse at the same time. A spring cannot gush forth sweet and bitter water out of the same opening. A fig tree cannot produce olives, and a vine cannot produce figs. Neither can salt water produce sweet water. A certain kind of tree bears a certain kind of fruit. A

certain kind of spring gushes forth a certain kind of water. Those whom God uses will surely gush forth sweet water which will not have any bitter taste to it.

God's way of salvation is to put a new spring within us. He is saving us by making us a new tree. If we are a fig tree, we will surely not produce olives, and if we are a vine, we will surely not produce figs. Once God puts a new life within us, we will gush forth sweet water spontaneously.

## V. LISTENING TO THE WORDS OF OTHERS

We must pay attention not only to our speaking but also to our listening. If the brothers and sisters know how to listen, they will eliminate much improper speaking. Many improper words are running rampant because many people like to listen to them. As long as there are those who like these things, they will find an outlet. There are so many defiled, evil, gossiping, dividing, double-tongued words because there are those who want to hear these words. Man's heart is evil, crooked, and unclean. As long as there are those who want to hear these things, there will be those who speak these things. If we, as God's children, want to know the kind of words we can or cannot say, we should first know the kind of words that we should and should not hear. We cannot make our ears a trash can and allow unclean things to be dumped into us. We have to reject the defiled, unclean, and corrupting words and not allow them to lodge in us.

Brothers and sisters, if you hear any improper speaking, you must not be distracted by it; instead you should say, "I don't want to hear it!" If you do this, you will stop many sins and help many people. Some people have a lust to listen to these things. This causes these words to multiply more and more, and more and more people will have an interest in them. Brothers and sisters, when someone speaks some inappropriate words, you should either walk away silently, which will kill his interest in continuing, or tell him clearly that such words are unbecoming to a Christian, which may stop him immediately. Many words are like fire from Gehenna; one must quench them the minute they start, before they begin to spread.

When many troubles arise, those who speak bear the major part of the responsibility, while those who listen bear a minor part of the responsibility.

Man has a lust for idle words; he craves strange things. If we can deny this lust, we will quench many fires from Gehenna. When someone says something bad, we should say, "Sorry, as a Christian I cannot listen to this kind of speaking." Once we take a stand this way, we will stop these words. If we intently listen while others are speaking enthusiastically about certain things, hoping that they speak more so that we can hear more, we are not quenching the fire; rather, we are adding fuel to the fire. We are making the fire burn stronger.

Psalm 38:13-14 says, "But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; /And I am like a dumb man, who does not open his mouth./Indeed I am like a man who does not hear/And in whose mouth there are no reproofs." Many people should behave like deaf men. When others speak improper words, we should be like deaf men, hearing nothing. Many times we have to learn to be deaf and to ignore these words. Words are a great temptation, and we have to learn to overcome them. If we listen to unclean and vain words less, we will sin less and avoid much trouble.

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Brothers and sisters, we have to be disciplined in our words; we have to learn to speak, and we have to learn to listen. We have to learn to fear God in the matter of our words. This is a great matter and a very particular lesson. We should learn this lesson properly. This is not something that comes cheaply; we have to put in much effort before we can build up a habit of speaking accurately. Speaking accurately is not easy. The minute we slip a little, our words err and our motives veer. Sometimes we may be right in the things we say, but our motive is to mislead others. This is lying. Therefore, we must pay attention to this matter and put considerable effort into dealing with this matter.

Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a watch, O Jehovah, before my mouth;/Keep the door of my lips." We need this kind of prayer: "O Lord, guard my tongue so that I will not speak carelessly." Perhaps we should add another word: "O God, guard my ears so that I will not listen carelessly." We must reject all fruits of corruption. We should not give any opportunity for the poisoning stench to spread. We must not allow the tongue to carry us into looseness, ungodliness, and rebellion. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we learn to speak as well as listen.

## MESSAGE NINE

# THE PROTECTION, RESTRICTION, AND SUPPLY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

## •Outline

- **•The Protection Of The Body**
- **•The Restriction Of The Body**
- **•The Supply In The Body**

## •Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:22-23, 4:16, 5:21; 6:10-18

Eph. 1:22-23 "And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all."

4:16 "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love."

5:21 "Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ:"

6:10-18 "Finally, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the stratagems of the devil, For our wrestling is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness And having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace; Besides all these, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming darts

of the evil one. And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,"

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In this chapter we would like to consider a few matters related to the Body of Christ. These matters concern: (1) the protection of the Body, (2) the restriction of the Body, and (3) the supply of the Body.

## THE PROTECTION OF THE BODY

The church is the Body of Christ, and every Christian is a member of this Body. The Body not only supplies all the members but protects them as well. Protection by the Body is very crucial for the members in spiritual warfare. God's children suffer the devil's attack because they are too individualistic and do not have the protection of the Body. It is foolish as well as dangerous for anyone to expose his head or exhibit himself in days of warfare. Such ones do not come under the sheltering of the Body, and they afford Satan the opportunity to attack them. Spiritual warfare is not an individual matter but the work of the church. Ephesians is on the Body of Christ. Chapter one speaks of the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies that God has given us; the result is that we see the power of the resurrection of His Son. At the same time, chapter one also shows us that the Lord Jesus is the Head of the church and that the church is the Body of Christ, the vessel which contains Him. The Christ who fills all in all also fills the church. This is why the church is exceedingly rich. Chapter two speaks of how the church is produced. Although the church is rich, it should not forget its former condition. It attains its position of riches through the saving grace of God. Chapter three is on the mystery of God, which created one new man from the Gentiles and the Jews. Chapter four is on God's building of the Body and how the Body grows. Chapter five is on the church as the Body of Christ and how we should be restricted by this Body. Chapter six is on the armor of the Body. In 6:11 "you" is plural, which means that the whole armor of God is not for individuals. This special armor is

for the Body. Every member has his particular function, and when these functions are put together, we have the whole armor of God, and we can engage in spiritual warfare.

Brothers and sisters, the spiritual armor is for the church, not for individuals. You cannot deal with Satan alone; you need the church to deal with him. Other members can see what you cannot see as an individual. Other members can garrison what you cannot garrison as an individual. Satan is not afraid when you pray alone, but when a few come together to pray, Satan will tremble. Some are outstanding in their faith, and they have the shield for protection. Others are particularly gifted with God's word, and they have the sword of the Spirit. When they exercise their sword and speak God's word, you receive help. Spiritual warfare is a corporate warfare; it cannot be fought by individuals alone. If you go to battle alone, Satan's attention will be directed toward you as an individual, and he will attack you as an individual. Those who do not see the Body think that they can do everything and that they are everything. These are the ones who are most likely to fail.

It is easy for a single tree to be blown down by the wind, but it is not easy for a whole forest to be blown down by the wind. Satan is seeking for those without any covering and is concentrating his attacks on these isolated and independent ones. Whoever is under the covering of the Body is under protection. One of the functions of the Body is protection. Those who are under the protection of the Body will not suffer Satan's attacks. If a man is not under the protection of the Body, he will live as if the church does not exist; he will not see the Body of Christ. If he does not encounter assaults, nothing will happen; but the minute he faces an assault, he will fall. The experience of many Christians testifies to this fact. A certain brother was physically weak because he was an individual in the Lord's eyes; he did not have the protection of the Body of Christ, and he came under the attack of Satan while he was trusting and boasting in himself. Brothers and sisters, it is extremely dangerous to expose ourselves; it is very precarious to put our trust and confidence in ourselves. A battle in the physical world requires protection, and a battle in the spiritual world also requires protection. If a brother does anything independently, even though he is

a good brother, he will be setting his own trap! Many spiritual defeats and failures happen when a person is alone and does not have the covering of the Body. Brothers and sisters, we are only members in the Body, and we cannot go on without the protection of the other brothers and sisters. Even Moses' hands needed the support of Aaron and Hur (Exo. 17:12). If Moses needed support from other members, how much more do we need support!

The gates of Hades cannot overcome the church. The Lord Jesus said, "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church. The Lord Jesus never said that God's children can be independent and leave the church. Spiritual warfare is not an individual matter but a matter in the Body. If we want to have protection, we have to be among the brothers and sisters. Never think that we can go to war alone; this only invites trouble. However, unless we are dealt with in our natural life, we cannot put our trust in the brothers. If the natural life is not dealt with, a man is not only incapable of trusting in God, but he is incapable of trusting in the brothers as well. No stubborn or self-trusting person can walk in the footsteps of his brothers. God is after those who know themselves. He is after those who find their protection among the brothers. The vessel God is after is the whole Body. We are only members in the Body; this is why we need the help of the Body. Those who cannot be joined to the brothers and sisters, who do whatever they want and go wherever they want, will surely end up in failure. Is there no brother or sister they can fellowship with? Is there no brother or sister they can pray with? Brothers and sisters, whenever we do not have the Body, we do not have any protection, and we fall into trouble. A battle in the physical world requires covering. Throwing away one's own covering when covering is needed is a tactical mistake; such a risk will bring in nothing but death. The same is true with spiritual warfare. Brothers and sisters, if we do not have any protection and have not encountered any danger, we can only say that God has been merciful to us; we cannot say that we comprehend spiritual tactics.

## THE RESTRICTION OF THE BODY

We are only one member in the Body of Christ. We should not consider

ourselves to be everything. Since we are merely a member in this Body, we should accept the restriction of the Body. Brothers and sisters, if you are a hand, you must be willing to remain a hand and also to come under the restriction of the other members. You must not allow yourself as the hand to act freely. Every part of the Body has to be restricted by the Body; no part can move independently. For example, you may want to leave your house. If some members of your body are lazy and do not want to leave the house, they still have to go along with your body. You cannot have the whole body leave while one member remains in the house. The same is true with your movement as a member of the Body of Christ. You must go with other brothers and sisters.

The work of the cross not only brings us into the Body, but also the Body becomes the very realm within which the cross works. If we were here only as a congregation, we might not need the cross. However, since we are together as the Body, we cannot go on without the cross. The cross will dig away our natural life, our own activities, and any disproportionate growth. The cross is indispensable to the church; it is indispensable among Christians. Whether or not we like it, we have to communicate with other brothers and sisters because we are all in the Body. Because we are in the Body, we have to be restricted and cannot be so free. If we were not members, we could seek our personal enjoyment. Since we are members, we cannot seek our own enjoyment anymore. If we come across a troublesome brother, we need to take up the cross. The cross will test us and sift away all our mixture and uncleanness. We must come under the restriction of the Body. The restriction of the Body will take away our freedom; it will drive us to the cross. Only after the cross has wrought a deep work in us will we be able to coordinate with the brothers and sisters.

Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ. Hence, every Christian should come under the restriction of the Body of Christ and learn to bear the cross. Some have a very strong disposition. Such a strong disposition must be broken. Some are very peculiar. Such peculiarity must also be broken. No Christian can boast of his strength or his peculiarity in the church. In the church, anything sharp, glaring, or conspicuous has to be worn away.

Spiritually, we all need to depend on the other members, and we all need

the restriction of the Body. God may grant grace to some to be miracle workers, and He may grant grace to others to be gospel preachers or teachers. If you can only preach the gospel, you should be satisfied with your function of preaching the gospel and humbly accept the Bible exposition of those who have the gift of teaching. If you have the gift of teaching, you should not think that you have everything; you should also honor and receive others' work. You have to learn to be restricted and allow others to do what you cannot do yourself. You have to learn to accept others' work as well as your own. In the spiritual work, no one is free to do everything.

Brothers and sisters, have you asked God to show you the measure He has given you? You should walk in the measure that God has given you. You can only walk within your measure; you cannot walk beyond that measure. Hence, you have to find out where the boundary of your measure is and accept this boundary. If you do this, you will not be covetous, ambitious, or restless to do many other things. Paul said, "But we will not boast beyond our measure but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach even as far as you....We are not boasting beyond our measure in others' labors, but have the hope, as your faith is increasing, to be magnified in you according to our rule unto abundance, so that we may announce the gospel unto those parts beyond you, not so that we may boast in another man's rule in things already prepared" (2 Cor. 10:13, 15-16). To go beyond one's measure is to overstep others; it is to intrude upon others and to push others out. We must remember that consecration leads to submission to Christ, whereas humility leads to submission to the Body. The psalmist said, "Nor do I go about in things too great/Or too wondrous for me" (Psa. 131:1). Things too great and things too wondrous are the things that are beyond one's measure. If everyone behaves this way, and if no one exercises himself in great matters or in things too wondrous for him, every member will function according to the measure of each one part. Otherwise, some in the church will withdraw while others will take over, and the church will suffer a loss. We should return to our position in the Body and be restricted by the Body. In this way the church will not suffer any loss.

## THE SUPPLY IN THE BODY

One principle of the Body is fellowship. The fellowship of the Body is not just a matter of receiving but also a matter of supplying. If you think that all you have to do is receive and behave in an orderly and quiet way without causing any trouble, you do not know what is meant by the fellowship of the Body. You have become a hindering stone, a sickness, and a burden to the Body. Brothers and sisters, you have to remember that fellowship has to do with the life of the Body. Fellowship is the principle of the Body. Every part of the Body is open to continuous circulation. Whenever any part of the Body is cut off from fellowship, it becomes dead. Whenever a part is sick, the other parts will come to its rescue. This is the law of our physical body; it is the same with the spiritual Body. The principle of the Body life is mutual supply. Whenever a member acts against this law, he brings death into the Body and becomes a burden to the Body.

Paul told the Corinthians, "Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor. 14:26). Many come to meetings as spectators; they are bystanders. To come to the meeting in this way is to bring death to the meeting. A meeting often dies at the hand of the bystanders. Brothers and sisters, we must supply each other not only at the bread-breaking meeting but also at the message meeting.

Every part of the Body is in circulation, and no one can be stagnant. Anyone who becomes stagnant is halting the life of God and bringing death into the Body. It is impossible to have one member stagnant without causing damage to the Body. No member can be useful without the supply of the Body. Some become hurt and decide to hide themselves and to be alone, pursuing spirituality individually. But let them try and see whether they can truly be spiritual. Life cannot become stagnant. Never think that a person can be spiritual by hiding in a place alone to have a spiritual retreat. The vessel God is after is a Body, not individuals. Those who are independent and detached from the Body will not last for long.

The Lord Jesus was thirsty one day as He sat by the well of Jacob. But the Samaritan woman was thirstier than the Lord. When the Lord gave her the living water, she was satisfied. When the disciples came back with food, the Lord was

no longer hungry (John 4:5-34). When we serve others and quench their thirst, we become satisfied. When we learn to bear others' burdens, our own burden becomes light. There is no retirement in spiritual work. The Lord Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17). Whenever we stop functioning, we stop living. A Christian must supply others not only in meetings but also in his daily life and work.

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May the Lord open our eyes to see the Body, to have the protection of the Body, to be restricted by the Body, and to supply others. May the Lord show each one of us that we all have a part in the meeting. It is not enough for us to speak about the Body; we have to practice the Body in our living. The Body of Christ is not a doctrine but a real life. Brothers and sisters, if we find that we can live and walk without the protection, restriction, and supply of the Body, we have not seen the revelation of the Body of Christ. After a person has received God's life, he will feel dry if he walks according to his natural life. In the same way, after one has received the revelation of the Body of Christ, he will feel wrong as soon as he walks in an individualistic way. If we do not have the revelation, it is easy for us to forget this, and we will remember it only as long as we remember the doctrine. But if we have this revelation, the revelation itself will become a law of life in us, and there will be no need to remember anything. For example, we do not have to remember to blink our eyes; spontaneously our eyes blink. If we have received the revelation of the Body of Christ, spontaneously we will feel the need for the Body; there will be no need for us to remember anything. Those who walk according to outward laws are the Jews, and those who live according to their memory are living according to the law and not according to life. If we are touched by the Lord within, and if our eyes are opened to see the Body of Christ, we will spontaneously live in the Body. Therefore, the most important thing is to have revelation.

God is recovering the life of the Body rather than the doctrine of the Body. The Body of Christ is a life. The Body of Christ is a matter of experience, and we have to enter into the reality of this Body. Brothers and sisters, if we are in the

Body of Christ, we will know that it is something real and concrete. We must not only understand the principle of the Body of Christ, we must also see the principle of the Body of Christ. If we see the Body, we will have the Body life spontaneously.

# MESSAGE TEN

## HOLDING THE HEAD

## •Outline

### •One—Four

## •Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:22, 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

Eph. 1:22 "And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,"

4:15-16 "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love."

Col. 2:19 "...holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God."

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### ONE

In order for God to establish Christ as the Head over all things, He must first make Christ the Head of the church. God must first make Christ the Head of the church before this headship can extend to include all things. The future position of Christ in the universe has much to do with His position in the church today. God must first secure Christ's headship among His children, that is, in the church. This is why it is a crucial matter for Christ to be the Head of the church.

Christ is the Head of the church, and the church is the Body of Christ. The whole Body is headed up under the Head. Nothing in the Body can exist apart from the Head. If the Body is detached from the Head, the only result is death.

Every movement of a human body is governed by the head. If the head is injured and loses its function, the activity of the whole body will cease, and the body will not be able to survive. The head is the hub of the life of the whole body. God's Word tells us that those who have the Son of God have life. A Christian receives life from the Lord, yet this life is never detached from the Lord. Those who have the Son have life, yet this life is still in the Son. This life is never for a moment apart from the Son. Without the Lord, we cannot live. Brothers and sisters, God does not give us a piece of Christ; He has given us the whole Christ so that we may be tightly joined to Him. The power of our existence comes from Christ. If we lose our fellowship with the Lord and if we move away from Him, we will immediately become lifeless. A Christian receives life from the Lord, and the life he possesses is still in the Lord. It is true that we have received life, but this life cannot be separated from the Head. After we have received Him, we must still abide in Him and trust in Him. Therefore, we cannot be independent in anything, because only the Lord is the Head and only He is the source of our life.

## TWO

Christ is the life of the Body; He is also the authority of the Body. Since life is in Him, authority is also in Him. Since He is our life, He has authority over us. Whenever we submit to His authority, we have life. Every move of our body is governed by the head. For Christ to be the Head means for Him to have the authority in the Body. Brothers and sisters, if we see what the Body is, we will spontaneously come under the control of the Head. The Body cannot move freely; it can only move at the direction of the Head. Without direction from the Head, the Body cannot move. The Body is under the authority of the Head; it cannot propose anything on its own. The power to direct the Body rests with the Head. Where life is, there is authority. In fact, true authority is life. Since the Lord governs our life, He has authority over us.

Those who say with their mouth that they understand the life of the Body need to ask themselves further whether or not they are under the authority of the Lord. Whether we are under the authority of the Head determines whether we know the life of the Body. Toward God's Word, some have the attitude:

"Although the Lord has said this, yet..." Who has given us permission to say "yet"? What authority do we have to say "yet"? In the world anyone who disobeys the command of his superior is lawless. If Christ is the Head, then we cannot be the Head and we have no right to disobey Him.

What does it mean to follow? To follow means that someone else decides your footsteps and destiny. This is the meaning of following. To follow the Lord means that you have no right to decide your own way. Have you ever said to the Lord that He is the unique authority and that you do not have any choice of your own? The only responsibility the Body has toward the Head is submission and obedience. If you want to live the life of the Body of Christ, you must cover your head and not have any opinion, proposal, or thought of your own. You can only submit to the Lord and allow Him to be the Head. If the Lord is the Head, no one else can be the head. You cannot be the head, nor can anyone else in the church be the head. The Body can only have one Head and can only submit to one Head. Only Christ is the Head, and therefore, you must submit to Christ.

However, many times there are too many heads in the church. There are many human leaders, methods, and ordinances in the church. Man wants to be the head. Christ is the Head in heaven, and man wants to be the head on earth. When the "head" on earth agrees with the Head in heaven, there is obedience. But when the "head" on earth does not agree with the Head in heaven, there is disobedience. How wrong this is! In the church only Christ is the Head; there is no other head. As long as Christ is the Head, no one else can be the head. Brothers and sisters, have you ever said to the Lord, "Lord, You are my Lord. I have no right to make any decision, and I have no right to choose anything. May You deliver me from being my own head and from taking anyone else as the head"? Brothers and sisters, we must all learn to receive orders from God. Christ is the Head, and no one can walk according to his own will. It is a basic Christian experience to surrender to the Lord and submit to Him.

Acts 2 shows us Peter's preaching of the gospel: "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified" (v. 36). The minute he opened his mouth, he spoke about Christ as Lord. Christ is not only the Savior but also the Lord. We all need to have the Lord as our Lord, and since we have all

sinned, He must be our Savior. Consider Paul's experience when he was saved on the way to Damascus. The Lord shone His light on him, and he asked the Lord, "Who are You, Lord?" (9:5). Paul first saw Him as Lord and then believed in Him as the Savior. Brothers and sisters, if our eyes are opened, we will say, "Lord, I am through. From now on, take control of me; be my Lord."

## THREE

Hence, we must hold the Head. Holding the Head means that we recognize only Christ as the Head; it means absolute obedience to the authority of Christ. We have to hold Christ as our Head. Ephesians 4:15-16 says, "We may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." The members are joined together through holding the Head and living the Body life. God is not satisfied with us just taking care of those around us. He wants us to hold the Head; He wants us to have a proper relationship with Christ. Once we have a proper relationship with Christ, we have a proper relationship with the other members. If we hold the Head, everything else will follow. If we can submit to the Head, our problems with other brothers and sisters can be solved easily. If we do not have a problem with the Lord, we will not have any problem with other brothers and sisters. Whether or not we can live the Body life properly depends on our relationship with Christ. If our relationship with Christ is proper, our relationship with everyone else will be proper. Brothers and sisters, we did not become Christians just because other Christians were amiable or because we found a set of methods to live a successful Christian life. We became Christians through knowing Christ. The way we were born is the way we should live. We were born through developing a relationship with Christ. In the same way we should live by maintaining a proper relationship with Him.

This does not mean that there should not be any fellowship between Christians. It means that the mutual fellowship among Christians is based on their individual relationship with Christ. Because the Christ who lives in me

cannot be separated from the Christ who lives in you or in others, there is a need for mutual fellowship among us. The Christ who lives in us is not fragmentary, but one. Christ is in you, and He is also in me. This Christ is the basis of our fellowship. Other than Christ, we have nothing to fellowship about. Our educations, backgrounds, and abilities are all different. But there is one thing we have in common—Christ. The Christ in us is the same; this is why we can have fellowship one with another. All those who belong to Christ can fellowship one with another. Those who do not belong to Christ cannot participate in this fellowship. We do not fellowship with a certain person because he is capable, mild, considerate, or gentle. If our fellowship is based on man, we are not holding the Head, and our fellowship is merely Absalom's fellowship. Absalom's fellowship drew the Israelites away from David. This is not holding the Head. Mutual fellowship among Christians must be based on each person's relationship with Christ. We cannot have another basis of fellowship outside the Head. If we hold the Head and others hold the Head, the mutual fellowship between us and them will be proper and beneficial. But if we do not all hold the Head, the fellowship will run into trouble. How far are we going to go as Christians? Are we going to follow the Lord all the way to the end? If some have left the proper way a few stations back, they are no longer on the proper path. How can we still fellowship with them? Therefore, if we want our fellowship to last to the end, we must follow the Lord to the end. Please remember that fellowship is based on our mutual holding of the Head.

## FOUR

What are the conditions for holding the Head? In order to hold the Head, we must allow the cross to deeply deal with our flesh and our natural life on one hand, and learn to walk according to the Spirit on the other hand. Only then will we have the full fellowship of the Body. If the cross has not dealt with the natural life, we cannot live the Body life. The book of Revelation mentions a group of people who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14:4). Can we say that we follow the Lamb wherever He goes? The cross is the means that brings in the fellowship. Once the cross has dealt with our flesh and broken the self, we can go wherever

the Lamb leads us. If there is no barrier between us and the Lamb, there will be no barrier between us and the Body. If our relationship with the Head is proper, our relationship with the Body will also be proper. Suppose the left hand is hurt. The head directs the right hand to help the left; the right hand does not move independently by itself. The mutual relationship of the members first goes through the head. If you hold the Head, you will help others because of the Lord, not because of human affection. Whenever you consider how others have wronged you, it proves that you are not holding the Head. If you are holding the Head, you will always be helping others for the Lord's sake. Once your relationship with the Lord becomes proper, your relationship with other brothers and sisters will also become proper. If you hold the Head, you cannot build up any direct relationship with others, and you cannot have any special affection toward a few.

God does not allow any division or parties in the church. What is a party? It is when a few Christians have direct communication with one another without communicating with the Head. They have a special friendship between themselves which does not issue from their love for the Lord. This is to form a party. More serious than the forming of parties is the forming of sects. Some are too close to one another; they have too much affection for one another, and they become a sect. If we are holding the Head, our heart must be as large as the Head. All the brothers should love one another, but this love has a foundation. Love is something in the Body of Christ. Our mutual love is a love that is based on the Body of Christ. Any love that is outside the boundary of the Body is something that God does not permit. Christians must love one another by holding the Head. This is the only way to prevent us from becoming a party or a sect.

In the church the knowledge of the truth, the handling of affairs, and everything else must be based on our holding the Head. The greatest problem in the church is the multiplicity of opinions. One portion of the Scripture may have a few interpretations, and someone may agree with a person while another may disagree. One matter can be viewed in different ways; some may insist on one view, while others insist on another view. If no one holds the Head or if we do not all hold the Head, there will be arguments. Paul said, "Is Christ divided?" (1

Cor. 1:13). Christ cannot be divided. The corporate Christ is one, and He will not give us two different views at the same time. The disunity among God's children is the result of not holding the Head. When we encounter any problem, we engage ourselves in disputes. Yet this is not the way to solve problems. If we will kneel down and pray in one accord and acknowledge Christ as the Head, matters will be solved easily. Spiritual things are never judged according to human opinions, thoughts, or doctrines, for these are not holding the Head. The Holy Spirit is working within us. The Holy Spirit is bringing us to the end of ourselves through sufferings, trials, and experiences. Then He will give us revelation which causes us to hold the Head; only this kind of holding is reliable. God will bring us to the end of ourselves through sufferings. Then He will give us revelation. Once we have revelation, spontaneously we will hold the Head. God's revelation is constituted into our life. This is something beyond dispute. To hold the Head is to hold what the Lord has given us. Differences of opinion often come from the proliferation of human opinion and concepts. If our opinions are not from the Head, they are vain. Who among us is qualified to express his own opinion? All expressions of self-opinion are of no value at all.

God's goal today is that His children live the Body life on earth. In order to manifest the Body life, we must hold the Head. Brothers and sisters, are we holding the Head? May the Lord bestow His grace to us.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## THE BREASTPLATE OF JUDGMENT

### •Outline

•One—Six

### •Scripture Reading: Exo. 28:6-7, 9, 12, 15-21, 29-30; 2 Cor. 11:28-29, 7:3; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3, 5-6

Exo. 28:6-7 "And they shall make the ephod of gold thread, of blue and purple and scarlet strands, and fine twined linen, the work of a skillful workman. It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two edges, so that it may be joined together."

9 "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel,"

12 "And you shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before Jehovah on his two shoulders for a memorial."

15-21 "And you shall make a breastplate of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it; of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet strands, and of fine twined linen you shall make it. It shall be square and doubled; a span its length and a span its width. And you shall enclose in it enclosures of stones, four rows of stones: the first row shall be a row of a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; And the second row, a carbuncle, a sapphire, and a diamond; And the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; And the fourth row, a chrysolite, and an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold in their enclosures. And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel, twelve, according to their names; they shall be like the engravings of a signet, each according to its name, for the twelve tribes."

29-30 "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate

of judgment on his heart when he goes into the sanctuary, for a memorial before Jehovah continually. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually."

2 Cor. 11:28-29 "Apart from the things which have not been mentioned, there is this: the crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?"

7:3 "I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts for our dying together and our living together."

Heb. 13:17 "Obey the ones leading you and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who will render an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you."

1 Pet. 5:1-3 "Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly; Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock."

5-6 "In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders; and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time,"

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## ONE

In His selection of men on earth, God first picked out one man. From this one man, a house was developed, and from the house, a nation was formed. The one man was Abraham, the house was the house of Jacob, and the nation was the nation of Israel. When there was one man, God appeared to him, spoke to him,

and revealed Himself to him. When the man became a house, God appeared to the head of the house, spoke to him, and revealed Himself to him. After the Israelites were delivered from the bondage of slavery and after they turned back to God's authority, name, and administration to be the kingdom of God, the Bible shows us that God changed His method of revelation. He no longer spoke and appeared to individual men as He had before. Instead, He revealed Himself to His people and spoke with them according to a prescribed way.

What was this way? It was the breastplate of judgment. Through the breastplate of judgment, God revealed Himself and spoke to His people. In the past God had spoken to one man, but in speaking to a nation He spoke through one object: the breastplate of judgment. When God's chosen people became a nation, God changed His way of speaking. Whenever troubles and problems arose among God's people, they went to God and sought His guidance and revelation through the breastplate of judgment. I hope that the brothers and sisters will remember this. When you are alone, as Abraham was when he served the Lord by himself, God speaks to you alone. But when God's people are around you and you become one of God's people, you should remember that God's way of revelation changes.

This does not annul a man's personal communication with God, and it does not annul God's appearance and revelation to individuals. However, when you follow God as Abraham did, He speaks to you individually, appears to you individually, and gives you revelation individually. But when God's people are around you, something important happens. Even though your individual communication is not annulled, you are no longer alone. Instead, you are mingled with the people of God to become one being and one entity. Then God's revelation and His speaking are not directed toward you individually but toward the people of God. There is a change in God's method of speaking and revelation to His people. Brothers and sisters, we must see this in a clear way. We must see that we are mingled as one Body with all the saints. Under such circumstances, God reveals Himself and speaks and appears to man in a different way. If we have not seen this, our fellowship with the Lord may not be stopped, but our service to God will surely be off. If we want to serve the Lord and meet the need of God's

children, we have to realize that God's appearance and revelation to individuals is different from His appearance and revelation to His corporate Body. Brothers and sisters, you have to realize that God's revelation to Abraham was by one way, and His revelation to the nation of Israel was by another way—the breastplate of judgment.

## TWO

The high priest wore the breastplate when he went to God; it was placed on the ephod. The breastplate was square and folded into two layers; four rows of stones were set upon it. Each row had three stones, upon which were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, two stones were upon the shoulderpieces, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on them as well. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel represented the whole people of Israel, that is, they represented the people of God. When the high priest entered into the presence of God, he did not go in alone; he had the twelve tribes of Israel on his shoulders and upon his breast. The high priest is a type of the Lord Jesus. This speaks of the Lord shouldering us and embracing us upon His breast. When the high priest went into the tabernacle to fulfill his service to God, he had to put on the ephod. He had to have all of the Israelites upon his shoulders and had to come to God with all of them upon his breast.

When the Israelites encountered a problem that needed to be solved, the high priest had to put on the ephod and the breastplate and come into God's presence to seek His speaking and revelation. The breastplate was called the breastplate of judgment because from it man found his solutions. Moses asked God to appoint a man to rule over the congregation, and God answered, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom the Spirit is....And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah" (Num. 27:18, 21). When the Amalekites invaded Ziklag and took the women and the people captive, both great or small, David inquired of the Lord to see whether he should pursue after the troop, and the Lord said, "Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all" (1 Sam. 30:1-8, 18-19). This shows that after God's people grew from one man into a nation, God

spoke to them through an instrument—the breastplate of judgment.

Within the breastplate of judgment there were the Urim and the Thummin. Urim in Hebrew means light, whereas Thummin in Hebrew means perfection. When the high priest went into God's presence with the breastplate, God's light shined and His will was fully manifested.

## THREE

Brothers and sisters, although the breastplate is something in the Old Testament and there are differences in outward form between the Old Testament and the New Testament, God works according to the same principle in both testaments. The things in the Old Testament are shadows, while the things in the New Testament are realities. Yet the New Testament realities are the same in principle as the things in the Old Testament. Therefore, God's way of revelation to His people is the same as His way of revelation to His children. When one, two, three, or five of God's children are humble and fearful before the Lord and when they discover some problems among God's children or His Word is not clear among them, what should they do? They have to learn to shoulder and embrace God's children and inquire for them before God.

Paul was one who shouldered God's believers and had the churches of God on his heart (2 Cor. 11:28-29). When he went before God with a breastplate of judgment, God's light shined. He saw the one who sinned in Corinth, and he also comprehended the word of spiritual mystery which he wrote to the church in Ephesus. Why was Paul able to write and present God's way so clearly before the churches of God? He was not ignorant or unconcerned about the affairs of God's children, nor did he receive light in a cloister while praying as a hermit. This was not Paul's way. He had the churches of God and His children upon his shoulders and breast. He came to God with a fearful heart, and the Father of light shined on him and revealed the needs of the churches which he was shouldering and embracing. Therefore, his letter to the church in Corinth was what the church in Corinth needed, and his letter to the church in Ephesus was what the church in Ephesus needed. Paul wrote his letters to the churches according to the same principle as the high priest who sought God's light with the breastplate of

judgment. The affairs of the churches of God were upon Paul's shoulders and upon his heart. Paul was not nonchalant about the affairs of the churches, nor did he pray mindlessly. He did not casually pray a few words and then write to the church in a particular place and then pray another casual prayer and write to another church. Paul did not do this, and no saint should do this. We have to understand the principle of bringing the Lord's saints into the presence of God. Paul brought the children of God with him as he looked to the Lord for many days. When he saw something in God's light, he wrote a letter based on that light. On another day he would see something else in God's light, and then write another letter based on that light.

Brothers and sisters, in order to understand God's will and way for His people and for the church, there must be some who will shoulder God's children and embrace them, bring them into God's presence, read their condition in God's light, and then write down what they have received before the Lord. This is the way God reveals Himself to His children in the church.

## FOUR

The affairs of the church are decided by the principle of the breastplate of judgment. The experienced, God-fearing, and godly ones among God's people should shoulder and embrace His children and bring them to the Lord. They should read their condition in the light of God and make judgments accordingly. Decisions in the church are not made through the dictates of one or two men. This is not God's way. You may ask, "Did not the churches at the time of the apostles obey the apostles?" Yes, they did. But the apostles first brought the people of God to His presence and asked for His revelation. They did not dictate their orders like a pope.

The affairs of a church are not carried out by one or two men giving all the orders and the rest going along with the orders. Should the affairs then be decided by a vote of hands? No, that is not God's way either. Then what is the proper way? The elders in the church should bring the condition of the children of God to Him and inquire about them. The elders are the matured ones among God's children. Being advanced in years does not make a person an elder.

Spiritual experience and condition distinguish one as an elder. An elder must be godly and know the condition of the brothers and sisters. When a problem or doubt arises in the church, a decision is not made by one person or by a vote of hands. The elders have to bring the condition of the brothers and sisters before the Lord; they have to go before the Lord with the saints' situations, discuss them, and seek common guidance for them. Although we cannot guarantee that the outcome will be a hundred percent right, we can say that it will be difficult for them to err.

We have to remember that once God's people become a corporate entity, His method of revelation changes. Thereafter, God reveals Himself through His people; He places His heart's desire within His people. In fact, His speaking is His echo to His people. Before the elders speak, God has put something within the brothers and sisters already. When the elders bring the brothers and sisters to the Lord and read their condition, they see a message which God has revealed within the brothers and sisters. This message is the present need of God's children; it is also God's need among them. Only this kind of message will touch God; only this kind of message will touch the children of God, and only this kind of message will touch God within all of them. God reveals Himself through His children.

Hence, decisions in the church are not made by a few people nor by a show of hands, but through a group of elders who uphold the people of God in His presence in a fearful way, asking God for His enlightening and revelation. This is the way that God guides His children in the church. The elders in the church should learn to know God's will and to understand the condition of His children and always have them in their hearts. Once a problem arises, they should bring His children to His light and read His mind concerning the solution to the problem. The Epistles in the New Testament were written according to this principle. The writers of the Epistles understood the mind of God and the condition of all the churches. Their hearts were with the affairs of the churches, and when they received some light from the Lord, they wrote it down. As a result, no word was wasted. These written words became God's revelation and His Word.

When we do not judge according to this principle, we fall into error eight or nine times out of ten. Often God's servants see light and truth through the brothers and sisters. God's servants often receive divine revelation through the ones with whom they have fellowship. Often we receive God's word when brothers and sisters are around us; when they are not around us, we do not have God's word. In deciding any matter in the church, we must follow this principle. In this way we will be preserved and not fall into error.

## FIVE

Brothers and sisters, do you feel that this subject does not interest you? You have to realize that this is not just a matter of procedure. There are some spiritual lessons to be learned here, and you can see the need of the breaking of the cross here. If you want to live according to the principles mentioned above, you need the breaking of the cross. If a church does not take the dealing of the cross daily, God has no way to speak to this church. Elders, apostles, old, and young alike have to welcome the breaking of the cross. Only then can God speak clearly. The elders in particular must take the dealing of the cross. Every move and word of the elders affect the brothers and sisters. They should not only read the condition of the brothers and sisters but also bring their affairs before the Father of light, pray over them again and again, and discuss them thoroughly before they make any decision. This is a crucial principle, one that is against your concepts. Among God's children, however, the elders are not the only ones who should keep this principle; God is inside the youngest brother and sister as well, and they can still affect—revealing or obscuring—God's will among His children. Therefore, every brother and sister have to learn to be restricted by God in what they do and say. They have to learn to be broken by the cross. If every brother and sister behave this way in a certain place, that place will become the place where God speaks the most.

No one should despise another one in the church. A brother may have bothered you again and again, but even his opinion must not be despised. If you trample his opinion under your feet, one day you will be sorry. Brothers and sisters, this word comes from the mouth of those who have learned this lesson

through much suffering. You should not despise anyone, and you should not look down upon anyone. You have to bring even their complaints and attacks before the Lord and read them, and you must bear them upon your shoulder and inquire of God for them. You cannot be arrogant. David took others' rebukes to the Lord and read them before the Lord. Brothers and sisters, do not presume that those who agree with you are the only ones who know God's will. It is often your opposers who make you understand God's will. If there is anything that can keep you from faltering in your footsteps, this principle is the only one. If you do not want to offend God's heart or the brothers' and sisters' hearts, you have to live according to this principle in an absolute way. Only this principle will drive away your prejudice and your view, and only this principle will allow you to read the mind of the brothers and sisters before the Lord. The words you find will be the word that God intends to speak to His children. Only this principle will allow God to unveil His heart to His children, and only this principle will satisfy the heart in heaven as well as the hearts on earth.

Suppose a few elders in the church decide on a matter and carry it out accordingly. Another brother may not feel right about it, yet he dares not say anything rashly because of his fear of the Lord. What is the result of this? The result is that the organic function of the Body of Christ is stifled through this decision. Then what is the right way? Before a matter is carried out, God must first operate among His children. Before the elders try to carry out a matter, they should first bring the condition of the brothers before the Lord. Whatever comes out of such a reading will strike a sweet cord and a nod of approval in everyone. The elders should seek God's will according to this principle. Otherwise, a decision may end up being contrary to God's operation within His children, and the announcement of the decision will not bring about an echo within His children. God's Spirit will not vindicate this matter within His children. As a result, the organic function of the Body of Christ will be obstructed. If the elders would read the condition of God's children under His light and do this thoroughly before making any decision, the decision would produce an echo within His children; it would bring anointing to His children and motivate His children. If they do not do this, the organic function of the Body of Christ will

stop. Brothers and sisters, we must ask God to deliver us. We need not only the structure of the Body of Christ but also the organic operation of the Body of Christ. Only then will the function of the Body be manifested. This principle applies to every brother and sister; everyone has to realize this principle.

## SIX

There is another thing I would like to point out—the matter of authority. What is authority? Superficially speaking, authority is based on position; whoever has position has authority. According to the Bible, this also appears to be the case, but actually, this is not the case. Authority is not mainly a matter of position; it is primarily a matter of life. When the people of Israel saw the budding rod of Aaron, they acknowledged his authority. Without resurrection life, authority is useless. Authority in the church is not mainly a matter of position but a matter of life. You do not become an authority by others' election, and no one can claim authority based solely on his position in the church. David submitted to the authority of Saul because he feared God, but Saul was rejected by God because he rebelled against Him. He had only the position of a king, not the life of a king. God did not vindicate his authority. This was not a case of David rebelling against the authority, but a case of God not vindicating it. God cast Saul down and set him aside.

The authority of the church is a matter of life. The amount of authority one has depends on the degree to which the resurrection life of God lives within him. The more he gives up God's resurrection life, the more gives up his authority. The Bible says that the elders should not lord it over the flock but should be a pattern to the flock. A pattern is an expression of life. It is wrong to put on a sober expression and assert that one is an elder and that he has authority. If anyone among us demands submission in a pretentious way, others have to put a big question mark on his authority. In the church all the brothers and sisters have to learn to humble themselves and submit to one another. Authority is a matter of living out the proper pattern in love. Only this will cause God's children to submit from their hearts. May the Lord be merciful to us and give us some excellent patterns.

## MESSAGE TWELVE

# What the Gospel Is

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: Col. 1:26-27; Eph. 5:30-32

Col. 1:26-27 "The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints; To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,"

Eph. 5:30-32 "Because we are members of His Body. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church."

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It is very important that we should know what the Gospel is. If we were asked to state what the Gospel is, probably we should set down some passages of Scripture which we consider are inclusive of the Gospel. Probably John 3:16 and say—that is the Gospel. We should be right to a point, but at best we should only be stating certain basic truths about the Gospel; glorious truths and yet not in themselves the Gospel in its fulness or in its central meaning. Those are wonderful facts and they are constituent parts of the Gospel, but that is not the Gospel in the sense in which you and I must understand the Gospel and know the meaning of the Gospel.

I believe that the Gospel is just this, simply, but most profoundly, that the Son of God, Who is also Son of Man, has come, and in His Coming has expressed

in the world the Divine type of what God intended before times eternal that His race, His creation, should be. That is God contracted to the span of human life; God manifest in the flesh; God combining with His own essential nature another kind of creation called “man” and in that combination producing as out from Himself a type, a kind, a species which never occupied the world before (so far as we know), which was His thought and conception before the foundation of the world. A creature in which God is resident Himself by His Divine Nature; and in the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Christ, we have that species represented, that type manifested, and that is the Gospel. That into the image of that Son those who become identified with Him in oneness of that Divine life are destined to be conformed, to be the instrument for the manifestation of God by His indwelling. And that is the mystery of which the Apostle Paul speaks so much, you are familiar with the word: “the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory.” “This mystery is great; we are members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” The realisation of this will be both personal and corporate.

Now the Master threw some advanced rays of light upon that revelation which was to come by the Holy Spirit later through a spirit-indwelt Church and its members when He said words with which we are very familiar—“In that day (what day? well we know) ye shall know that ye are in Me and I in you,” “and if a man love Me he will keep My words and My Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.” Further, in His prayer: “I in them and Thou in Me,” and again: “If any man will hear I will come in unto him.”

Then later these words from the realisation of that marvellous foreshadowing and promise: “If Christ is in you the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.” “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith”—“Jesus Christ is in you,”—and “for me to live is Christ” to which might be added many declarations and utterances relative to this great central truth.

The Gospel is the manifestation and revelation of that which was in the heart of God before the world as to what His own people should be; that His people in whom He Himself is resident, through whom He reveals and manifests Himself, who are definitely partakers of His Divine nature, and that that

representative, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, has achieved that work by His Cross whereby God may get His end and realise His original purpose. That is the Gospel. And seeing Him, not as an historical figure, not as just Jesus of Nazareth, but seeing Him as the representative of all the sons of God as an inclusive Son and understanding the true nature of the Lord Jesus, we see that which God has from eternity chosen us to be in Himself. That is the Good News; that is the promise, that is the prophecy, that is the power. Of course, I am quite conscious that many questions might rise out of a statement like that, but I am not careful to stay and discuss such at this moment. We want to recognise one or two other things in relation to this theme which arises out of that declaration.

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We have often said that although God created Adam and intended him to fulfil ultimately, and to realise, the work which Christ the Lord came to do and to realise, it was but a probationary creation; He did not create him at the outset on the same plane as the Lord Jesus, and therefore he never lost what the Lord Jesus regained, but the Lord Jesus brought infinitely more than ever Adam lost.

It was the Divine intention that ultimately the Lord should inhabit and indwell, and reside within and manifest Himself, as out from the man of His creation. But that first creation which was in the mind of God intended to realise that end ignominiously failed and fell from God. The Cross does not come in to retrieve merely that loss. There is much misconception that Calvary just regains Paradise and reconstructs the mass of wreckage of Adam's fall and mistake and blunder and sin. The Cross may do such, but it does infinitely more. It does not start where Adam went wrong; now it starts with God Incarnate and on the ground of all that Calvary has done in wiping out one order which has proved ineffective you start where God originally intended man should end, where man should have arrived at the end of his probation. If Adam had not fallen there would have been a development and a growth unto partaking of a life which is uncreated. That is why God hedged around that Tree of Life so that a man should not perpetuate a species endlessly. He might later have taken that, and possessing the life of the Ages, sharing one life with God, uncreated life, endless

life, he might have come at length to the standard of the Sonship. But the probation failed and so man on that plane was wiped out in the Cross and that creation brought to an end; and when the Lord Jesus rises from the dead He rises not of a fallen Adam race but He rises as the first begotten from the dead, of a new species altogether; and it is a new creation, not a renewed creation—a new creation, something that has never been before. And that is brought about by the same Spirit as energised out from God in the original creation but which energises so much the more now to bring forth this other thing. There never was such an energising of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Universe as is manifested in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

In our resurrection union with Christ we are to "walk in newness of spirit." Not merely the old spirit resuscitated, but a newness of spirit. What is this newness? It is in the fact of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as its true life; Christ resident within by the Holy Spirit. This is new. It was never true of man before, the operations of the spirit of God were always upon before—as from without.

It brings us right back to the A.B.C. of our Christian life and experience to recognise this, that sonship in this superlative sense, relationship to God of this kind, which is to be sons of God in the Eternal Son, is on the basis of God Himself being resident in our spirit and that on the basis of a new thing which has been done in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a new creation, in which God takes up His abode. "Upon man's flesh shall not the holy anointing oil come."

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From that time onward the course of spiritual experience is the history of the progressive ascendency of God in man's spirit over that other old outer man. There are times when it is difficult for the Lord's people to put a piece of tissue paper between the two. It is very difficult for you, for instance, sometimes to be able to see the narrowest line between your prayer and the prayer of God the Holy Spirit in you. You are praying and for all you are worth, but your prayer as such gets nowhere, if it were left there you could go on praying and get nowhere until in your prayer there is an extra ingredient.

Many people have the idea that incense in the Bible represents the prayers

of God's people, that is not so. They quote Scripture from Rev. 8—the golden bowl containing incense, and then immediately the declaration "which are the prayers of the saints"—be careful of your grammar—"the incense which are the prayers of the saints." What are the prayers of the saints? The golden bowls. What is the incense? It is the prayer of the Holy Ghost within the saints (Rev. 5:8). The Greek in that passage makes it perfectly clear that it is the bowls which are the prayers of the saints and the incense is something which is added to; the incense is added into the prayers of the saints. Elijah, a man of like passions—he prayed and "in his praying he prayed," the something extra there. What is that? The man prays, but as he prays something comes through his prayer, it comes right out of the Throne of God. Only that declaration which comes right out from God Himself can open or close the Heavens. And that is what is meant by praying in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost praying in you. For is it not said most definitely that He shall make intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered. The Holy Spirit is in the Church, the Body of Christ and it is there that He is fulfilling His advocacy and making intercession. There are times when an unutterable something is in our spirit, an awful cry which we are unable to articulate, a groaning which cannot be uttered and although you cannot articulate that that is the effective thing; that is the extra ingredient.

That is why God was so particular when He gave the ingredients of the incense—"there shall be none of this used by men for themselves." Not merely to make, but not for themselves. This thing was not for the flesh, it was unto the pure purpose of God; and if it came into the realm of the flesh there would be a blazing forth of judgment—so it was when strange fire was offered. It is the thing which is God Himself, effecting His purposes which are the purposes related to this new creation.

One thanks God for that extra something, because while one has a very blessed union with God and life in Him, one is always making mistakes; one is constantly coming short; overwhelmed with lack of wisdom and understanding and how they do move short of that revelation of life utterly in the spirit. While one's relationship to the Lord is absolutely clear, and while one's spirit is pure (I prefer to interpret "heart" as "spirit") towards God and while one is always and

constantly praying—"Lord, plant that Cross into the depths of my being," while one does that, in spite of the limitations, there is a movement of the Lord, He is doing it though we be of little faith, which is nothing else than God Himself going on with His work. That will never be thought a reason why we can continue to blunder, but as one is seeking to go on with the Lord, the Lord is doing His own work. We are in union with the Lord and He has brought us on. Sometimes He lets us make these false moves to show us that this thing is of Himself and not of us.

The main conception is before us and the line is simply this—that God had a design, a species in mind that is the reproduction of Himself, an incarnation of Himself not in one man only but in a Body, the inclusive incarnation of God, the Body of Christ, composed of born-again ones; that was His original conception. Adam did not lose that, he failed to attain unto it. The Cross comes in and wipes out that kind of thing, not merely the result of Adam's failure in himself and in the earth, He wipes it out—the first Adam.

In the resurrection this is realised, but God Himself brings about the resurrection by the energising of the Holy Spirit and sonship in this superlative and transcendent sense is on the ground of a union with Christ in resurrection by an indwelling revelation of God through the Holy Spirit. "Because we are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our heart whereby we cry "Abba, Father"—"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." Sonship is only possible by the way of the Cross by the indwelling Spirit.

These are far-reaching principles, but they bring with them comfort and assurance that the end will be attained because God has promised it. He does not leave it with us to do it, it is God Who works in us. It is very difficult to understand why some who claim to be the Lord's people, some who carry His Name and are engaged in what is His service, can go on with gross and fundamental contradictions in their life, and that the Holy Spirit should be resident in them to declare in them the Will of God. This thing is so difficult to understand, but I believe it is impossible to go on like that if really the Holy Spirit is getting the upper hand.

In unenlightened days when one knew very little about the fact of revelation,

one was working upon the objective and external, even then one recognised most clearly that they were held when they said a thing from a pulpit or platform which was not according to the truth, and yet it seemed to be born out by the truth, but one remembers they did not have a good time when they were saying it. And we are being checked like that all along if the Lord really is within. You are safe if the Lord has really taken up residence inside. You will have a check when you are making a mistake. The whole secret of walking in the Lord is that the Lord is walking in you. May He bring us into the effectual working of it that we may know what that extra is—Christ in you, by the Holy Spirit, the hope of glory.

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Thus far we have seen something of the nature of the new man whom God had in mind as the ultimate realisation of His desire. We have seen that Christ Who is God manifest in the flesh is the only answer but the absolute answer to that quest of God from before the world and its creation, and that Christ is the first and representative and inclusive of that type. He answers specifically to the Divine desire and requirement in that He is a manifestation of God by the indwelling of God.

We have been able to see just a little of the meaning of Pentecost and of the Holy Spirit's coming as an inseparable part of the Godhead and taking up residence in the spirit of the new creation man on the ground of the resurrection of Jesus, the Cross having for ever wiped out of existence, so far as God's purpose is concerned, God's creation in Adam. So we have the presentation as a new man in Christ Jesus; that he is in a very real way by Divine intention a God-man—a God-indwelt man, a God-possessed man, a God-revealing and manifesting man and in all therefore not a natural man but a supernatural man that has the Risen Christ as his type, he is essentially a spiritual man. All his being and his life is spiritual, his sustenance is spiritual, his warfare is spiritual, his service is spiritual, his equipment is spiritual, his walk is spiritual; everything of this man is spiritual because he is a spiritual being.

You say—"that does not describe us!"—"That surely must describe some

future state." But it does describe us if we are in Christ Jesus. That is our description but we have to be able to clearly make that discrimination between the outer man and the inner man and to recognise that this man is not the outer man with which we are so familiar, but it is the inner man to whom we, the outer man, are such strangers. We are learning to know him and to know ourselves by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

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One feels a desire to indicate afresh by familiar words how we are learning to know this new man as ourselves, to recognise him and to see who he is and what he is, what he is made of, what he can do and what are his qualifications.

We see him mostly in his enduements and service as portrayed partly and very clearly in that 12th chapter of the first Corinthian letter. We shall see here just again as has been said already that this new man is as distinct from our old, outer, natural man as any two entities can possibly be distinct from one another. These two entities are utterly distinct from one another. They are poles asunder and all their make-up is clearly divided and between the two stands the Cross which writes death on the one side and life on the other.

If this new man is a spirit-man, is born from above, born of the Holy Spirit for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit and if we are born of the Spirit therefore we are spirit in our new life, new nature, and new being; if this man is such then his whole outfit must be spiritual.

This is not something up to which you have to climb, it is interwoven with your new life and is the expression of it, but you are called upon to recognise three definite lines of separation, to acknowledge them and assent to them and to allow the Holy Spirit to make them very clear and practical in your experience; that is our spiritual education. The clear line of distinction and discrimination in the matter of use and service and work is simply this: that the abilities and enduements and qualifications and gifts of the natural life are not the primary ground of our activity and service in the spiritual life; that our activity and service as a new man is upon the ground of an entirely spiritual equipment and that is not natural but supernatural. And that if this new man is a supernatural

man, something which cannot be produced by any of the resources of natural life, he requires the transcendent act of God in that power which itself transcends all the ordinary operations of the natural and which relates to all his activities and works and these are the product of special, definite, spiritual impactions and gifts.

Those who have no gifts naturally can have them spiritually, whilst those who have plenty of them naturally have nothing to boast of. The very birth is not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man.

What does 1 Corinthians 12 really represent? We have thought of it and in thinking have got into an awful lot of confusion and made room for many preponderances. We have recognised the true nature of this, that it is indispensably necessary that this new man by the Holy Ghost should have special spiritual qualifications to do the work for which the Holy Ghost—in the knowledge of God's purpose concerning each one—has equipped and called him. God knows what we are called to in the Body of Christ and He has made provision for our equipment to do that thing. This chapter presents to us many of those things by which the new man fulfils his new vocation according to the Will of God. Dispensations and dispositions were said to be as He willed. One does not regard these things as extraordinary demonstrations, but as the normal and natural expression of a spiritual life that the Lord shall give equipment for special service.

Now beloved, it should never be right for you to say "I am not fit for that, I am not qualified for that; I have no abilities of any kind or gifts or qualifications for the Lord's work." If you are really born again of the Holy Spirit and you are this new creation, what has happened is that being in the world you can do nothing. You can neither talk nor use your hand nor feet nor your eyes, that you are simply useless in the new creation. I am of the persuasion that there are no useless things in the new creation. The Holy Spirit wraps up with the new creation those things which are going to make it capable of realising its end and effecting its purpose. Having made the provision, we have as our birthright, our inheritance in the new creation, the right of equipment of a supernatural character unto the work of God and have it as something which is natural to us in

the spiritual realm.

Two things must be said here. The whole of our trouble is to recognise this, that our uselessness or our usefulness in our natural life is no criterion whatever, and that is where the Cross comes in. It comes on the positive side for the very clever people, to smite them right out of the realm of real spiritual effectiveness, to smite them as clever people, as natural, in their equipment and enduement; that is a fact, however, you may wriggle and argue. The course of spiritual experience is to make them realise how utterly useless they are in spiritual service, they don't count! Their works are at an end, their abilities are at an end, their reputation is at an end, no longer can they hold their heads up before men and claim to be something in religious work. We cannot do the things that we once could do even in the Name of the Lord. But then in the recognition of that fact, the meaning of the Cross, they come not to the end but the beginning. Behold I make all things new and all things are now out from God, whereas before they were out from somewhere else.

The new door with a new equipment. How different! And only those who have gone some way through that new door know how different. Your wisdom here is absolutely confounded, your natural genius for getting things done is absolutely brought to confusion; you are made a fool of if you dare to move in that realm again, and God sees that you don't succeed in that way.

But now it is a new kind of thing—the Wisdom of God set over against the wisdom of this world. This wisdom of this world is sensual, psychical, is devilish. (James 2:15.) A different kind of wisdom, "By the same Spirit the word of wisdom; to another—knowledge," this is as far removed from natural knowledge as heaven is from the earth. By it the things which are of God are accomplished, are done, and that which is of God far outstrips anything we can do.

We have got to face the fact that the Cross means on the one side to bring us where we cry, though we have been the most able and successful, "I cannot!" "I cannot!"—that is the end. You have got to accept that fact, the sooner, the better, before we shall come into that new creation, "I can, in Christ, all things." We have to recognise this that these equipments and enduements are racial and as such they are corporate. The Church is also called a "nation," "an elect nation." The

metaphors are all brought together—"an elect nation, a royal priesthood, a spiritual house." Nation—the root is a birth, it relates to a birth; it is racial, it is on the ground of sharing one life. If this is true and the Holy Spirit is "The Spirit of Life" that life, He is also the Spirit of service, and therefore of equipment, by whom and through whom the gifts are given—"distributed"—to those who share the common life of the Body. These gifts are corporate gifts and related, and they are not for independent service or action, but all meant to contribute to one object and purpose, and they are inseparable.

If this is true and the gifts, the qualifications, are the natural right of birth on the basis of a common life for a common end in a corporate Body, they will only be manifest and effective in their own place and relationship. That is that the member has to be properly related and put into position, and function within the definite and clearly defined limits of their divine appointment. To get outside your appointment in the Body of Christ is at once to arrest the functioning of the Holy Spirit through that divine importation. "Stir up the gift"—to keep it in the ascendency because it may be lost in its power—stir it up.

If all this is true the Holy Spirit requires for the expression and manifestation of the gifts a discerning of the Body, a recognition of the fact of the Body. For spiritual equipment is dependent upon relationship, ministry in and to the Body of Christ. If it requires the Body for this then the Holy Spirit will require a discerning of the Body if there is to be a manifestation of enduement for body service. That brings us to that much misunderstood testimony to the Body which was discerned undoubtedly by the Church in its first clear days when those who were representative members in the Body brought each new convert, each new elect member, who had confessed and declared their union with the Body of Christ, and in a definite act by putting their hands upon them and held a testimony to the Body, and the Holy Spirit recognised their testimony and gave His own attestation to it, and by such means and at such times equipped that member for the work—it was "the work whereunto I have chosen them." Timothy, "Stir up the gift which is in thee in the laying-on of hands." What was that? It was there by prophecy. Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. When the Holy Spirit prayed through such as prayed over Timothy,

evidently He prayed prophetically as to Timothy's work as an evangelist. "By prophecy," says Paul (1 Timothy 4:14,2,6,4,5).

Beloved, is this quite clear that this new man is a corporate new man, his equipment is a corporate equipment, his enduements are for the whole work of the Body. The recognition and discernment of that fact is required by the Lord in a definite testimony, and then not necessarily by any demonstration at the time. There is a quiet, a silent moving out into ministries which take their own course and find a special emphasis in the Body of Christ, and while we keep within the realm of that ministry, it grows and so it becomes the natural expression of our life in the Body of Christ.

One does feel that it is necessary to add as a note the emphatic pronouncement that while fulfilling the Divine mind and will as representative and "First-begotten"—the federal head of a new race—Christ was infinitely more than that. He is very God of very God. Deity will never be the essence of the new creation man. His will be Divine nature by derivation, not original being. We must always recognise the two sides to Christ's being and work.

by T. Austin-Sparks

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# MESSAGE ONE

## LIVING BY FAITH

### The Present Testimony (4) - Issue No. 33

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### •God's Purpose

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## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 10:38

Heb. 10:38 "But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul does not delight in him."

The word "live" in this verse can be translated two ways according to Greek. It can be translated "have life," or "live." In Romans 1 it should be translated "have life," while in Hebrews it should be translated "live." Because Romans talks about sinners, "live" should be translated "shall have life by faith." Hebrews is written to the believers, those who are saved and have eternal life; therefore, the more accurate translation is "live by faith."

*  *  *  *

I have met many believers who have mentioned various spiritual problems. Of all of the spiritual problems, there is one that many people have difficultly overcoming. Many believers frequently wonder why at times they feel spiritually dry and tasteless, while at other times they are happy and excited. When they are happy and excited, even though they are not having the experience in the third heaven, it seems as if they are having a unique mountaintop experience. They

wonder how they can overcome the dry life to remain all the time in a happy and excited condition. They wish that their whole life would be one of constant flowing and bubbling. If they could do this, they would be able to sing hallelujahs all their life. Many believers are seeking a solution to this problem.

Believers ordinarily refer to this type of living as "wave-like." They live a fluctuating life. In their feelings, many Christians live a life that is sometimes on the mountaintop and sometimes in the valley. Sometimes they are on the top of the wave, and sometimes they are under the waterline. Sometimes they are high, and sometimes they are low. Almost every Christian feels that he is living a fluctuating life. Sometimes he feels very happy and will not be satisfied with only two hours of prayer. The more he testifies, the more he has to say, and the words come out like a river. When he listens to a message, he feels very interested and does not become tired at all. When he studies the Bible, he feels that God's Word is as sweet as honey. But then sometimes, things seem to be completely different. He feels that praying is the same as not praying. Whether or not he prays does not seem to make much difference. The Bible seems to be letters of black and white only, and it is dry and tasteless. When he meets someone, he feels guilty if he does not testify, and so he reluctantly says a few words like, "If you believe in Jesus, you will have eternal life." However, in his heart he feels uninspired and has nothing to say. Other things of the same nature are done halfheartedly. Sometimes he feels that it is only profitable to draw near to God and pray to Him and that no work is necessary. Yet at other times he feels that even this is too dry, and there is not much joy in drawing near to God. Since he feels obligated to draw near to God, however, he does it reluctantly.

We can compare this kind of Christian life to nature. Where there is a mountain, there must be a valley. Where there is a high wave, there is also a low wave. Because many Christians frequently have this kind of experience, they conclude that a fluctuating life is inevitable and that it is impossible to live a steady life. They think that this will be their experience until they die. There is another group of Christians who say that mountain and valley, high and low wave experiences are unnecessary and that the Christian experience of life can be steady and on a straight line. What I want to tell you is that it is not altogether

right to say that a Christian must have fluctuating and wavy experiences, nor is it altogether right to say that a Christian's experience must always be level and flat.

If we want to find out the principle of something, we have to combine the experiences of all kinds of people. Only by combining the spiritual experiences of all kinds of people can we come up with a common principle. For example, a person may study patients who have suffered from a certain illness. He will study the causes, symptoms, and results of many cases before he can draw a conclusion. If the hundreds or thousands of patients that are studied are found to have the same cause and same result, he can then draw a conclusion from what is common in all the cases. For this reason, we have to study how the highs and lows of a Christian life occur and how they develop before we can find out the proper principle.

A Christian begins his life from the time he is saved. Is a person sad when he is saved? No, he is very happy. When someone finds a treasure, he is happy. When someone tells you that believing in Jesus Christ will give you eternal life and that you will pass from death to life and never come under condemnation anymore, that is the happiest day of your life. But let me ask, can this happiness remain forever? No, after a while this happy feeling will go away. How long will the happiness last? It is not certain, and it differs from person to person. According to my knowledge, the happy feeling and great joy that one had at the time of salvation seldom lasts more than a few months. Generally speaking, after a month or two, the feeling goes away. With some, the feeling of joy from salvation is gone in only a matter of one or two weeks.

Let us use a horizontal line to illustrate the experiences of a Christian. Anything above this line is joy, and anything below this line is dryness. When some are saved, for the first few months they live in joy. But one morning, though they study the Bible, pray, and fellowship just as before, they feel that their joy is not as full as the day before. It has diminished. Some people are persecuted and ill-treated after they are saved. Others want to deal with their sins to the extent that they are willing to cut off their right arm after they are saved. Still others want to confess their sins to others and give up their sins after they are saved. At this time they are happy and consider it worthwhile to be saved because their

happiness more than compensates for their loss. Of course, they should be happy when they are saved. Even God is happy that they are saved. But a few months later, they begin to lose their joy, or the joy is no longer as full as it was before. At the time of salvation, they loved to read the Bible. Even though they may not understand the meaning of the Bible, they are interested in reading it. Although there are many things that new believers do not understand about the Bible, they like to eat and do not think that it is too much to read more than a dozen chapters a day. At that time they feel very happy about praying. Although they cannot tell how many times God has answered their prayer, they still like to pray. They lock themselves up in a room for a few hours and jump up and down for joy. But when the joy is gone, they begin to feel sad. Temptation will come from two sides. On the one side, the enemy will come; Satan will tell them that they are backslidden and no longer saved. On the other side, they will think that they have committed some sins and have become fallen. Yet in spite of their searching, they cannot find out what sins they have committed. Now, they feel that everything has dried up.

However, this dryness does not last long. Sometimes it lasts for one or two weeks; sometimes it goes away in three to five days. Once the dryness goes away, the joy comes back. Formerly, their reading of the Bible and praying were such an effort and drag that it felt like trying to recite a forgotten passage. Now it seems that the fellowship with God is resumed. But how the recovery came about, they do not know. Now they are more careful to maintain their joy. They try their best to maintain the exciting joy. They are more careful in reading the Bible, praying, and testifying to others.

But not long after this, the joy is gone again. They wonder why today is not the same as the day before for they read the Bible, pray, and testify just the same. Why is there such a big difference between the two days? Why was there the joy yesterday but not today? Under such a condition, they even wonder what God is like and what Jesus Christ is like. They have fallen into a great error. They think that their spiritual power is gone and that they have become fallen. Although they pray, it is not done faithfully; although they read the Bible, they spend less time on it; and although they testify, they do so only reluctantly.

After a few days or several weeks, however, the joy strangely returns. Now they feel an interest in everything again. If they are not having the experience of the third heaven, they are, at least, having a mountaintop experience. But stranger than this is the fact that after a while, they revert to their former dry and tasteless condition. They begin to conclude that their spiritual life is one of ups and downs. If someone asks them about their spiritual life, they would say that their life is fluctuating. During the highs, they read the Bible, pray, and testify with interest and joy, and during the lows, they do the same things without any interest and in dryness. This is the fluctuating life.

I would like to consider the matter of this fluctuation, starting from the first joy we received at the time of salvation. If we can find the cause of the illness, we can find the cure. From the experience of many saved people, we can find a law that joy is greater at the beginning than at the end, while dryness is greater at the end than at the beginning. The joy becomes less intense (though deeper), and the time of joy becomes shorter. At the same time, the dryness becomes more intense and lasts longer (though shallower). Perhaps the first dryness lasts for three to five days; the second dryness for a week; the third for two weeks, and the fourth for perhaps a month. In other words, the second time around, the joy is less intense and shorter than the first, while the dryness is more intense and longer than the first. The period of dryness extends longer, and its intensity increases more. All believers have this kind of experience. Eventually, our dryness is more than our joy.

Can any Christian say that he has more joy today than on the day he was saved? We may feel sad in our hearts and feel that we have sinned or failed. We are not as joyful as when we were first saved. When we were first saved, it was like riding on a cloud or like standing on a mountaintop. We were bold to testify without fear, even on the street. We could read fifty to sixty chapters of the Bible a day and still feel that this was not sufficient. But today we feel that we are dragging our feet in everything we do, and we are reluctant to do anything.

Let me say that we have made a basic mistake. We have a big misconception concerning spiritual experiences; we think that the joyful times are the peak times of our spiritual life. But the dry times are not times of spiritual decline.

Suppose I lost a watch. When I find the watch again, I will become very happy. After three to five days, my joy will not be as great as when I first found the watch. Perhaps after a few days, the joy will be completely gone. But this does not mean that I have lost my watch again. What has been lost is merely the joy of finding the watch. The same is true with our spiritual life. When we found the Savior, we were saved and could not help but rejoice. Not only did we rejoice from ourselves, God gave us joy as well. If someone did not have joy when he was saved, I doubt that he has found the Savior yet. But later the joy was lost. We may think that the things that we gained are lost. Actually, only the joy is lost; the things we gained are not lost. Let me ask: Has the Lord Jesus changed? No. Has God changed? No. Has the eternal life that God has given us been taken back? No. They were ours when we were excited about them. They are still ours when we feel so dry. It does not matter how excited we are or how dry we are. What we gained has not been lost; it is still there. This is why I say that there are no fluctuations in a Christian's life and experience. (This does not include the case of those Christians who have sinned, fallen, or backslidden. Those are exceptions. What we are talking about are the normal conditions of Christians.)

God never changes, the work of the Lord Jesus never changes, and the Holy Spirit never changes. The eternal life that we have received is still there; it is never lost. What is lost is merely our initial joy. A young child may think that the sun is gone when it rains. He may go to his father and ask, "Where is the sun?" He may go up to the roof and find that the sun is not there. He may go to a nearby watchtower and find that the sun is not there. But the sun has not changed; it has merely been blocked by the dark clouds. Today our Sun has not changed; what has changed is our feelings. The sun in the sky has not changed at all. But there are dark clouds in the sky which block the sunlight. If we live in our feelings, our sky will always change, and there will always be the covering of the clouds. If we do not live in our feelings, there will be no change in our sky. We ought to live above the clouds of our feelings.

I have said that the intensity of joy decreases while the duration is shorter, and the intensity of dryness increases while the duration is longer. These are common phenomena of a Christian's experience; they are not accidental. The

experience of most Christians falls under this pattern. We can conclude that these things do not happen by accident. Since they do not happen by accident, there must be a hand behind everything. Whose hand? It must be God's hand. He causes our joy to become less intense and its duration to become shorter. He causes our dryness to become more intense and its duration to become longer. (We are merely referring to the experiences of ordinary Christians; we are not talking about the experiences of abnormal or outstanding Christians.)

Abnormal Christians have sinned and become fallen. Of course they have no joy. Outstanding Christians have denied themselves from the beginning in a specific way and pursued after God in a specific way. Every time they go through some special dealing, they experience special joy. Every time they see God working in a special way, they experience special joy. Outstanding Christians and abnormal Christians are exceptions. What we are talking about are the normal Christians.

## GOD'S PURPOSE

God's purpose for doing all these things are:

### A. That We Would Not Be for Ourselves

When we read the Bible during a period of excitement and joy, we have a great interest in reading. But are we reading the Bible because of our interest or because the Bible is the Word of God? Is the purpose of our prayer to seek God in His presence, or is the goal the joy we feel in our prayer? Are we praying at the expense of forsaking our duty, or are we praying for God's sake? If we do all these things for ourselves and to satisfy ourselves, then our aim is not God's glory. At the height of our excitement, we do not realize that we are doing these things for ourselves; we think that we are doing these things for God. We have to realize that the times we are most excited, when we seem to be living on the mountaintop, perhaps are the times when we are in our flesh the most! This is why God takes our joy away and puts us in a condition of dryness. How do we feel then? Our prayer, reading of the Word, and witnessing become dry. Under these conditions, God is teaching us a lesson; He makes us realize that our peak spiritual experiences are just something of ourselves. We may think that they are

the most spiritual experiences. Little do we realize that they are merely of the flesh. Toward the world, we expressed the part of our flesh that is evil. Now we try to express the part of our flesh that is good. God is testing us to see if we will keep praying, reading the Word, and testifying for Him during the times when the joy is gone and the dryness is present. God does not want the dryness to be too harsh for us, so He gives back the joy after a while. But He also does not want us to presume that we have reached the peak of our spirituality, so He takes the joy away again. God does not want us to be discouraged because of the dryness, so that we will not want to be Christians anymore. Therefore, He gives us a little joy again and recovers our taste to a certain degree.

When the dryness comes the second time, God will see if we have learned anything. We may think that we have done something wrong again. Actually, this is not God's intention. He is seeing if we are working according to our duty, or if we are working because of joy. Perhaps some people have to go through these experiences five or six times; perhaps others seven or eight times. Most of the time, the feelings alternate between joy and dryness. This cycle will continue until God arrives at His purpose when we realize that our desire for joy is for ourselves and not for God. This is the first reason God deals with us with joy and dryness.

## B. Disciplining the Power of the Will

When we are living a life full of joy on the mountaintop, do we feel that we must exert any effort? We do not feel this. We do not exert any effort in reading the Word, in praying, and in testifying. Suppose we are talkative. During the times when we are happy, when we feel that God is so near us that we can almost touch the Lord Jesus and God, we would rather lock ourselves in a room and not see anybody. At such times, we can easily overcome our natural weaknesses. Suppose we are quick-tempered and very easily lose our temper. During the times when we are excited, we can very easily forgive others. But when the joy is gone, we are like porcupines; others cannot touch us. If they do, we become angry. When we are excited, we do not feel any burden to our work or living. But when we are dry, we feel that all our living and our work are burdensome. At

such times it is an exercise of the will for us to read the Word, pray, or testify. At this time we feel that we have to exert much effort and that it is a duty to read the Bible, pray, and testify. Originally in testifying for the Lord, we could speak for five hours according to our excited feelings. But in our dryness we can find nothing to say. We speak about believing in the Lord and receiving eternal life in a restricted way. We have to take control of ourselves to speak something. When we are doing it at the height of our excitement, no effort is involved. But when we feel dry, we consider such work to be extremely burdensome, and we are not able to do it except with much determination. Let me ask: During which time do we experience actual spiritual dealings? It is when we are dry. When we are excited, we may not have any spiritual experience but only the results from the power of our emotion. When we are dry, we have to exercise our will, and our work is the result of our real person. The reason God gives us the dryness is so that we will learn to exercise our will during these dry times.

Suppose we are traveling by a sailboat from one place to another. The journey may take only a few hours. At the beginning of the journey, the wind blows in the right direction, and we hoist the sail. After a while the wind stops, but there are still a few hours to go. Should we take out our oars and row, or should we anchor and wait until a good wind comes before we set sail again? If we want to reach our destination sooner, we have to try our best to row. At such times we are exerting the true strength we have. This is only an illustration. When we are excited in our emotion, we are like a boat sailing with the wind; the boat does not have to exert any effort. We wish that there could be smooth sailing all year round. But if this were the case, both the captain and the sailors of a ship would become useless; they would only be able to sail in favorable winds. If the direction of the wind changed, they would not know what to do. I am afraid no one would want these sailors. When God gives us favorable wind, we praise Him. But He is also stirring us up to exercise the resurrection power given to us, without which we would not move when the joy is gone. God gives us the dryness, so that when joy and excitement are not present, we would exercise our own strength (the strength we received at the time of our regeneration). In this way, we will be able to pass through hindrances and contrary winds. The power

of resurrection is more clearly demonstrated in an environment filled with death.

God can grant us the help of emotions, but this is not His purpose. The help of emotions is merely the means by which God deals with us. His intention is to train our will, so that at the darkest hour, we could still exercise our will, and at the time when we feel dry, we could still exercise our will to read the Bible, pray, and testify. By doing this, the strength of our will will become stronger and stronger. If we only move by the power of the emotion, we will never advance. The reason God gives us feelings of joy is so that we would not turn back halfway in our Christian life. This is why the joy we receive from Him diminishes to a shorter time as we go on, and the dryness increases for a longer period of time. We will then exercise our will more, and our will will be greatly strengthened.

When we examine our past experiences, we see that our joy and dryness fluctuate. We also learn that during the times of joy, there is not much progress, while during the times of dryness, there is much more progress than when we were joyful. We observe that during the weeks of dryness we have advanced. We normally think that if every day were dry and suffering, we would fall. But when we compare this with our experience, we see that, on the contrary, it was when we felt weak that we advanced. When we are happy, there is not much progress. When the wind is strong and favorable, will it help us develop our muscles? No, our muscles become stronger and stronger during contrary winds. But please remember that for ordinary believers, there is no such thing as so-called up and down spiritual experiences. Our growth is absolutely dependent on the way we exercise our will. When we are dry and exercise our will to say, “I will advance,” we will advance. Unfortunately, the eyes of many believers are set only on the matter of joy; they think that this is the peak of spiritual experiences. Little do they realize that there is real spiritual progress only when they exercise their will to advance.

## C. Overcoming the Environment

If you can overcome the feeling of dryness, you can overcome your environment. The feeling of dryness is the most difficult to overcome. If you can

overcome this feeling, you surely will overcome your environment. The environment that is closest to a Christian is his emotion. Only by overcoming your emotion can you overcome other things. If you exercise your will to say, "I will read the Bible, I will pray, and I will testify," even though you are living a dry and parched life, you will find that you can overcome all kinds of environments, no matter how great they may be. I will say frankly that those who have not overcome their environment have not overcome their emotion. Those who would overcome their environment must first overcome their own emotions.

## D. Living by Faith

The duration of joy becomes shorter, while the duration of dryness becomes longer. The degree of joy is less, while the degree of dryness becomes more. The end result is that at a certain point, the two will meet. They will be like two streams merging into one; there will not be any distinction between them anymore. At the beginning, the joy becomes shorter and less intense, and the dryness becomes longer and more intense. But in the end, we cannot tell the difference between our joy and our dryness anymore. The reason God is leading us this way is to show us that there will eventually be no difference between the two. In other words, our joy and our dryness will be completely merged as one. Today God has no intention other than having the just live by faith. The just do not live by emotions. Therefore, no matter how we feel in our emotions, they will not bring us anything. Some believers have to go through God's training ten or twenty times until they do not exercise the strength of their emotion. God's training causes the dryness to increase more and the duration to become longer, in order to bring these ones to the point where they will live by faith.

If a man is not saved, we have nothing to say about him. But if he is saved, his experience will surely be one in which the times of dryness become longer, while the times of joy become shorter. His plain days will become more, and his joyous days will become less. God will point out to him what his goal is. Many Christians are living a dry life. Of all the days in a year, he may only experience three to five days of joy. Some may even go through three to five years in dryness, without any joy at all. If you have never been trained, you will see in that day that

your emotional strength is useless because the just live by faith.

Finally, if you live by faith, you will be able to live a joyful life in the driest hour and live the driest life in a joyful way. These words seems to be contradictory, but it is a reality in the spiritual life. God is leading you to live such a life by faith.

What is it to live by faith? It is what the three Hebrew men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego said to Nebuchadnezzar: "Our God…will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if He does not…we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). They were saying even if God did not save them, they still would not change. This is to live by faith. Christians today are strongly inclined toward a life in the emotion. Whenever God takes away their feeling of joy, they have nothing left. But God says that we should live by faith and not by feelings. In a few years, we will see that joy and dryness are the same, and neither joy nor dryness can affect us anymore. We will live the same in dryness or in joy. We do not have to live like those whose vessel is small and who are easily satisfied. When they are happy, they dance in their rooms. When they are dry, they wet the wall with tears. If we live by faith, we will not be affected by either of the two. This does not mean we are insensitive; we do have feelings of joy and dryness. But these outward feelings will not affect us inwardly. (This article covers the joy experienced by the outward man; it does not cover the joy that the inward man enjoys in the Lord. The latter is deep and unshakable. But this deep and unshakable joy can only be enjoyed by us after we can fully control the outward joy.)

## MESSAGE TWO

# LIVING BY THE LAW OF LIFE

## •Outline

- **•The Failure Of Living By The Will**
- **•The Liberation Of The Law Of Life**
- **•The Operation Of The Law Of Life**

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:1-2

Rom. 8:1-2 "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death."

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### THE FAILURE OF LIVING BY THE WILL

In the Christian life an important principle is to live not by one's own will but by the law of the Spirit of life. Many Christians, especially the young ones, do not see this, nor have they learned this lesson. The strength of their living is dependent upon their will and sustained by their will. They dare not put aside their will for even a moment, because they know that they will stumble and their Christian living will cease. The living of many Christians is dependent upon their will. Brothers and sisters, even if you have been a Christian for many years, do not think that you no longer live by your will. Many still maintain their Christian living by their will. Perhaps you still do not know the extent to which your will occupies your living and how much ground you have given your will.

The person in Romans 7 is one who lives by his will. The "evil" is his acts, and the "good" is his will. Therefore, he says, "For I do not do the good which I will; but the evil which I do not will, this I practice" (v. 19). All of his "good" is in his will. He can comfort himself by saying, "I want God; I want God's will; I want

to obey God's will." He can comfort himself also by saying, "I do not want to sin, I hate sin, and I want to serve Him; my sole purpose is to please God." He can say, "I want God's will and I want to please God; I want to do only things that are good, and I will glorify God's name." He may make many resolutions in his will, but he can do nothing more. There is a gross misconception in his thinking that whether or not a man can do good is dependent on whether or not he wills to do it. He does not see that doing good or evil is a matter of a law, not a matter of the will. He does not see that even if he has decided to do good, he will only experience failure and disappointment.

Quite a few brothers and sisters say, "I truly want God's will, I truly want to please God, and I am truly doing things according to God's law." A brother may be saying these things and at the same time wonder, "Why don't I receive what I seek before God, and why am I doing all the things that are contrary to my will?" Many brothers and sisters wonder and say, "Why can't I do what I will, and why do I instead do what I do not will?" Brothers and sisters, God wants to show you one thing in this situation: Your willpower cannot be the power of your living. Perhaps you still do not know how much you live by your will. Therefore, let us first take a look at how a man lives by his will.

A clear sign of living by the will is refusing to let go. Many people refuse to let go of themselves. This does not mean that Christians do not need restrictions. But many Christians hold on to themselves; they will not let go of themselves. It is an arduous task being a Christian who puts a very tight grip on himself, thinking that a Christian must be careful in the way he eats, the way he walks, the way he rides a streetcar, and the way he talks with his family. From morning to evening he keeps a firm hold on himself in order to behave like a Christian and in order to walk, eat, and travel properly. It seems that one can only be a Christian when he firmly holds on to himself and carefully bridles himself! He thinks that once he lets loose of his grip, he will fail. This is the situation of many Christians who live by their will. They firmly hold on to themselves in an effort to live like Christians; they force themselves to act like Christians. This is like trying to make a stream flow upward. Many Christians are trying to make water flow upstream; they force themselves to behave like someone they are not. Many

people compel themselves to be like someone else. They are not that kind of person, but they stubbornly try to be that kind of person. What do they do? They exercise their own will to put a tight hold on themselves. Many people strenuously try to be Christians this way. They make the strength of their will the power of their life.

We should remember that if we have to exert so much effort to be a Christian, we are surely not this kind of person. If we were this kind of person, we would not need to expend such a great effort. Oh, there are many things which are difficult to turn our eyes from! There are many things which are difficult to refuse, and there are many foods which are difficult to resist. How much effort do we need before we can control ourselves? How much effort do we need before we can refrain from speaking improperly? How much effort do we need before we can refrain from going places that we should not go? There are things that we naturally like to do, and we spontaneously do them. If we want to stop, we must force ourselves not to do them. For example, if you were raised in Shanghai, do you need to say, "I am determined to speak Shanghainese; I must speak Shanghainese; I will speak Shanghainese. I need to be careful not to speak the Shantung dialect or the Cantonese dialect"? No, you do not need to will yourself to do this, because you are a Shanghainese, and you will naturally speak Shanghainese. But if you are not a Shanghainese and you want to speak Shanghainese, you need to exert effort to speak it.

To live by the will is to try to be a certain type of person when you are not. When you try to force yourself to be a certain type of person, the only thing you can do is exercise the will. We are land creatures, and it is natural for us to live on land; if we want to live in water, we must exercise our will.

There are two kinds of people who try to be Christians according to their willpower. First, there are those who have not been regenerated; they have not been born of God and have never received God's life. Therefore, they must exert considerable effort to compel themselves to be Christians. Many so-called Christians are actually not Christians at all; they are merely trying to be Christians. Since they want to be Christians, they sing a few hymns because other Christians sing hymns, and they say a few "hallelujahs" because others say

hallelujah. But whether singing hymns or saying hallelujahs, they do it all with considerable unease. When other Christians speak, it is real, but when they speak, they do not feel a thing. People who are like this are pretending to be Christians; therefore, it is very unnatural for them. Second, there are those who are born again and who are God's children, but who do not believe in the life that God has given them. They have the life, but they do not live by this life. Their salvation experience is unclear; their regeneration experience is also not clear. They did not hear the complete gospel, and they have not fully believed in God's Word. They fail often and are weak to the uttermost. They cannot believe that the life within them can swallow up death. They are accustomed to sin and have failed constantly; therefore, they concede that no other experience is possible. They consider themselves as standard Christians. Thank God, they are absolutely wrong.

Brothers and sisters, just because you have not experienced the mighty power of God's life, do not say that the life that God has given you is as weak and powerless as you are. Thank God that His life comes with great power! As long as a man dares to believe in God's Word, God's life will manifest its mighty power in him. God's life cannot manifest its mighty power in many people because they either do not have the life or they have not fully believed. When one genuinely believes, he will testify that God's Word is fully trustworthy.

## THE LIBERATION OF THE LAW OF LIFE

Paul cried, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?", and one day he experienced deliverance. Then he said, "For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2). This is not a new grace but a new revelation; it is not a new gift but a new vision; it is not receiving something new from God's hand but discovering something that God has already given. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed us! According to the Greek "freed" is in the past tense; it is already "freed." The law of the Spirit of life has freed us! The verse does not say, "going to free," "will soon free," "can free," or "intends to free," but "has freed." The law of the Spirit of life has already freed us; therefore, we are delivered from the law of

sin and of death.

We need to realize that the experience and the acts in Romans 7 are unnecessary. Hallelujah! There is no need to go through the experience in Romans 7, and there is no need to act according to Romans 7. The exercise of the will in Romans 7 is even more unnecessary. Suppose your surname is Wang. You have had the surname for decades, and every day your surname continues to be Wang. You do not have to exercise your will to call yourself Wang or resolve to be surnamed Wang, because your surname is Wang. If you are a Wang, you do not need to desire to be called Wang. If this is your desire, it means that you are not a Wang. Here you should see one thing: If you are in the Lord, the Lord will use a law—the law of the Spirit of life—to free you from another law. Once you see this, you will immediately say, "Thank the Lord! Praise the Lord! I do not need to exercise my will anymore. If I release my grip, I will not fall to the ground; I will fall into another law." Thank the Lord, this is a fact. All experienced Christians understand the meaning of these words.

Many Christians fear that if they let go or if they do not exercise their will to act like Christians, things will become unpleasant. Many Christians say, "I cannot let go of myself. If I let go of myself, things will be unpleasant. Even though I am keeping a tight grip on myself, I still cannot speak or walk properly; I am still weak and failing. What would happen to me if I let go?" Many Christians are obsessed with this fear and dare not release their grip. But God's Word is very clear! If we believe in what God has already given us and release our grip, we will not fall to the ground; rather we will fall into a new law.

May God open our eyes to see that no one can resist the law of sin by his will; nor can anyone resist the law of sin by willing to do good. No one can do the will of God or resist the law of sin and of death by his own will. The will can never contend with the law of sin and of death! Thank and praise God! There is another new law that can contend with the law of sin and of death. Thank and praise God! This is not only a new life; this is also a new law.

Oh, what a joy that this life is a law! God has given us not only the Holy Spirit but also the law of the Holy Spirit. God has given us not only life but also the law of life. In the past we were dead in our offenses and sins; we had not only sin and

death but also the law of sin and of death. We did not have to resolve or force ourselves to sin. Rather, there was a law that compelled us to sin. If God had only given us a life and nothing else, it would seem reasonable to be good sometimes and bad at other times. But God has given us a life-law; it remains the same all the time, and it never changes. Just as sin and death are a constant law that does not allow exceptions, the life that the Lord has given us is also a constant law that does not allow exceptions. There is a law of life, not just a life. This is why we can release our grip. Because we have seen that this is a law, we can release our grip. Because we have seen that there is a treasure laid in us, no glory goes to us; all glory goes to the Lord who raises the dead. If we have seen this, we will praise God.

Brothers and sisters, if we live by another law, a new law, we will experience a wonderful thing—we will not feel the existence of the old law anymore. Remember the words of the Scripture which say, "For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." It does not say that the law of sin and of death has been annihilated or abolished; rather, it says that we are freed from it. The law of sin and of death still exists, but we are no longer living under its power. We are living under another law.

Brothers and sisters, if you want to know what the law of life is, simply lift up your eyes and look at the birds in the air. How do they fly? They fly because their life has a law of flying. They have a life, and in their life there is a law. This law enables them to fly. Their life has a law which enables them to overcome the force of gravity and fly in the air. If there is a heavy snowfall one day and a crow or sparrow falls dead in your courtyard, you will see how great the force of gravity is. Gravity draws it to the earth. The force of gravity is always present. The bird has life, and this life has a law which overcomes the force of gravity and enables it to fly in the air. When the life is gone, the law of life is also gone, and the law of gravity overcomes it. Thank the Lord! God has indeed given us grace and dispensed a new life as well as a new law to us. This renders the law of sin and of death of none effect. It is not destroyed; but it is rendered of none effect. God did not eradicate the force of "gravity"; rather, He gave us another law of life, so that the "birds" can now overcome the law of "gravity."

We know that when we are strong physically, we do not feel the law of gravity. We only feel the law of gravity when we are weak. When we are weak, even walking, standing, or sitting makes us tired. We are relieved only when we lie down. Those who are the weakest feel the force of gravity the most. Thank God, our life is still with us today. This is why we do not feel the force of gravity so much. Someday when our life is nearing its end, the force of gravity will become stronger for us. If you have ever had to lift a corpse, you know how great the force of gravity is. You cannot make a corpse stand up straight; once you let go, the corpse will fall.

Some have been Christians for twenty or thirty years, yet they still do not know that sin and death are a law and that life is also a law. You need to know that God's way of salvation has nothing to do with resolving to be someone you are not. There is a life in you that delivers you from the law of sin and of death. God has no intention that you will, hope, desire, or purpose to be a certain kind of Christian. If you try to do it by your own will, it will seem as if you are hung up in midair; the endeavor will be quite strenuous. If you have ever seen a talkative Christian, you know how difficult it is for him to try to talk less. He knows that he should not speak so much, yet he cannot refrain from speaking. It is very difficult for him to stop speaking. Have you ever seen a quick-tempered Christian? It is really hard to ask him to be patient. If he tries to practice patience, sooner or later he will become sick from repression. But thank God! The way of salvation is not to be someone you are not; rather, it is living out a new law of life from within. When this law is lived out from within, sin will appear to be nonexistent and annihilated, and the power of death will seemingly disappear. If you are healthy, you will not feel the force of gravity when you are walking. You can lift up your feet because there is a greater power in you. This is the meaning of the law of life.

## THE OPERATION OF THE LAW OF LIFE

On the practical side, we need to learn to know how the law of the Spirit of life operates within us.

The Lord uses the law of the Spirit of life to deliver us from the law of sin

and of death. He uses one law to overcome another law, and He uses today's law to overcome yesterday's law. How does this law manifest itself in a Christian? How can we detect the law of the Spirit of life in a Christian? We can examine several aspects.

We can consider first the aspect of knowledge. The law of the Spirit of life will manifest itself in God's children in the way of knowledge. There should not be any ignorant Christians. All Christians (referring to genuine Christians) should have proper knowledge. Whatever we encounter, the Spirit of life in us will give us knowledge concerning it. No Christian can say that he does not know. Every Christian has to admit that the Lord has spoken already. At the most we can say that we have not heard the Lord's speaking; however, we cannot say that the Lord has not spoken. Can we really say that we do not know the Lord's mind? Can we say that we do not know whether or not we can do a certain thing? We can never say this. We may be a weak believer, having just believed in the Lord Jesus and just received life into us. Yet as soon as we believe in the Lord and as soon as the Spirit of life dwells in us, the law will be instructing us within. Many servants of the Lord have met many of God's children in various places, and they have all come to the conclusion that there is not a child of God who does not know His will. There are no ignorant children; there are only disobedient children. When we talk too much, do we not feel something restraining us within? Sometimes when we open our mouth to speak certain things, is there not something within telling us to stop? Do we not have a feeling that we should stop? Brothers and sisters, this life is in us, and it is always manifested through its law.

It is strange that some of God's children think that they have received the life of God but have not received the law of this life. It would be strange for a man to have life without having the law of that life. We need to realize that both the life and the law of life are linked together. Where there is life, there is also the law of life. Life is inseparable from the law of life. Where there is life, there is also the law of life. If we have God's life, whenever we need knowledge, we will find it within. This is true not only with big matters but also with very small matters, matters that we feel are insignificant. Sometimes when we go to someone's house, our steps may be a little too heavy as we are walking up the stairs. A voice

within may say, “This is not right.” Walking upstairs is not a big thing, but when the sound of our footsteps becomes a little too heavy, our inner being will tell us that this is not right. Sometimes we want to take a book from someone else’s bookshelf and read it, but inwardly a voice says, “This is not right because the book does not belong to you. You have not asked, and you have not been given permission. How can you take it and read it?”

Brothers and sisters, the law of life is in us; indeed, it is in us. The problem is that many are not willing to walk according to this law. If a person lives by this life, his feeling will become very sensitive. We have a law within, and this law will tell us that we cannot trespass against others. It will tell us that we cannot be so loud, that our laughter is not proper, or that our motive in saying a word is wrong. We may encounter tens of thousands of things, but the law within will tell us what we should do in each case. Even if a person is not refined or educated, the law of life will be in him as long as he has the Lord’s life. The law of life will give him knowledge, and through this knowledge he will express God in his living.

Why do some Christians always stand in the wrong place and remain unaware of it? Why do some of them always do wrong things and remain ignorant of them? It is not because they do not have life or the law of life, but because they have not learned to follow the law of life within.

This law also manifests itself in love. Sometimes you feel that a certain brother is really troublesome and that you cannot settle things with him. You need to exert much effort to love him. You may say, “I will love him; I intend to love him. I will pray to the Lord to enable me to love him.” But when you are with him, you simply cannot love him. It seems as if you can only nod at him. You may think, “I am a Christian, and I must speak a few words with him or else my conscience will not be at peace.” Please remember that this is an act of your will. You are doing it by your will; you are not doing it out of love. If you are a Christian, you do not need to will to love others. Many times even prayer is not necessary, because there is a law within you. When you see such a brother, you know that you can never get along with him, you know that he is very troublesome, and you know that his very presence will irritate you. However,

when you stand in front of him, you will spontaneously feel that it is wrong to hate him. Your inward being will not say "amen" to hating him. Instead, something within will love him and tell you, "He belongs to the Lord; he is your brother; he is the Lord's beloved." There is such a feeling within you. There is such a speaking within you. Brothers and sisters, when you are in this kind of situation, you do not need to do anything before the Lord; you do not even need to pray. All you have to do is lift up your head and say to the Lord, "I cannot do it! You can do it." You do not need to exert any effort. You only need to say, "Lord, since You say that he is lovable, I will love him."

The biggest failure of many Christians at this point is exercising their will. When you feel that a brother is not lovable, you hastily exercise your will to treat him well. Whenever you have a problem, you exercise your will immediately to try to solve this problem. When you meet a person whom you cannot love, you immediately force yourself to love him. Yet in spite of your great effort, you still cannot love him. At such times, you should stop and say to the Lord, "I do not have any strength to love him. Lord, I know that there is a life in me, and this life loves him." Simply remain in His presence. There is no need to think or ask. All you have to do is say, "Lord, I want to live fully by the law of life." You do not need to exert any effort at all, because you believe that there is a law within you, a law that loves the brothers. This gives you the boldness to see him and talk to him. The strange thing is that when you do this, you will unconsciously (note the word unconsciously) converse with him. You will unconsciously love him and unconsciously treat him like a brother. You will talk with him and fellowship with him. Later, even you will be surprised, saying, "I did not do anything. Yet the Lord brought me through beyond my comprehension." Brothers and sisters, this is the law of life; it enables you to unconsciously overcome, without any need of your willpower.

If we know God, we will realize that the law of the Spirit of life, like the law of sin and of death, is spontaneous. Hallelujah! It is spontaneous. Sinning requires no exercise of the will; the law of sin does it for us. Neither do we need to set our will to do good; it is the law of the Spirit of life that does it for us. Lying, coveting, and losing one's temper require no exercise of the will. There is a law

that causes one to lie, covet, and lose his temper. Holiness, righteousness, love, and purity also require no effort of the will; there is a law in us that produces all of these things. The exercise of the will is man's work, not the Lord's work. Herein lies the basic difference. The Lord has given us a law, and this law is spontaneous.

Many times you realize that you talk too much, speaking words that should not be spoken. You even feel sick and do not understand why you always talk so much. In the course of contact with other people, you worry and say, "I am a Christian. I need to glorify the Lord's name. I should not talk so much." Then what do you do? You exercise your will, and make resolutions, saying, "Today I will be careful not to speak too much." You hold yourself back for an hour or two. You feel no freedom at all, and the longer you hold back, the more unbearable it becomes. You utter countless prayers, saying, "Lord, I should not be talkative. If I continue to be talkative, I will not behave like a Christian. Lord! Have mercy on me. Please protect me! Please watch over me!" However, your will is useless when it comes to controlling your speaking. The Lord lives in you, and the Lord's life is in you. This life has a law, and when this law is manifested in you, there is no need to worry at all. You can say to the Lord, "I am going to So-and-so's house. I will no longer make any resolution. I cannot control my mouth. I know what kind of person I am; I know that I talk too much. But Lord, I believe; I deeply believe that the law of the Spirit of life which You have given me has freed me and delivered me from that law of talking too much."

This does not mean that when you go to that house you must continue to consciously say, "I believe the Lord's Word." If you do, you are exercising your will once again. If you really believe, you will forget it, set it aside, and go in a spontaneous way without even thinking about it. The strange thing is that when you do not exercise your will to hold yourself back and when you believe in the Lord's Word, you will not need to make any resolution, worry, or even think about it. Even when the thought of talking too much comes to your mind, it will not bother you any longer. You will be able to sit for two or three hours or even stay for two or three days without feeling troubled. When you come home and think about it, you will say, "I was not concerned and not paying attention to the

matter. I did not have to consciously keep myself from talking too much. Why did I not talk so much?" Brothers and sisters, this is the operation of the law of life; it frees you from your incessant talking. This is the Christian life. It is not the work of the will; it is a law. This law is a life; it is spontaneous. The Christian life is a spontaneous life. The law of life in you, like the law of sin and of death, is a law. Just as the law of sin and of death is a very spontaneous law, the law of life that you have received is spontaneous as well.

O brothers and sisters, we can say much more about this matter. We can relate innumerable experiences to prove this point. Our victory is not a victory of the will but a victory of the law of life. When we need knowledge, there is a law in us that continually gives us knowledge of what is right and wrong. When we are faced with a task, there is strength within us which carries us through in a very spontaneous way. In all of our living, we see the effects of this law. Many Christians live in too much pretension and performance. Many Christians "act out" their Christian life. Their daily life is nothing but a performance. Oh, the moment we see the law of life, the first thing we will do is drop our own work! Many people use spiritual terms and adopt spiritual behavior, yet they are the ones who are doing these things. Once a person sees the law of life, the first thing he will do is drop his own work.

Performance is the most damaging thing to the Christian life. Many Christians who perform think that the better they perform, the better Christian they will be. The outward expressions of spirituality of many Christians are artificial; they are the work of the will. When we see the law of the Spirit of life, we will cease all of our outward performance. All of our expressions will be spontaneous; all of our words will be spontaneous; all of our prayers and our living will be spontaneous. With this law in us, how spontaneous our living will be! We will not need to expend any effort; our will will not be required to purpose anything; we will live very spontaneously. After going through a day this way, we will say when we lie down at night, "Today I did not try to be a Christian, yet I lived as a Christian. Today I did not try to do anything, yet the Lord brought me through." Brothers and sisters, when you put aside your will, you will not be any worse than you are today. When you throw aside the crutch of your will, you

will not fall. On the contrary, you will become very spontaneous. Formerly, you prayed and asked for this or that from the Lord, just as Jacob did when he wrestled with God. But when you walk before God, you will see that you have become a soft person in His hand. You will not have to pretend to be soft; you are soft already. You will live a simple Christian life, yet throughout your life the Lord's name will be glorified. The Lord has given you life. It is a life that operates in you, a life that speaks in you. There is no need for your own striving or working.

In conclusion, let us return to Romans 8:1-2: "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." God uses the first law to deliver us from the second law; God uses a new law to save us from the old law. I would like to ask you a few questions. How much do you know of this new law? Is your Christian life governed by your will or by the manifestation of this new law in you? Are you living your Christian life, or is there a spontaneous law, a spontaneous power of life in you that directs you to live the Christian life in a spontaneous way? Brothers and sisters, you can boast about your knowledge; you can boast about your power; you can boast about your work; you can boast about your sacrifice; and you can boast about your intelligence. You can be proud of all these things, but if you do not have this law, you have nothing to be proud of, because you have not learned the first lesson of the Christian life.

The first lesson in the Christian life is that the Christian life is very spontaneous. The life in Romans 8 does not require any effort; everything is spontaneous in this life. Oh, may the Lord grant us grace so that we may truly say to Him, "I am willing to live in Your presence. I believe Your Word. I believe that I received the law of life when I was born again. This law is greater than the law of sin and of death. With the law of sin and of death, I sin spontaneously. With this law, I trust You spontaneously, serve You spontaneously, and glorify and praise Your name spontaneously!"

# MESSAGE THREE

## GOD SPEAKING THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENT

## •Outline

### •One—Three

## •Scripture Reading: Gen. 35:1-8, 34:30

Gen. 35:1-8 "And God said to Jacob, Rise up, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau. Then Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments. And let us rise up and go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem. And as they journeyed, the terror of God was upon the cities that were around them, so they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And he built an altar there and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; so its name was called Allon-bacuth."

34:30 "And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble upon me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I am few in number, and they will gather themselves together against me and strike me; and I will be destroyed, I and my house."

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## ONE

No matter how much spiritual advancement a man has achieved, he often needs the speaking from the environment. This kind of speaking can be found in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. In reading church history and in considering the experience of the Lord's followers, we do not know of one person who did not need the speaking of the environment at all. Everyone needs the environment to remind him and speak to him. Many examples point to the fact that the more spiritual a person is in the eyes of the Lord, the more he allows his environment to speak to him, and the deeper a person is in following the Lord, the more he allows his environment to remind him and speak to him. Those who have problems with the Lord are either easily affected by the environment or insensitive to God's speaking through the environment.

Brothers and sisters, the precious thing about a man who has normal fellowship with God is that he will not be influenced by the environment, yet at the same time, he will allow the environment to speak to him. If a man is not proper with the Lord and if he is not in fellowship with the Lord, a very small thing in the environment will affect him; however, at the same time, even a great thing in the environment will not cause his ear to be attuned to the Lord's voice or speaking. I present this principle, and you can test yourself accordingly. If you can be affected by your environment yet not hear its speaking, it proves that you are no longer in fellowship with the Lord and that you have become fallen. No environment should affect you, yet every environment should speak to you.

If an environment is placed before us, there is a speaking behind it. Whenever God puts an environment around us, He is speaking to us through the environment. Hidden within the environment is God's speaking to us. When I say "us," I mean every one of us. The environment that we face every day has a word for each of us Christians. Brothers and sisters, if we are living under God's light, we will see that He puts us in an environment for His way's sake on earth. In order to gain something from His children, God puts them in an environment. We should not consider things in a superficial way; we have to see the Lord's hand behind the veil. Once we see that the Lord is arranging the environment, we will be filled with a sense of sweetness. Although we cannot say that every

environment is initiated by the throne, we can say that each one is according to the design of the throne. There is a throne in heaven, and our Lord resurrected and ascended to sit on that throne; all things are under His feet. God speaks to His children through the environment He has arranged. We should receive His speaking through the environment. If we are affected by the environment but not taught by it, we have a problem with the Lord; there is something wrong between us and Him.

## TWO

Let us consider the story of Jacob. Everyone agrees that the most profound experience in Jacob's life was his wrestling with the Lord at Peniel. As a result of that wrestling, his name was changed. Even though Jacob went through a profound experience at Peniel, God still had to raise up circumstances when He spoke to him again. In Genesis 34 Jacob's daughter suffered a tragedy, and his sons caused a great deal of trouble. When such an environment arose, God spoke to Jacob in Genesis 35. Some may argue that God spoke to Jacob directly in Genesis 35 rather than speaking to him through the environment. Yet one must first read Genesis 34. God first put Jacob into the environment of chapter thirty-four before He spoke to him in chapter thirty-five. God said, "Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother" (v. 1). Brothers and sisters, God reminded Jacob of an old story. Many years earlier Jacob had run away to his uncle Laban's home out of fear that his brother Esau would kill him. When he reached Bethel the sun had set. He lodged there and fell asleep on a rock. God appeared to him in his dream, and when he awoke, he vowed, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (28:20-22). He made a vow to the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, did you not make a vow to the Lord when you were saved? Although you may have vowed like Jacob, bargaining with God while you

vowed, your heart was still proper. When you began on this path, your heart toward the Lord was proper. Jacob made a vow to the Lord. His condition is a picture of our condition. The morning after Jacob made his vow, he left everything behind. During the entire time he stayed in the east, he maneuvered to protect himself. Although he prayed that God would protect him and give him food and raiment, he trusted in himself the whole time. He is a perfect reflection of us. He looked to God, yet he also exercised his own maneuvering hand. When he left Laban, he had to bow his head and acknowledge God's mercy on him. If it had been left to Jacob, he could not have prevailed over Laban! Jacob was crafty, but God had prepared Laban who was craftier. Jacob was dealt with for twenty years. Finally God took him out of Laban's hand, and Jacob had to acknowledge God's care. However, he had forgotten his earlier vow to the Lord. When he came back from Padan-aram, he settled in Shechem.

Brothers and sisters, you may think that Jacob should have been able to settle comfortably in Shechem since he had suffered so many dealings, passed through so many experiences, endured so many hardships, and acquired so many possessions. But this was not the case. The God whom he served would not allow him to settle down in peace. Jacob's heart was satisfied, but God's heart was not satisfied. God had given Jacob what he desired, but Jacob had not given God what He deserved. God still had to speak to him; He still had to speak to him through his environment. God knew that unless He dealt with Jacob through his environment, he would not be able to hear His voice.

Brothers and sisters, do not think that your spiritual experience is so deep that you can go by the inner voice alone. No, God often has to speak through the environment. You may encounter great things or small things, and they may have a little impact or a severe impact on you, but God has to raise up environments in order to speak to you. No one can be so spiritual that he no longer needs the speaking of the environment. God must create an environment around a believer and speak to him through that environment. Jacob was spiritual after Peniel. He was no longer Jacob; he had become Israel. He had passed through many trials and dealings and had even been touched by God in a thorough way. He was truly spiritual. Yet even after arriving at such a state, God had to raise up the

environment to speak to him. He wanted to settle down in Shechem, but God would not allow it. The Bible does not say whether or not he realized this within himself. He may have seen something, but it did not remain in him for a long time. We have no idea whether he was conscious of his condition. We only know that God raised up the environment to speak to Jacob. What was the circumstance? His daughter suffered a tragedy, his sons caused him a great deal of trouble, and he was no longer able to keep his peace. When confronted with these circumstances, Jacob did not realize that God was trying to speak through the environment. He put the blame on his sons and became afraid. At this juncture God spoke to him: "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Brothers and sisters, the environment which Jacob encountered prepared him to receive God's speaking. Jacob thought that he had everything he needed and that he could live in peace. But God raised up the environment so that he could no longer be peacefully settled. God was saying, "I have given you what you asked for at the beginning. Now you should honor your vow." God raised up this environment. He spoke to Jacob through the environment. After Jacob heard this speaking, he offered himself and his household to the Lord once more and cleansed himself and his household.

## THREE

Brothers and sisters, when God shook up Jacob, what was found? Idols were found in Jacob's house! Such a spiritual person, one who knew God very much, had not only forgotten his vow, but also had hidden idols in his house! We still have idols hidden in us, and the inner voice is not enough to shake them out. It takes outward circumstances to shake them out! Brothers and sisters, in order to return to Bethel, all these things must be surrendered! If you ignore your first vow and allow these things to remain in your house while claiming to obey the inner leading and inner voice, God will raise up circumstances that will shake you so that the idols in your house will be shaken out. He can even shake out the golden earrings and other improper objects in your house. In our fellowship

with the Lord, we often are not sensitive to His rebukes and our mistakes. God has to raise up an environment to shake us up. Then we will realize that there are still hidden idols that we have not yet given up. We should not trust ourselves and say, "As long as I have the peace within, I am all right." We do need to inwardly hearken to the inner voice, but brothers and sisters, we must realize how deeply we have fallen, how difficult it is for us to stand, and how easy it is for us to fall. At times our inner feelings are not that sensitive, and the inner admonition is not that strong. Therefore, we still need God to speak to us through the environment.

Brothers and sisters, we may have been Christians for many years. As far as our experiences are concerned, we may have made considerable progress since our first time in Bethel. But as far as our consecration goes, we may have lost our initial consecration at Bethel. God is happy to see that we have some experiences and to work Himself into us through these experiences, but He is even happier to see us sustaining our initial fresh consecration. Brothers and sisters, no matter how mature you are, you still have to return to Bethel. From Jacob's experience, we can see that God had worked much into him, and much of His element had been deposited into him. Yet Jacob had lost his initial vow of consecration. This is why God had to speak to him through the environment. Jacob was already very spiritual, yet God still had to speak to him through the environment.

Brothers and sisters, it is not enough to just have the inner voice. Sometimes we still need the speaking of the outward environment. We may want to settle down comfortably in Shechem, but God will raise up the environment so that we cannot settle down comfortably. He wants us to fulfill our first consecration; He wants us to return to Bethel. We may have forgotten our vow, but God has not forgotten it. We may not have honored our consecration, but God honors it. Brothers and sisters, consecration exposes our shortcomings. Whenever we turn back to our initial consecration, we find many unnecessary things within us, and we find that we have backslidden.

Brothers and sisters, we should not think that we are that spiritual and that we have no problems at all. Go and pray, perhaps saying, "Lord, seven years ago I was revived for the first time. I prayed that night and consecrated everything on

the altar; I offered up everything to you. Today I will offer up everything to you again." Once we return to our first vow, we will find that we have many unnecessary things. We will realize that we have fallen away from our initial consecration. We may be more experienced than before and we may boast that we know God more and that we are more mature, but when we turn back to our initial consecration, we will see we have fallen and that we have idols and golden earrings in spite of our maturity. There are many things that need to be buried. We need to bury the idols and the earrings under the oak tree in Shechem before we can return to Bethel to serve the Lord. Brothers and sisters, Jacob was mature, yet he did not return to Bethel until God raised up the environment and spoke to him.

We should consider whether God's voice is in our environment calling us back to Bethel. We have come to where we are, and all our needs have been met. We would like to settle down, but will God let us settle down? We have our rest, but does God have His rest? Has He gained what we vowed to Him at Bethel? God has to raise up the environment to turn some brothers and sisters back to Bethel, that is, to their first vow. If we have given up our first vow, God will order an environment to stir us up, to make us restless, and to speak to our inner being. The environment that God has ordered for us will not affect us without also speaking something to us.

Brothers and sisters, even a man as spiritual as Jacob could not hear God's speaking except through the environment. We should never presume that everything is fine as long as we feel peaceful inside. Sometimes our feelings of peace are a kind of self-deception. We may say that our heart is at peace, but have we received more of the Lord's correction recently? Have we been reminded by Him? How much has God gained in us? How much has He stripped from us? Brothers and sisters, we must remember that we should have the Lord's speaking in our environment. We should hear God's voice through the environment and return to Bethel, to our initial vow of consecration so that God can be satisfied.

## MESSAGE FOUR

# PRAYING ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIRE

**•Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:14; Psa. 119:147-148; Dan. 9—10**

1 John 5:14 "And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

Psa. 119:147-148 "I anticipated the dawn and cried out; / I hoped in Your words. My eyes anticipated the night watches, / That I might muse upon Your word."

Dan. 9 "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, a Median descendant who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans, In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by means of the Scriptures the number of the years, which came as the word of Jehovah to Jeremiah the prophet, for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, that is, seventy years. So I set my face toward the Lord God to seek Him in prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed to Jehovah my God and confessed; and I said, Ah, Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments, We have sinned and have committed iniquity, and we have acted wickedly and rebelled, to the point of even turning away from Your commandments and from Your judgments. And we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our chief men, and our fathers, as well as to all the people of the land. To You, Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us, shamefacedness, as it is this day, that is, to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far off in all the lands to which You have driven them because of their trespass by which they have trespassed against You. O Jehovah, to us belongs shamefacedness, to our kings, our chief men, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong

compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; And we have not obeyed the voice of Jehovah our God, to walk in His instruction, which He set before us through the hand of His servants the prophets. Indeed, all Israel has transgressed Your law, to the point of even turning away so as not to obey Your voice; thus the curse has been poured out upon us, the very oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. And He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us great ill; for under all heaven there has not been done anything like that which has been done in Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this ill has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of Jehovah our God by turning from our iniquities and attending to Your truth. Therefore Jehovah has been vigilant with the ill and has brought it upon us, for Jehovah our God is righteous in all the deeds that He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made for Yourself a name, as it is this day, we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all the manifestations of Your righteousness, may Your anger and Your wrath be turned away, I pray, from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us. And now hear, O our God, the prayer of Your servant and his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary that has been desolated, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You based upon any righteous doings that we have done, but based upon Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! Do not delay, for Your own sake, O my God; for Your city and Your people are called by Your own name. And while I was still speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my supplication before Jehovah my God for the holy mountain of my God, Even while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, reached me in my utter exhaustion about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me and

talked with me and said, Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command went forth, and I have come to tell you, for you are preciousness itself. Therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are apportioned for your people and for your holy city, to close the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make propitiation for iniquity, and to bring in the righteousness of the ages, and to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint the Holy of Holies. Know therefore and comprehend: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with street and trench, even in distressful times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing; and the people of the prince who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end of it will be with a flood, and even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week; and in the middle of the week he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease and will replace the sacrifice and the oblation with abominations of the desolator, even until the complete destruction that has been determined is poured out upon the desolator."

Dan. 10 "In the third year of Cyrus the king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the word was true and concerning a great distress. And he understood the word and had an understanding of the vision. In those days I, Daniel, had been mourning for three full weeks. I ate no desirable food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, until the three full weeks were completed. And on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the great river, that is, the Hiddekel, I lifted up my eyes and I looked, and there was a certain man, clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with the fine gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, His face like the appearance of lightning, His eyes like torches of fire, His arms and His feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of His words like the sound of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; instead, a great dread fell on them, and they fled to hide themselves. Thus I was left alone and I saw this great vision; and no strength was

left in me, but my color turned deathly pale; and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of His words; and when I heard the sound of His words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. And at that moment a hand touched me and sent me trembling on my knees and the palms of my hands. And he said to me, Daniel, man of preciousness, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand in your place, for I have now been sent to you. And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. And he said to me, Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand this matter and to afflict yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days; but now Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I remained there alone with the kings of Persia. Thus I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the last days, yet the vision pertains to something many days from now. And when he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face to the ground and was dumb. And at that moment one who resembled the sons of men touched my lips; and I opened my mouth and spoke, and I said to him who stood before me, Sir, because of the vision my anguish has turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can such a servant of my lord speak with such as my lord? For as for me, just now there is no strength in me, nor has there been breath left in me. Then the one who was in appearance like a man touched me again and strengthened me; And he said, Do not be afraid, man of preciousness. Peace to you. Be strong, yes, be strong. And when he spoke to me, I received strength and said, Speak, sir, for you have strengthened me. Then he said, Do you know why I have come to you? And now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia; so I go forth, and the prince of Javan is now about to come. However I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who holds strongly with me against these ones except Michael your prince."

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In Daniel 9 we should pay attention to two things concerning Daniel's prayer. First, a genuine man of prayer is not only one who comes before God continually

but also one whose desires are fully blended into God's desires. In other words, his thoughts are fully one with God's thoughts. This is a very important principle in prayer.

Some prayers originate from our needs. Sometimes God answers these prayers, but He does not gain anything through these prayers. Psalm 106:15 says, "And He gave them their request,/But He sent leanness into their soul." What does this mean? This means that in the wilderness the Israelites prayed to God for the satisfaction of their lust, and God answered their prayer. He gave them what they wanted, yet they became weak before His eyes. Brothers and sisters, sometimes God answers our prayers to satisfy our needs. Yet these prayers do not satisfy God's desire. These prayers are of little worth.

There is another kind of prayer—one that originates from God's needs. It comes from God and is initiated by God. This kind of prayer is valuable. Those who have this kind of prayer must be in God's presence continually, and their desires and thoughts must be mingled with God's desires and thoughts. Because these ones live in God's presence continually, He shows them and touches them with His desires and thoughts. These desires and thoughts become the praying ones' desires, which in turn become their prayer.

We must learn to pray this kind of prayer. Although we are childish and weak, we must still come into His presence and allow His Spirit to mingle our desires with His desires and to lead our thoughts into His thoughts so that we can touch and participate in His desires and thoughts. If we do this, we will understand something of God's way and demands on man. Brothers and sisters, the more we enter into God's desires and thoughts, the more we will understand these desires and thoughts. Eventually, His desire will become our prayer. These prayers are precious. Daniel joined himself to God's thoughts; he touched God's desire and will, and they became the desires of Daniel's heart. God's desires were imprinted in Daniel and became Daniel's desires. When Daniel prayed according to these desires, crying out or groaning because of these desires, they became God's desires.

We must have this kind of prayer, a prayer that touches God's heart. More words are not needed, only more of a touching of His desires is needed. We

should allow God's Spirit to lead us into His heart. We should spend time to learn this lesson. When we first begin to pray in this way, there is no need to say or consider much. Our heart should be calm and undisturbed. We can bring the things we have encountered into God's presence and consider them, or we can forget about these things and simply meditate on God's Word. We can remain in His presence, touching God in our spirit and allowing God to touch us in the spirit. Actually, we do not have to go to God to touch Him; we can simply wait on Him. While we wait on Him in this way, something will come to our attention, and we will gain something. Then we will touch God's desire. The greatest wisdom comes from this kind of waiting. In this way our desires are mingled with God's desires, and our thoughts are one with God's thoughts. Based on this, we can pray to God.

When we bring our desires and thoughts to God, He will imprint His desires and thoughts into us to the extent that they become our desires and thoughts. These prayers are the most precious of all prayers; they are the most weighty prayers. Brothers and sisters, we have to remember the Lord's Word, which tells us to pray this way: "Our Father who is in the heavens, Your name be sanctified; Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:9-10). We should not just memorize these three sentences. They should afford God's Spirit the opportunity to bring our thoughts to God so that His desires and thoughts can be imprinted in us and become our desires and thoughts. When that happens, the prayers that we utter will be valuable.

The same thing can result in two different kinds of prayers. One kind of prayer originates from our own desire; we pray according to our own concepts and wishes. God may answer these prayers, but there is very little value to these prayers. However, if we bring this matter to the Lord and His Spirit mingles our desire with His desire, leads our thoughts into His thoughts, and imprints His desires and thoughts into us, we will find ourselves having intense desires and thoughts. If God is grieved and sorrowful over man's condition of death, the same grief and sorrow will be imprinted in us, and we will have a desire to see man delivered from death. There will be a groaning within that will be turned into prayer. If God is grieved and anxious over His children's failures and this is

imprinted in us, we will also have a desire to see that none of His children fall into sin or darkness. We will utter such prayers and supplications from within; we will confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing of His children. One kind of prayer issues from man's own will, while another kind of prayer is based on the desire which comes as a result of the imprint of God's desire. These two kinds of prayers are different. Brothers and sisters, when we come to God and His desires are imprinted in us, these desires will become our breath and groaning. Prayers that are precious and weighty are those that are based on inward desires.

God has much work to do on earth; there are many things He wants to accomplish. We cannot pray according to our own feelings or thoughts; rather, we should come before His presence and draw near to Him and look to Him. We should allow Him to imprint us with the things that He wants to do on earth and turn them into our groaning. When we draw near to God, He may imprint the desire in us to preach the gospel. We will have a desire within to preach the gospel, and this desire will become a burden. When we pray according to this burden, there will be nothing but this burden in our groaning.

Brothers and sisters, when we draw near to God in this way, He may reveal more of His desires, and more will be imprinted in us. When God imprints His desires into a person, he will turn God's desires into his own and pray accordingly. When Daniel went to the Lord, he touched something. When he prayed and groaned for what he had touched, the prayer became precious and weighty. It became something that sanctified God's name, something that brought in His kingdom, and something that enabled His will to be done on earth.

Second, we should also realize that this kind of prayer will shake the seat of Hades and affect Satan. Hence, he will frustrate such prayers. Any prayer that comes from God will inevitably touch the power of darkness. This will bring in the spiritual warfare. Our bodies, families, and everything around us will come under Satan's attack. Whenever we pray this way, we will become vulnerable to Satan's attacks. He will attack until we cannot go on in our prayer. He will even try to stop us by nullifying our prayers and delaying their answers. A prayer may

deserve immediate answer, yet it may still hang in the air. God answered Daniel's prayer, but Satan hindered the answer to his prayer for twenty-one days. Daniel went down on his knees and waited until the answer to his prayer arrived. Brothers and sisters, have you ever wondered why your prayers have not been answered quickly? Perhaps it has been less than twenty-one days since you prayed! Perhaps the throne has answered your prayer, but the answer is hindered and still in the air; there is the need for prayer on earth, the need for men to endure in the presence of the Lord, and the need for some to go down on their knees.

Brothers and sisters, if we come to God and remain calm before Him, giving up our thoughts to enter into His thoughts, we will see the great need for prayer, we will see that God is waiting for us to pray about so many things, and we will see that everything around can become the subject of our prayer. In fact the whole earth can become the subject of our prayer. We should not pray according to our feelings. We must mingle our desires with God's desires and allow God's desires to become our desires, groanings, and yearnings for the universe. God's desires cannot be released without first passing through man, and God's desires, when expressed through man's desires, will be opposed by the power of Satan. In order to fulfill God's desire, we have to pray, and in order to remove Satan's frustration, we have to pray. We have to exercise the authority of prayer and release what should be released and bind what should be bound. We should not pray according to our own desire; we should go to the Lord and pray according to the desire that He has imprinted in us. When God says that something is needed, we should say the same, and when He says that something cannot remain, we should also say the same. We should forget about ourselves and touch God's desire and express His desire through our prayer.

# MESSAGE FIVE

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONCERNING PRAYER

## ●Outline

### ●One—Five

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### ONE

●Question: Has God given us a full provision for our prayer?

●Answer: Yes, God has given us a full provision in His Son through His Spirit.

If we did not have a full provision from the Lord, we might withdraw from our privilege and duty to pray. Thank the Lord that He has fulfilled all of the requirements for drawing near to Him and living before Him. We can sum up the Lord's provision with two words: trust and help.

First, let us consider trust. Trusting means committing and having the boldness to depend with full assurance. Many things are included in this word. A trusting spirit is very crucial to prayer and the Christian life as a whole. If we waver before the Lord, and if we lack assurance and trust in Him, our life will suffer a fatal blow. Let us pay attention to a few portions of the Word:

Hebrews 10:19-22 says, "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a great Priest over the house of God, let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

Romans 5:2 says, "Through whom also we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and boast because of the hope of the glory of God."

Ephesians 2:18 says, "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit

unto the Father."

Ephesians 3:12 says, "In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him."

We do not come to God according to our worthiness. Christ holds our hand and leads us to God. It is the Lord Himself who recommends to God those who are washed by the blood and who are alive from the dead. We put Him on as our robe of righteousness. Hence, our trust is in Christ Himself.

True faith is based on one thing—Christ Himself. We have an absolute right to come to God. He Himself is our right to come to God. This is His provision. We can come to the Father at any time in His name. We do not have to come to the Father according to our condition or in our own name (this is impossible in any case). We come to the Father in the name of the Son.

Second, let us consider help. Blessed are those who come to God through trusting in the Lord! However, even though we have such a tremendous privilege, we may feel impotent, weak, foolish, and unable to pray. It is marvelous to have help from the Spirit.

Romans 8:26-27 says, "Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God." Our weaknesses are most readily manifested in our prayers. Nothing exposes our spiritual weakness more than prayer. We know how difficult it was for the disciples to pray in the garden of Gethsemane; they could not watch and pray. But thank the Lord that we have the mighty Spirit as our help. We must trust in the indwelling Spirit to operate in us according to His power, because He is our help in our time of weakness and foolishness. Although we do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit is in us; He knows the will of God and He will teach us to pray according to God's will. He will teach us to fellowship with God intelligently and bring us into the reality of fellowship. We should trust in the Christ in whom we believe and the Spirit who sustains us and helps us pray.

## TWO

●Question: Why is Satan doing everything he can to frustrate our prayers?

●Answer: Satan will do anything that he can to cut off our fellowship with heaven. Consequently, he will pay any price to frustrate genuine prayer. We must be on the alert. He constantly attacks the prayers of the believers and the prayers of the church. He knows that once he prevails in his attack on prayers, he can rest in peace. Therefore, we must be watchful and on guard against Satan, particularly when we pray.

We have to pay attention to several things when we deal with Satan's attacks:

(1) Satan will attack our faith in the Lord. He knows that as long as he can make us feel unworthy, weak, and lacking in faith towards the Lord, we will lose our heart to pray.

(2) Sometimes he attacks our body, mind, mentality, and other physical faculties. When we feel tired and enervated, we have no interest in praying. We must guard ourselves from these things. These things are surmountable. The Lord will take responsibility for the things that are beyond our power.

(3) Sometimes Satan will attack the time we have set aside for prayer, whether it is our individual prayer time or the prayer time of the church. Many people have similar experiences. Satan is very subtle in his deception. He either usurps the time of prayer, or he causes us to not pray genuine prayers. Sometimes we have the time to pray, but lack the life to pray.

(4) Sometimes Satan will frustrate us from having uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord. He will produce a barrier between us and the Lord so that we cannot contact Him. It is as if a cloud strangely appears between us and Him.

(5) Finally, Satan is determined to shut us up in darkness so that we do not see the need for prayer. He turns our focus continually to other things so that we suffer in our prayer life. We must never fall into Satan's trap. We have to look to the Lord, gather material for prayer, and pay more attention to the Lord's interest and needs. We have a great responsibility to pray. Consequently, we have to watch and pray.

## THREE

●Question: According to the Lord's Word, what kind of prayer should we pay attention to other than our personal prayers?

●Answer: We should pay attention to corporate prayers, that is, the prayer of the church.

When we talk about the prayer of the church, we do not mean that personal prayers are unimportant; we are not insensitive to the need of personal prayers. But there is a law in God's kingdom: Some things are impossible for an individual to do alone; they require a collective effort and mutual support. Mutuality is particularly necessary in the matter of prayer. Those who follow the Lord constantly realize the need for praying with other believers. Sometimes it is not enough for a person to pray alone. Particularly for matters as great as God's kingdom, the only prayer that works is one in which the whole church strives to pray. The Lord said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13). We can follow this with the phrase "whose house we are" (Heb. 3:6).

The Lord said, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens. For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst" (Matt. 18:19-20). Both fact and experience tell us that when we are gathered together in the Lord, there is more of the Lord's presence than when we are by ourselves. The Lord is in the midst of the church; He cannot be in the midst of individuals. (With individuals, there can be no "midst." The Lord can only be inside an individual. The portion of the Lord which is assigned to "in their midst" cannot be found in individuals.) When we truly are gathered together into the Lord, we will feel the broadening sphere of our prayer, and we will be much more empowered in our prayer-battle. Moreover, in our prayer meeting we can often experience the Holy Spirit revealing God's will to us, burdening us, and giving us utterance for prayer. We can, of course, say much more on the prayer of the church. But I will stop here and say only one important word: The prayer of the church cannot replace our personal prayers. At the same time, personal prayers will always come short of the prayer of the church; they are not on the same level as the prayer of the church.

## FOUR

●Question: What do we need to take care of in our prayer?

●Answer: There are many things that we have to take care of in our prayer. Let me list them below:

(1) We must sustain a proper fellowship with the Lord in everything. We must bring everything in our daily life to the Lord because nothing in the Christian life is common or inconsequential. We should have a daily and spontaneous habit of fellowshipping with the Lord in everything (Phil. 4:6).

(2) We should petition again and again. The Lord loves to see men petitioning Him. He is a gracious Giver, and He wants man to pray. "But if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing" (James 1:5-6). "You do not have because you do not ask; you ask and do not receive because you ask evilly" (4:2b-3). Petitioning involves trust and hope. As long as the motive for our petition is pure, we can petition as much as we want.

(3) Our prayers should involve meditation and supplication, that is, going before the Lord to pray on behalf of others (Col. 4:12). Strictly speaking, this is participating in the fellowship of the Lord as the High Priest, because He is praying for His people and their needs all the time.

(4) We should persevere in prayer. The need for perseverance or earnestness in prayer does not meant that it is difficult for God to answer our prayers. Persevering in prayer means that we should clearly identify God's need before Him and persist in praying about it. If this is the case, why does not God answer us immediately? Why does He delay His answer? There are at least two reasons for this. First, God wants His people to have an adequate reaction to His deep longings and concerns. Second, certain necessities and circumstances have a need for persevering prayer. Satan has strongholds, and we have to offer up strong prayers before these strongholds can be torn down (Mark 9:28-29).

(5) We should have reigning prayers. We must be joined to the Lord on the throne (Eph. 2:6), who is the Lord over all, and we must pray according to the name which is above every name.

(6) We should have fighting prayers. We should deal with matters by exalting the victory of the cross through our prayers. The direction of our prayer

should follow that of the Lord's victory (6:10-20).

(7) We should have faith in prayer. Under certain circumstances, the Holy Spirit will give men an inward assurance; they will know God's will. When this happens, their prayers will be answered immediately (Acts 9:40).

(8)We should be burdened for prayer. Prayer is like a spiritual travail for birth. It is fellowshipping with the Lord's suffering, fellowshipping with the Father's heart, and being in harmony with the Spirit's groaning until the day of glory (Gal. 4:19).

## FIVE

- Question: What is the central goal of prayer?
- Answer: The central goal of prayer is for God to have a glorious church.

The central subject of prayer is to prepare a glorious church for Christ, a church that will match Him. This is the revelation of the whole Bible and God's central goal, and we must pay special attention to it. This is also the Lord's desire. Before He was crucified, His prayer revealed this desire (John 17). At the same time, we can see the same desire in Paul's Epistles. This does not mean that we should pray less for other things; it merely shows us the central goal of all our prayers. Once we have this goal in us, we can raise other prayers to a higher level. If we see that the gospel not only brings men out of death and into life but also joins men in an unspeakably wonderful union with the glorious Christ, our prayer for the world will only increase; it will not decrease. Carrying this one step further, there is a great need today for the world to see the glory of Christ through the church. The church, through the Spirit, should convince the world that it is the channel through which blessing is brought to the world.

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Finally, God wants us to enter into a more intelligent and deeper fellowship with Him. He wants us as His many sons to come to Him through His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants many priests to accompany the High Priest, who is living forever to intercede for us, and to bear the work of supplication before Him. "And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). "But you

are...a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9).

# MESSAGE SIX

## OUR LORD'S SANCTIFYING HIMSELF

### Notes On Scriptural Messages (1)—Issue No. 23

## •Scripture Reading: John 17:16-19

John 17:16-19 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As you have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

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Today I am going to focus on verse 19, which says that the Lord sanctified Himself for the disciples' sake. The verses we read today are somewhat peculiar. The Lord's desire that His disciples be sanctified required Him to first sanctify Himself for their sake. Why was this so? Many people have a problem when they read these verses. Is He not holy? Is not His nature holy? Why did He have to sanctify Himself? Today I will again speak briefly on the Lord's conduct while He was on the earth.

Our Lord is holy in His nature. He never knew sin. He is also God and has the power of God. In regard to Himself, He can do many things, and He can do them at will without contradicting His holy nature. In regard to His power, He is able to do many things. He has His independent power and can do things without waiting for God. Yet our Lord never spoke or acted in such a way. In everything, He was under the control of the will of God. He even said, "I can do nothing from Myself" (John 5:30). Why? What does this mean? If the Lord acted according to His own will and power, would His acts have been counted as sin like ours? No, a thousand times no! Why then did He not act according to His own will and by His own power? He was sanctifying Himself for His disciples' sake. When He could have been free, He chose not to be free; when He could have exercised power, He

chose not to exercise power, in order to set a good example for His disciples. He is holy, and He could have followed His own will and exercised His own power. But if His disciples followed their own will and exercised their own power that would have been sin.

The Lord had His freedom and could have done many things. But for the disciples' sake, He was glad to be restricted. In other words, for the sake of the disciples, the Lord gave up His own freedom. He laid aside many of His rights and gave up a great deal of His personal freedom, in order to show His disciples that they should not act freely before God or exercise their own power. If He did not act or exercise freely, should not we do the same? Brothers and sisters, have you ever considered the Lord's life on earth? His entire life on earth was altogether under restriction. He is God, yet He became a man. He could have lived without eating and drinking, yet like all other men He hungered and thirsted. He is God, yet He became a baby. He is absolutely great, yet He grew up according to man's stature. He is such a glorious God, yet He was put into an earthen vessel.

Our Lord must have labored on earth more than any other person. Once the Lord told the Jews, "Your father Abraham exulted that he would see My day, and he saw it and rejoiced." The Jews said, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" (John 8:56-57). O friends, do you know why the Jews spoke such a word? They purposely wanted to reduce the Lord's age by a few years. I truly believe the words in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, "His appearance was marred more than that of any man, / And His form more than that of the sons of men." "He has no attracting form nor majesty that we should look upon Him. / Nor beautiful appearance that we should desire Him." At that time the Lord was only thirty years old. The Jews purposely wanted to lower His age; yet they said He was close to fifty years old! This shows how old the Lord's countenance appeared. He indeed was a man that had fully experienced the sufferings of human life. You could see this from His face. Let me tell you that this was only a restriction that He faced in His physical body. We do not know the sufferings he experienced due to spiritual restrictions.

Our Lord is truly holy and without lusts. Although He had the liberty to do many things, He did not do them. He acted in this way for the sake of His

disciples. Once a man came to Peter and said, “Does not your Teacher pay the temple tax?” Peter said, “Yes.” The Lord did not have to pay the temple tax, but in order not to offend them, He said to Peter, “Go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you” (Matt. 17:24-27). Peter should have paid the temple tax; the Lord should not have paid the temple tax. But for Peter’s sake, the Lord sanctified Himself. The Lord wanted Peter to know that he should submit to governmental authority; therefore, He paid the temple tax. For Peter’s sake, the Lord restricted Himself.

When the Lord was seized as He came out of the garden of Gethsemane, Peter stretched out his hand, drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest. What did the Lord say? He said, “Do you think that I cannot beseech My Father, and He will provide Me at once with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt 26:53). But why did the Lord not do this? For the sake of His disciples, the Lord sanctified Himself. The Lord was concerned about what the disciples would do in the future if He beseeched the Father to provide Him with twelve legions of angels. They might, for example, order fire to come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans. The Lord could beseech the Father to provide twelve legions of angels, but His disciples could not order fire to come down from heaven. Therefore, for the sake of His disciples, the Lord did not do this; He sanctified Himself. He was restricted by the disciples.

Once in the wilderness, there were four thousand people following Jesus, not including women and children, and it was late in the day. What did the Lord say to the disciples? He said, “I am moved with compassion for the crowd, because for three days now they have remained with Me and they do not have anything to eat” (Matt. 15:32). What does “and” indicate? It indicates that the Lord had not eaten for three days either. This is why it says “and they do not have anything to eat.” It would have been very legitimate for the Lord to send His disciples to buy food when He had nothing to eat. But He was more concerned about their not having eaten for three days than He was about His not having eaten for three days. If the Lord had cared for His own eating, then at Pentecost there would have been a few more Ananiases and Sapphiras who would have

withheld certain portions for themselves. For the sake of His disciples, the Lord sanctified Himself. He was restricted not only in His physical body, but He was restricted also spiritually. How He suffered!

Likewise, brothers who are more advanced in the Lord and who have learned more lessons, have had more experiences, have a keener conscience, and know God more clearly, will not do many things that they would otherwise have the liberty to do. Although these things are altogether lawful and not sinful, they would not do them for the sake of the younger brothers. For example, many times I have felt this suffering when I stayed with young brothers. One may need more rest because of his physical weakness. Fearing that this may lead others to become lazy, he does not rest as much as necessary. When he loses sleep at night, he should be able to rise up a little later. But for the sake of the weaker brothers who would also rise up late and miss their morning prayer and Scripture reading, he suffers and rises up early. He may have a stomach problem and should be more selective in his eating. But in so doing it may cause the younger ones to be choosy in what they eat. As a result, he does not eat as he should. This kind of sanctifying for the sake of others is very important.

There was a mother with four sons. All of her four sons loved to drink and they almost exhausted the family's money. One day the mother told a preacher about this matter and he asked her, "Do you drink?" She said, "I always drink a little wine during each meal but never to the extent of getting drunk. My husband also drinks a little." The preacher said, "If you cannot give up your drinking, you should not expect your sons to give up theirs." Indeed, if parents have just a little craving, their children's craving will be many times stronger. If parents smoke cigarettes, the children will smoke opium. If parents watch movies, the children may possibly become movie stars.

The Lord wants His disciples to be sanctified. For this reason He sanctified Himself. He left a pattern for us to follow. We need to follow His footsteps. He did not need to be restricted, yet He was restricted. For the sake of His disciples, He sanctified Himself. Do you realize how much the Lord suffered and how much He was restricted when He was living with His disciples? He was tired more than His disciples. He was hungry more than His disciples. He needed rest more than

His disciples. Yet He never left them except when He was alone on the mountain praying. He was the same as the disciples in everything. At the very end, His disciples could not point out any flaw in Him. All His disciples testified that He was without sin. Peter said that He was without blemish and spot, that no guile was found in His mouth, and that He committed no sin. Those who lived with Him knew His heart the best, and this was the testimony of one who had lived with Him.

The Lord is holy. But for the sake of His disciples, He sanctified Himself. We should also be the same at home, in school, and among the brothers and the sisters. God has put us here in order that we may be a shining light in darkness. We must pass through strippings and bondages. Otherwise, we cannot expect others to be sanctified. We must sanctify ourselves for the sake of others. Today we have seen the Lord and the excellency of His footsteps. Let us follow His footsteps.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## MEASURE AND FLOW

## •Outline

### •One—Five

## •Scripture Reading: John 7:37-38; Ezek. 47:1-10, 12

John 7:37-38 "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water."

Ezek. 47:1-10 "Then He brought me back to the entrance of the house, and there was water flowing out from under the threshold of the house to the east (for the house faced east); and the water flowed down below the south side of the house, on the south of the altar. Then He brought me out by the way of the north gate and led me around on the way outside to the outer gate, on the way to the gate that faces east; and there the water was running out on the south side. When the man went out to the east with the line in His hand, He measured a thousand cubits; and He led me through the water, water that was to the ankles. Then He measured a thousand cubits and led me through the water, water that was to the knees. Then He measured a thousand cubits and led me through the water, water that was to the loins. Then He measured a thousand cubits, and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. And He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then He led me and brought me back along the bank of the river. And when I returned, there were very many trees on the bank of the river, on one side and on the other. Then said He to me, This water flows out toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah and goes to the sea; when it flows into the sea, the water of the sea is healed. And every living creature which

swarms in every place where the river goes shall live, and there will be very many fish when this water comes there. And the water of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes. And fishermen will stand beside the sea from En-gedi even to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish shall be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many."

12 "And on the banks on both sides of the river will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail; but they will bring forth new fruit every month, because the water for them flows out of the sanctuary. And their fruit shall be for food, and their leaves for healing."

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## ONE

In the Bible water is a very important matter and has a great significance. In Genesis 2, after creating man, God put him in the garden of Eden, which was watered by a river. In this chapter we see water, and as we read further, the Bible often mentions water or a river. According to Psalm 36:8, God's people "are saturated with the fatness of Your house,/And You cause them to drink of the river of Your pleasures." The prophets frequently referred to water; Ezekiel 47 vividly depicts water flowing out and becoming a river. In the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John which deals with life, the Lord Jesus referred to water many times. He said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (4:14). He also said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (7:37-38). The last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, indicates that there is a pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (v. 1).

In these passages, the Bible uses water as a symbol of the life of God. When we receive the life of the Lord, it enters into us and becomes as if it were a spring

of water connected to our being. Once we receive the life of the Lord, we are joined to the fountain of life. According to John 7:37-38, when the water comes into us, it becomes rivers of living water flowing out from us. Now we need to consider the following question: How can the life within us flow out like a river of living water?

## TWO

The word flow is in John 7, and the synonyms issued or ran out are in Ezekiel 47. Both John and Ezekiel said that the water would become a river. If we compare Ezekiel's word with John's, we will see how the water flowed out. It flowed out by measuring. In Ezekiel we see that after measuring, the waters came to the ankles; after measuring again, they came to the knees; after measuring once again, they came to the loins; after measuring the fourth time, they became waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. From this we should notice one thing. In order for the water in John 7 to flow out like a river, there must be the measuring spoken of in Ezekiel 47. By putting the two passages together we can see that the secret for the living water to flow out is measuring.

What is the meaning of measuring? According to Ezekiel, it means the separation of the holy from the common. The man whom Ezekiel saw in the vision measured several times. Ezekiel 42:20 says, "He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place." The measuring in this verse discriminates between the sanctified and the profane; it separates the sanctified from the profane. After measuring a piece of land, it is regarded as a sanctified, no longer profane, place and it is consecrated to God. God wants us to be consecrated to Him. This is why He measures us. Any part in us that is measured is no longer profane; it is sanctified. What was once worldly becomes godly after it is measured.

While communing with God, Ezekiel saw the measurer in a vision. His appearance was like the appearance of brass (Ezek. 40:1-3). When the Bible speaks of man meeting God or His angel, it often mentions the appearance. For

instance, Revelation 4 says that John saw God sitting on the throne and that He looked like a jasper stone and a sardius. The measurer whom Ezekiel saw had the appearance of brass. The significance of brass in the Bible is judgment. The altar, which was made of brass, represented judgment. The bronze serpent prefigured the Lord Jesus undergoing judgment on the cross on behalf of man. The measurer had the appearance of brass; this signifies that he was a judge. At the time of measuring, there is separation as well as judgment. There must be a definite standard, or a definite scale, in order to measure. Sloppy people cannot measure; neither can those who are unable to differentiate between good and evil. Likewise, those who are ignorant of the measuring scale cannot measure. When we are in fellowship with God and are enlightened by Him, we will come face to face with the measurer. When God measures us, light shines on the areas where we have fallen short of His standard or His delight. This is God's judgment.

## THREE

Ezekiel 47 says that the water flowed out from under the threshold of the house. After the first measuring, the water reached the depth of the ankles; when it was measured again, it was deeper; after the third measuring, it was deeper still; and after the fourth measuring, it became a river. What is the temple? It is our human spirit. Our spirit becomes the temple, and God's Spirit dwells in our spirit so that the water of life flows out from our spirit. How can the water flow out and become deeper and deeper as it flows on? The secret is in the measuring.

For instance, after you were saved, perhaps you knelt down by your bed to pray one morning; you came before God and touched Him. At that time it seemed as if someone descended from heaven to judge your lips and tongue, saying, "Your lips are so filthy, and your tongue is so sharp." Your lips and tongue were judged by God. When God's light judged you, you reproved and judged yourself, saying, "My lips are indeed filthy, and my tongue is indeed sharp." This is the same as what happened in Isaiah 6:5 when Isaiah met God in a vision and said, "Woe is me, for I am finished!/For I am a man of unclean lips,/And in the midst of

a people of unclean lips I dwell;/Yet I have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts, with my eyes." You met God, and your lips and tongue were judged. Then you went on to pray, "Lord, my lips are filthy. Cleanse me with Your blood so that my lips and tongue will be consecrated to You and placed at Your disposal from now on." From that point on, your lips and tongue were separated. If you utter frivolous or sharp words, you will feel uneasy inside. You can no longer speak so freely, because your lips and tongue have been consecrated to God.

Wherever there is judgment and measuring, there is the outflow of the water of life. Often you are powerless in preaching the gospel because your lips and tongue have not been measured; consequently, the water of life cannot flow out from your lips and tongue. When you are enlightened, judged, and measured by God, the water of life will flow out from you. Just one measurement, however, is not adequate; God will measure you two, three, and many times. God measures your lips and tongue first, and then He may measure your clothing and adornments. After you are measured by God, others will sense that even your hair and clothing are dripping with the water of life. Your clothing will satisfy those who are inwardly thirsty, refresh those who are inwardly dry, and illumine those who are inwardly dark, because your clothing has been judged, measured, and sanctified by God. How much the water of life flows out depends on how much God has gained you. As God gains more of you, the water of life will flow farther and deeper. Whether or not the water will flow far or deep enough depends on how much you are measured by God.

## FOUR

The water flowed out from under the threshold of the house. After you are saved, God's life is in your spirit, but it wants to flow out. When God measures you, He starts from the inside. One day as you are drawing near to God, He will touch you and judge the love within you. In His light God will enlighten you to see that your love has not been gained by Him. Even though you know God's love, your own love is still attached to people, matters, and things other than God. God will judge your love and reveal that you have not yet given Him your love. You will spontaneously confess your sin, reprove yourself, and pray, "O God, from this

day on I will give my love fully unto You." After your love has been measured by God in this way, life will flow into your love.

Later, when you draw near to God, He may judge your thoughts. He will show you that your thoughts are like an unbridled wild horse and that they have not turned to God. If you have never learned to rely upon the Spirit to control your thoughts, they will be like wild horses running here and there. As God opens your eyes, you will confess your sin. Then a desire will rise in your heart, and you will say to God, "From this point forward, I consecrate my thoughts to You." After your thoughts have been measured by God in this way, life will flow into your thoughts.

Still later you will meet God again, and He will judge your will because your will has been obstinate and you have never learned to obey. Then you will confess your sin. This will subdue your will before God. You will pray, "O God, from today on, I do not want to choose what I want; instead I want to choose what You want." After your will has been measured by God in this way, life will flow into your will.

Is the measuring complete after reaching this stage? No, God still needs to measure. He will measure your body, including your feet, hands, mouth, ears, and eyes. Every part of your body is sound and useful, but none of it has been placed at God's disposal, and none of it is useful in glorifying God. Therefore, God has to measure you. Once there was a woman in her fifties. When others spoke to her about God's Word, she could not hear, but when her son and daughter-in-law whispered to each other, she could hear them perfectly. Her ears were unmeasured. Some people's eyes are very sharp in looking around, but dull when it comes to reading the Bible; their eyes can be used only on the street, but not in the Bible. Their eyes are not measured. One day when God touches such a person, He will judge his eyes. Then he will confess his sin, saying, "My eyes are full of lust, Lord. I beseech You to cleanse me with Your precious blood. Hereafter, I consecrate my eyes to You." Sometimes a certain brother glances at you. He does not need to say anything, yet life enters into you because his eyes have been judged and measured by God.

God will measure not only our soul and body but also our family, knowledge,

wealth, and every other thing. Then His life will flow out abundantly from our various parts.

## FIVE

Brothers and sisters, if we want God's life to flow out, we have to be measured by Him. When He measures us, He starts from the inside and works to the outside step by step. According to Ezekiel, there are at least four steps in the measuring. After the first thousand cubits were measured, the waters were to the ankles. When feet are immersed in water, they cannot walk as freely as before. The feet of those who have been taken hold of by God are not so free. Many brothers and sisters prefer to walk freely by themselves; they do not want to be restricted by God's life. Therefore, they do not want to be measured by God. Once a person is measured by God, however, his feet will not be free to walk about at will. After the second measuring, the waters become deeper; walking is even more of an inconvenience. The more you are measured by God, the more you will find that it is inconvenient for you to engage in your own activities. After being measured the third time, the waters were up to the loins; the whole body was hemmed in by the water. When a Christian reaches this point, he will lose almost all of his own activities. He will be enlightened, judged, and measured by the presence of God; God will take hold of him to such a degree that he will be bound by life. Brothers and sisters, this experience is precious. When you meet such brothers and sisters, you notice that their eyes do not turn much, their words are not sharp, and their hands and feet no longer act freely. They are immersed more deeply into God's life, and God has gained more of their inward being. In the final step, the river of John 7 comes, and the water becomes so deep that a man can swim in it. At this point, one is fully carried along by the flow of the water. This is Madame Guyon's final experience—being lost in God. This is the deepest step.

Brothers and sisters, being measured is the secret to having the outflow of the water of life. While you are in communion with God, He will measure you. Verbal consecration is still not true consecration. You can be sanctified and genuinely consecrated only after you are enlightened and measured by God.

Having a heart for God and a heart to offer up everything to Him is still useless. You have to be enlightened, judged, measured, and sanctified before there can be real service. The water of life will flow deeper and wider as you are measured more and more. There will be the fruit of life wherever the water of life goes, and others will receive the supply of life. O brothers and sisters, may we be measured by God again and again so that His life will flow out as a river of living water, going deeper and farther as it flows.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## NOT LOSING OUR TEMPER

## ●Outline

- **●Expressions Of The Christian Life**
- **●Temper Being Incompatible With The Christian Life**
- **●The Root Of Our Anger—Self**

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After a man has received the Lord's grace, there should be some definite changes in his conduct and nature. One of the changes should be in his temper. Some people have believed in the Lord for many years, yet their temper is still the same as it was before they were saved. This is very unfortunate, and it surely does not glorify the Lord. As soon as a man believes in the Lord, he should take care of the problem of his temper. It is wrong for a person to have a terrible temper for years without seeing any change at all.

### EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

There are some clear expressions of the Christian life that should be exhibited as soon as a person is saved.

In John 15:12 the Lord charged the disciples to love one another. One expression of the Christian life is love. We have to love. We should love our brothers, and we should love all men.

The Lord also said, "Blessed are the meek" (Matt. 5:5). A Christian should have a meek attitude; he should not be stubborn. We should learn to have a meek attitude. "Behold, your King is coming to you, meek and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, a foal of a beast of burden" (21:5). The Lord was meek in His attitude; He came meek and mounted on a donkey.

Luke 9:23 says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself...and follow Me." The Christian life is a life of denying the self. The

Christian life should not be one that speaks for itself, fights for itself, or builds itself up; rather, it should be one that denies itself.

First Corinthians 13:7 says that love "endures all things." The Christian life should not be one of impatience, but one of endurance.

First Thessalonians 5:16 says, "Always rejoice." The Christian life should be one that always rejoices. Nothing should disturb our joy or quench our rejoicing.

Philippians 4:7 says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." A Christian should not allow anything to disturb or usurp his peace. God's children should maintain their peace at all times.

Matthew 11:29 is also a very important verse. It is the Lord's own word: "I am meek and lowly in heart." A Christian should be lowly in heart. He should not be arrogant; rather, he should humble himself all the time.

## TEMPER BEING INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Love, meekness, self-denial, joy, peace, and humility are all proper expressions of the Christian life. Temper and anger are not compatible with these expressions.

Where there is love, there is no anger. Where love flourishes, anger does not exist. Where love is, temper does not exist. One cannot be loving and angry at the same time. The Lord's command is that a Christian should love others, whether they are unbelievers or believers. If love fills your heart, anger will depart. It is impossible to love a person and be angry with him at the same time. You must realize how important love is for a child of God. Love should not be in just your conduct; it must become your attitude as well. You should not love occasionally; rather, love has to be your attitude. If you have such an attitude, it will be impossible for you to lose your temper.

The Lord commands us to be meek, and He was very meek when He was on earth. He came on a donkey, which means that He does not reign with severity but in meekness. When the Lord was on earth, it was easy for men to talk to Him, invite Him, and approach Him. It is hard to talk with some people, but a Christian should be anything but unapproachable. It should not be a hard thing to

approach him. A Christian should be meek. If we are meek in our attitude and nature, spontaneously we will not lose our temper easily. Temper makes a person hard; those who have a temper are crude in their emotion. Love and compassion are the finest of all human affections, while anger is the crudest. If a man is meek in the eyes of the Lord, he will not give any ground to anger. It is an expression of crudeness for one to constantly argue and lose his temper. This is not compatible with meekness.

The Lord charges us to deny ourselves and to learn to be self-denying. If a man denies himself and drops his rights, he will not get angry easily. Men become angry when they want to fight for themselves. If a man does not fight for himself, he will not need to lose his temper. Brothers and sisters, as children of God we should deny ourselves and not protect ourselves.

Sometimes others are unreasonable with us. Many things tend to provoke us, but the Bible says that love is not provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Lord shows us that we should be patient. Whatever the Lord allows to happen to us, we should be patient. The Lord's command is that a Christian's life be a life of patience. If we live a patient life, there will be no possibility of losing our temper.

A Christian should always rejoice. Joy is life. A man cannot be angry and rejoicing at the same time; this is impossible. Either you are rejoicing or you are angry. When you are angry, you cannot possibly be rejoicing. A man cannot be happy and angry at the same time. If the Lord's joy fills your heart, there will be no place in your life left for anger. The Lord has not given you ground for your anger. Brothers and sisters, if your life is filled with joy, your bad temper will be gone spontaneously.

The Lord intends that we be filled with peace. Nothing should disturb our peace. We should be at peace in the midst of everything, no matter what the circumstance. The Lord's peace guards our minds and hearts from all attacks. If our hearts are filled with this peace, it will be impossible for us to become angry.

A child of God should be one who humbles himself. God does not want us to be high-minded; He does not want us to sit in a high place. God's Son humbled Himself when He was on earth. He desires that we would also be lowly and that we would go along with the lowly (Rom. 12:16). Temper is incompatible with

humility. We have to follow and learn of our lowly Lord who took a lowly way.

In Matthew 5:22 the Lord said, "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment." The Lord is not pleased to see any of His own becoming angry or losing their temper easily. It is especially bad to get angry or lose our temper with our brothers. Every child of God should learn to control his temper and not become angry easily.

## THE ROOT OF OUR ANGER—SELF

Anger is a common thing, and there are many people who lose their temper easily. But temper is the most superficial of all problems. Strictly speaking, it should be dealt with the moment we believe in the Lord. It is wrong to see a person with an uncontrollable or unmanageable temper eight or ten years after he is saved. So many people lose their temper easily. Why? So many Christians have not dealt with this problem yet. Why? If we cannot answer these questions, we cannot be proper Christians. We must understand the reason that a man becomes angry easily before we can find the solution to this problem.

Temper is a big thing. Yet in reading the New Testament, we cannot find the word temper. The Bible does not pay much attention to what we consider as the most common sickness, because temper is not a sickness but the symptom of a sickness. A sickness is one thing, and the symptom of a sickness is another thing. A man may have appendicitis—this is a sickness. He may have a fever as well—this is a symptom of the sickness. Symptoms are present because a sickness is present. It is useless to try to deal with the symptoms without dealing with the sickness. The fever may subside temporarily, but the sickness remains, and after a while the fever will come back. Temper is not a sickness but the symptom of a sickness. Hence, we have to know the root of the sickness. Once we know the root, we can get rid of the temper. Once the sickness is gone, the symptoms will surely go away. We have to realize that temper is a symptom and not a root of sickness. It is wrong for us to consider temper a sickness. It is no wonder that we cannot deal with it, because we consider it as a sickness.

Many brothers have said that they have a problem with Romans 6:11 because they still cannot overcome their temper. Romans 6:11 says that we

should reckon ourselves to be dead, but many people have a problem applying this verse. When they are about to lose their temper, they hurriedly try to recite Romans 6:11, saying, "I have died, and since I have died, I can no longer lose my temper." Yet this is not effective. Romans 6:11 is not about delivering us from the symptoms of sickness but about saving us from the sickness. It is useless if we try to apply it to our symptoms. If we try to reckon ourselves to be dead when we are about to lose our temper, we will still lose it. We may not lose it outwardly, but we will lose it inwardly.

What is the root of our temper? The simple answer lies with the self. If a man has not dealt with his self, he is heading in the wrong direction if he tries to deal with his temper. A man loses his temper because of the self. His self is his sickness; his temper is not his sickness. Because a man has the self, he has temper. If the self is dealt with before God, temper will be gone spontaneously. This is why the Bible pays attention to the self instead of our temper. Once the problem with the self is solved, the problem with temper is solved as well. As long as the problem with the self remains, the problem with temper remains.

Concerning the self, there are several things that we should realize.

First, some people are very subjective. Those who are subjective are surely full of the self. They have opinions and concepts for everything, and they think that their concepts and opinions are never wrong. They also constantly insist on their opinions and proposals. They cannot stand any obstacles, frustrations, or breaking down. Their opinions must prevail and persist to the end. If anyone does not agree with their proposals or go along with their opinions, their subjective nature has no tolerance. Consequently, they lose their temper and become very angry. Brothers and sisters, if your eyes are only on your temper, you will never be healed of the sickness. Your sickness is your subjectivity and strong will; it is not your temper. Once your subjectivity is broken and your will and opinions are bruised, you will say to the Lord, "Lord, this is Your work, and I submit to You." If you do this, how can you lose your temper again? If you kneel down and say, "Lord, this is Your business; it is Your work" when your proposals are cut off, how can you lose your temper? It will be impossible for you to lose your temper. You only have a temper because you insist on your proposals and

opinions. When you insist on your way of doing things, the self comes out and temper follows. No one can lose his temper if his self is removed. The root of your temper lies in the self. It is foolish to spend so much effort to deal with your temper while forgetting to deal with your self. Once a man believes in the Lord, the self must be broken. The self cannot remain whole before the Lord, and it is not worth keeping. If a man is free from the self, he will not lose his temper even when he is interrupted, frustrated, or tried.

Second, some people have a temper because they think they are better than others. They think highly of themselves and think that they are superb. In other words, they are proud. Everyone who is proud not only considers himself higher than others, but also demands that others admire and regard him highly. No proud person is satisfied with just having a high regard for himself. He is not content with just himself saying that he is good; he wants others to say that he is good. A proud person is not content with self-admiration; he wants everyone to admire him and the brothers and sisters to exalt him. If another brother does not appreciate his "worthiness," his "importance," or his high "spiritual attainment" or does not speak marvelously of him, he feels hurt and becomes angry! Where is the source of this anger? It comes from pride. A man becomes angry because he is proud. Brothers and sisters, if you remove your pride, you will remove your temper. It is impossible to remove one's temper without first removing his pride. The root of temper is pride. You will not lose your temper if you are a humble person in the eyes of God, if you consider others' jesting, despising, and slandering as the discipline of the Holy Spirit, and if you accept this disciplining work, saying, "Lord, this is all for my own good; these things have happened to me because You want to deal with my pride. Lord, I thank You for Your perfecting work in these things." Then when a brother does not obey and instead damages your standing, you will feel that pride is wrong and that it is all right to be hurt. If you do this, you will not lose your temper; rather, you will say to the Lord, "It is right for You to deal with my pride." If you know God's hand, you will not lose your temper. Brothers and sisters, temper is not a sickness. If you deal with temper as if you were dealing with a sickness, you will never succeed. You have to learn to prostrate yourself before the Lord and say, "You can do whatever You

want." If you put your self aside and are willing to deny and deal with your self, you will see that your strength to lose your temper will be gone, your motivation to lose your temper will be gone, and your temper will lose its grip.

Third, as a consequence of self-exaltation, you think that others should not be as highly regarded as you. You only want to see yourself being uplifted; you do not want to see others being uplifted. You only want to gain something for yourself; you do not want others to gain anything. You rejoice at others' failure and are sad at others' success. This is jealousy, and jealousy occurs not only in the secular realm but also in the spiritual realm. Those who are proud rejoice at their brothers' failures and are unhappy when they see their brothers standing. This is a despicable attitude. No attitude is more despicable. If a man rejoices when others fall, he is the same as Satan, who loves to see others fall. What a shame for God's children to have Satan's sentiment! The meanest and most despicable sentiment is one which rejoices rather than grieves over a brother's fall. The basis for this kind of feeling is the desire for the self to be exalted. One hopes to see everyone around him fall in order that he can be exalted. Brothers and sisters, a person who knows God wants to see both himself and others rise. Those who do not know God want to see themselves rise, yet do not want to see others rise. They even hope to see others fall so that they can be exalted by the contrast. This is a despicable sentiment. Temper often comes because there is jealousy in the heart. If you are a self-exalting person, you will be angry if you see someone better and higher than you. Jealousy leads to anger. If you ignore jealousy and try to deal with just your temper, you will never succeed. You must uproot jealousy from your heart before you can remove your temper. If jealousy remains, your temper will flare up again and again.

Fourth, with some people the self is expressed in the form of self-love. They love themselves more than anyone else. Their attention is on themselves, and the only persons they treasure dearly are themselves. When it comes to eating, the most important ones to be taken care of are themselves. When it comes to lodging, the first ones to be taken care of are themselves. When it comes to bedding, the first ones to be taken care of are themselves. In everything related to the human life, the first ones in their mind are themselves. They want more

benefit for themselves. They want more comfort for themselves. All of their thoughts are centered around themselves. They care for themselves and treasure themselves. When any discomfort comes their way, they become angry. Many people become angry because their self-love is hurt. They love themselves so much that they are not willing to suffer any hurt, pain, or embarrassment. Once their self-love is hurt and they fall into some discomfort, suffering, or embarrassment, they become very angry and lose their temper. Those who have learned this lesson before the Lord know that they live on this earth for the Lord and according to God's grace; they do not live according to their self-love. They live by His grace and not by their self-love. They realize that they live and stand because of His mercy and protection. When they live this way, they do not lose their temper even if they are very justified in doing so. Their self-love has been dealt with. Brothers and sisters, I hope that we realize that all of our temper stems from the self. If the self is not dealt with, temper will remain. We cannot expect anyone to stop their temper if the self is not dealt with. Those who do not deal with themselves will find that their temper is still with them.

Fifth, some brothers and sisters love themselves so much that they care only for their own things. They are only interested in their own affairs and have no interest in the affairs of others. They have no interest in helping others. Their conduct and thoughts are centered around themselves. They are the most important persons, and their affairs are the most important affairs. Their thoughts are on themselves, and whatever they do is for themselves. They are busy for themselves, and they care for themselves. Therefore, they have no time left for others. If others bother them, they become irritated, and their temper flares up. Their activities are centered around themselves, and they have no sympathy for others. They love themselves so much that they have no time to sympathize with others. They are so busy with themselves that they have no strength to bear others' sorrow. Many people lose their temper when others infringe upon their self-centered love; they feel disgusted and bothered, and they are impatient and angry. The root of all anger is in man's self. If we are not self-centered and are able to sympathize with others and if we learn to love others, we will not feel bothered and angry when others trouble us. We will feel

that it is a joy to help others and that by helping others we are serving God. Therefore, we must not deal just with our temper, because it is not the root. We must deal with the root of the sickness. If our self is dealt with, our temper will be gone. The more thoroughly we deal with the self, the more our temper will go away.

Sixth, some people love not only themselves, but they have other kinds of love—they love things; they love money. Some people are not yet delivered from material possessions. Money and material possessions are precious to them. All kinds of things are precious to them. They have a self that craves things, objects. The expression of the self in these people is in their love for objects. If someone comes to their house and breaks an object or loses something that belongs to them, they become very angry because they are hurt; the self which is attached to the objects is hurt, and the result is anger. The cause of their anger lies within themselves, not in others. If you hit a piece of wood with your hand, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of wood. If you knock on the wall, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of the wall. If you knock on a piece of glass, what kind of sound will you hear? You will hear the sound of glass. The hand is the same, and the knocking is the same, but the sounds that are produced are different. One is wood, and the sound is the sound of wood. One is a wall, and the sound is the sound of a wall. One is glass, and the sound is the sound of glass. Different objects have different sounds because the nature of these things is different. An outward phenomenon is an expression of the inward nature of something. Our temper is within; it is not outside of us. If the self is gone, the environment cannot stir up our temper. A man loses his temper because there is the element of self within him. As long as the self is within, he will lose his temper given the right environment. The environment does not produce the temper; it merely brings out the temper that is within.

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In conclusion, anger comes from man's self. As long as a person is angry, it means that a certain aspect of the self has not been dealt with. Perhaps many aspects of the self have not been dealt with, or perhaps one particular aspect of

the self remains. Therefore, the extent to which one's temper is dealt with depends on the extent to which the self has been dealt with before the Lord. The more thoroughly a man's self is dealt with, the more he is delivered from his temper. If the self is not clearly dealt with, his temper will remain.

We should not be so foolish as to just deal with our temper. We should remember that the problem of self is much deeper than the problem of temper. If we do not deal with the self, our temper will always be present. As we learn to prostrate ourselves before the Lord, we will be enlightened concerning the condition of the self, and God's mercy will bring about many things in our circumstances. If we have learned some lessons before the Lord, we will bow our head when these things come upon us and say, "Lord, Your arrangements are the best. It is good that You deal with my self this way. I submit and I accept these dealings." If you do this, your anger will not be vented. If you do not know the Lord's hand, like a mule that is without understanding, you will think that men or the environment are inflicting these dealings on you. When your eyes are set on men and the environment, you will be rebellious and angry. It is useless for a person to deal with his temper without first dealing with the self. We have to see that the root of temper is in us. Temper in a Christian is a sign of his refusal to accept the arrangement of the Holy Spirit in his environment. We have to learn to accept the discipline of the Holy Spirit and set ourselves aside. We have to realize the futility of the self. If we do these things, the problem of temper will be solved spontaneously.

Immediately after believing in the Lord, we should deal with the problem of temper. We should not allow this problem to continue; nor should we deal with it only after we have been Christians for many years. A Christian should be one who denies himself. He should not be subjective, proud, jealous, self-loving, or self-caring, and he should not love money. We need to deny the self and realize that everything that comes upon us is under the Spirit's arrangement for our own good. We should learn to accept everything. We should not deal with our temper as a symptom, but we should deal with the root of the sickness. We cannot deal with our temper without dealing with the self. Where there is temper, there is the self. We have a quick temper because we have a quick

disposition. However, do not think that those who are slow will not lose their temper. They lose their temper as well, except in a different way. As long as there is the self, there is temper. Brothers and sisters, in order for us not to lose our temper, we have to deal with the self. Once we are enlightened concerning the self, we will be delivered from our temper.

## MESSAGE NINE

# THE LAW IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

## ●Outline

- **●Authority In Life**
- **●The Laying On Of Hands For The Gift**
- **●Prayer With The Anointing Of Oil**
- **●The Revelation Paul Received At The Time Of His Repentance**
- **●The Judgment Of The Brothers**

## ●Scripture Reading: Acts 8:4-8, 12, 14-17; 1 Tim. 5:22, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; James 5:14-16; Acts 9:3-12, 15-17; Matt. 18:15-17, 20

Acts 8:4-8 "Those therefore who were scattered went throughout the land announcing the word as the gospel. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them. And the crowds gave heed with one accord to the things said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he did. For with many of those who had unclean spirits, the spirits came out crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was much joy in that city."

12 "But when they believed Philip, who announced the gospel of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

14-17 "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had

received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, Who went down and prayed for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit; For He had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

1 Tim. 5:22 "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor participate in others' sins; keep yourself pure."

4:14 "Do not neglect the gift which is in you, which was given to you by means of prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

2 Tim. 1:6 "For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

James 5:14-16 "Is anyone among you ill? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The petition of a righteous man avails much in its working."

Acts 9:3-12 "And as he went, he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. And Saul rose from the ground; and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. And they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without seeing, and he neither ate nor drank. And there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying; And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he may receive his sight."

15-17 “But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; For I will show him how many things he must suffer on behalf of My name. And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent Me-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming-so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Matt. 18:15-17 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector.”

20 “For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst.”

*  *  *  *

In order to live the life of the Body of Christ, we must first have the revelation of the Body of Christ. If we do not have the revelation of the Body of Christ, we will never cease our individual activities. Some have said that there is nothing extraordinary about seeing the Body of Christ. Yet, brothers and sisters, if you see the Body of Christ, you will know that there are laws in the Body of Christ and that you have to act according to these laws; these are not empty words. If a man sees Christ, he will not try to save himself by his own works. Similarly, if a man says that he has seen the Body yet is independent and individualistic in his conduct, he is not holding the Head and has not received the revelation of the Body. If a man has genuinely received the revelation of the Body, there will surely be some change in him, and he will surely seek fellowship and learn obedience.

## AUTHORITY IN LIFE

There are a few cardinal laws in the Body. Fellowship is one, and love is

another. But another great law is submitting to the Head in conjunction with other members of the Body. A member by himself does not have any authority; the authority is with the Head. It is wrong for any member to say that he has authority. A member does not have direct authority; he can only derive authority from the Head. This authority is not a matter of position but a matter of life; it does not come by "appointment" but by one's "being." If a member is not an eye, the Body cannot appoint him to be the eye. If a member is not the hand, the Body cannot appoint him to be the hand. Because a member sees, he has the authority of seeing. Because a member can function, his function becomes a help to others.

In the church it is wrong to consider authority as a matter of position instead of life. It is wrong to make an appointment based on a person's social status rather than on his spiritual condition. God's Word shows that authority is in life, not in position. Authority lies in one's living, not in his appointment. A man has authority in the church not by his position but by being dealt with in his experience and in many concrete matters. He has learned something before the Lord which others have not learned. As a result, the Lord gives him authority in life. In the Body of Christ, all authority is in life. God has made some appointments in a local church, but these are not according to position but according to life. When life and appointment are joined together, there is the need for submission. If one does not submit, life will stop, and he will be detached from the Body; this is the meaning of "not holding the Head" (Col. 2:19). If there is a problem between you and the members, your relationship with the Head will not be normal. If you are at odds with other members, you may still have your doctrine and work, but the word of life will be gone from you. Brothers and sisters, you may have been a believer for three years, but how much genuine growth have you gained? It is a pity that while your manner and knowledge seem to have improved, the life of the Body of Christ has not increased. In the church you should learn to submit to one another. If the members do not submit to one another, the life spoken of in Romans 8 can never be manifested. You will feel like a deflated tire, and it will be difficult for you to advance. Those who see the Body of Christ will spontaneously see that submission is a joyful thing.

The case in Acts 8 shows us the principle of the Body. At that time the church in Jerusalem suffered the first great persecution. The apostles did not leave Jerusalem, but the brothers were all scattered. The scattered ones went everywhere to preach the word. Philip was not an apostle. His ministry was to care for the food. Yet because he had life, he went down to Samaria to preach Christ and performed miracles; he cast out many unclean spirits and healed many paralyzed and lame ones. The whole city of Samaria was filled with the gospel. The Bible says, "And there was much joy in that city" (v. 8). This shows that many in the city of Samaria had believed. The Lord used Philip. But if Philip had been proud, he could have said, "In Jerusalem Peter saved many. In Samaria I saved many." He could have considered himself a marvelous man in history. Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, but the experience of the ones saved in Samaria was different from the experience of the ones saved in Jerusalem. In Samaria the Spirit did not descend upon anyone. The Samaritans had genuinely believed, and they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Yet the Spirit did not descend upon anyone immediately. When the apostles heard this, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When the two arrived, they prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit. After the apostles laid hands on them, they also received the Spirit.

What is the meaning of the laying on of hands? Leviticus tells us that when one offered a sacrifice, he had to lay his hands on the head of the sacrifice. What does laying hands on the head of the sacrifice mean? Why is it that only the bulls that passed through the laying on of hands could be offered up, while myriads of other bulls in the world could not be offered up? To lay hands on a bull's head meant that a man was identified with the bull. The bull became him, and when the bull was offered up, it meant that he was offered up. When the bull was accepted, it meant that he was accepted. Hence, the laying on of hands means identification.

The New Testament speaks of the laying on of hands many times. First Timothy 5:22 says, "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor participate in others' sins; keep yourself pure." Since laying hands on someone is being identified with someone, we can become identified with others' sins if we are not careful. The

meaning of the laying on of hands is identification and fellowship.

In the Old Testament, when kings and priests were appointed, someone laid hands and poured oil on their heads. Hence, the meaning of the laying on of hands is bringing men under the anointing of the Head and into the fellowship of the Body.

Today in the church the apostles are the representative members in the Body of Christ; they represent the authority of Christ. For the apostles to lay hands on the Samaritan believers meant that they acknowledged them as part of the Body. Once they were in the Body, the Spirit descended upon them. If the Samaritan believers had received the Spirit before the apostles came, it might have caused Philip to think, "The apostles can work in Jerusalem, and I can work in Samaria." Then the saved ones in Samaria would have been separated from the ones in Jerusalem. If someone had said that there was a Philip in Samaria just as there was a Peter in Jerusalem, the principle of the Body would have been destroyed. Then there would have been two works, one in Jerusalem and the other in Samaria, and the two would not have been under one work. The case in Samaria shows that one has to be subject to the Body before there can be the anointing. The anointing did not come down until the apostles from Jerusalem came and laid their hands on the believers. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Body; it is not the Spirit of individuals. It is fundamentally wrong for individuals to seek after the Holy Spirit. Some people are deceived, and some have received evil spirits because of their individualism. Some do not see the Body. The vessel that the Lord is after today is a Body vessel, not individual vessels. Individual work and fruit can never satisfy the Lord's heart and never achieve God's ultimate goal. All of our work should be carried out in the principle of the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is an acknowledgment of identification and fellowship; it is also an acknowledgment that there is only one Body.

Hebrews 6:1-2 says, "Therefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us be brought on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God, of the teaching of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment." These six things belong to the word of the beginning, and they can be divided into three

categories. The first category includes two kinds of conduct. The second category includes two outward testimonies. The third category includes two doctrines concerning the future. The two kinds of conduct are repentance from dead works and faith in God, the two outward testimonies are baptism and the laying on of hands, and the two doctrines concerning the future are resurrection and judgment. We may not have neglected five of these things, but we have neglected one of them—the laying on of hands. Although the Bible does not explicitly tell us to practice the laying on of hands, it shows us that at the time of the apostles those who were saved were baptized, and they also received the laying on of hands. Baptism puts us into Christ, while the laying on of hands puts us into the Body. The laying on of hands is a testimony not only of our relationship with Christ but also of our relationship with the Body. It brings us under the authority of the Head so that we will no longer be independent and so that we will reject all individualistic living and work.

Paul said, "And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Once you have received the laying on of hands, you are no longer an individual; you become a member in the Body. Once a man has received the laying on of hands, he should stand in his proper position.

## THE LAYING ON OF HANDS FOR THE GIFT

Paul said to Timothy, "For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). This means that the gift which Timothy had received at the time of the laying on of hands needed to be revived and rekindled. First Timothy 4:14 says, "Do not neglect the gift which is in you, which was given to you by means of prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Here we see that the gift was given by the apostle with the presbytery by means of prophecy. They ushered Timothy into the Body through the laying on of hands, while the anointing bestowed the gift. While they laid their hands on Timothy and prayed for him, God gave one of them a prayer of prophecy, which foretold the kind of person that Timothy would be. This prayer governed the anointing. When an

experienced person lays his hands on others, his prayer will become the characteristic of the life of those on whom he lays his hands. This is the authority of the Head dispensing the proper gift through the laying on of hands of the representative members. Those who receive the laying on of hands should realize that from that day on they can no longer trust in themselves and no longer be independent. They are a part of the Body, and they can no longer seek their own benefit. Even if they seek after spiritual things, they have to seek them for the sake of the Body. Thereafter, the Lord can use them or others. When other members are used, they are no longer envious. Many people work in an individualistic way, and they pursue in an individualistic way. We have to ask God to deliver us from these things in the same way that we asked Him to deliver us from sin.

## PRAYER WITH THE ANOINTING OF OIL

James 5:14 says, "Is anyone among you ill? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This must be read in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 11:29-31: "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body. Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we would not be judged." Some become sick because they have acted contrary to physiological laws, while others become sick because they have acted contrary to the law in the Body of Christ. If a Christian does not discern the Body and does not act according to the rule of the Body, he will surely become weak and sick. This kind of sickness requires the elders' attention. The elders are appointed by God in a local church as representative members; they represent the Body of Christ in that locality. They should come and anoint the sick with oil.

Psalm 133:2 says, "It is like the fine oil upon the head/That ran down upon the beard,/Upon Aaron's beard,/That ran down to the hem of his garments." The ointment was poured on Aaron's head, and it ran down from his head to his garments. God's ointment is on Christ's head; it is an ointment which the Holy Spirit gives to the Son. Christians receive their ointment by coming under Christ

the Head. What does it mean for a sick man to ask the elders to pray for him? Suppose a man is sick. We can understand his sickness by looking at the medicine prescribed to him. When the elders are asked to come and anoint a sick man with oil, it means that he has detached himself from the ointment. If a Christian maintains his proper standing as a member, he will not lose his anointing. He becomes sick because he has not discerned the Body. The elders should bring the sick ones under the Head and recover them to the Body. If you live in the Body, you will not lose your anointing. If you leave the Body, you either become sick or you die. Brothers and sisters, everything will be well if you really see the life of the Body and live in the Body.

The sickness in James 5 is a special kind of sickness. We know that it is a special sickness and not an ordinary one because verse 15 says, "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him." What kind of sin did he commit? The sin he committed must have been the sin of being detached from the Body of Christ. If his sin were a personal sin, he would only need the blood, and he would be forgiven when he confessed to men and dealt with the sin. There would be no need to ask the elders to come and anoint him with oil before he could be forgiven. The anointing of the elders cannot remove sin; only the blood can wash us of our sins. Yet verse 15 says that if he sins, his sins will be forgiven. This forgiveness comes from the prayer of the elders. Hence, the sin in this verse is different from ordinary sins. This sin is the sin of walking contrary to the Body. This sin cannot be forgiven if one just prays to God; the elders need to pray for him before he can be forgiven. He has to look to others for this forgiveness.

Verse 16 is even more peculiar: "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The petition of a righteous man avails much in its working." This verse says that we should confess our sins to one another. We have to confess our sins to one another because something is wrong in the Body of Christ, and the mutual confession of sins is needed. The sick have to confess to the elders, and the elders have to confess to the sick. This shows that when one member is in trouble, the whole Body is responsible. If one member who has been healthy in all respects suddenly becomes sick, the elders

have to take responsibility for it. It may be that the elders have been lacking in love. It may be that the elders have been negligent in care. Therefore, the elders have to confess these sins. As for the sick, they have to confess the sin of acting independently and the sin of detaching themselves from the Body.

Not only do we have to confess our sins to one another, but we also have to pray for one another. Praying for one another is asking that the elders pray for the sick ones and that the sick ones pray for the elders. Hence, there is always the need for love and humility in the Body. If a person is detached from the Body, he will incur spiritual sickness as well as physical sickness. Whenever he is detached from the Body, he loses the anointing. Those who are outside the Body need to realize the importance of returning to the Body and coming under the anointing.

## THE REVELATION PAUL RECEIVED AT THE TIME OF HIS REPENTANCE

Acts 9 shows us two characteristics of the revelation that Paul received at the time of his repentance. On his way to Damascus, Paul saw a light from heaven, which shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (v. 4). The Lord said, "Why are you persecuting Me?" He did not say, "Why are you persecuting those who believe in Me?" Paul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (v. 5). The Lord showed Paul that all the believers are one with Him. This is the oneness between the Head and the Body. Paul was the first one in the Bible to see the testimony of the Body. One cannot touch the members without touching the Head. Never think that you can offend the brothers without offending Christ. You must remember that anyone who touches a small member of the Body touches the Head. The hurt is in the members, but the pain is felt in the Head.

Paul was a person who was greatly used by the Lord. Yet on the way to Damascus the Lord told him, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do" (v. 6). The Lord meant, "I will not tell you what you should do. Others will tell you." The Lord used others to tell him what he should

do. This was a revelation of the Body; it was a great revelation. The day that Paul was saved, the Lord showed him the principle of the Body. Although Paul was a vessel greatly used by the Lord, God chose another person to come to his aid. Brothers and sisters, never think that we have no need of others and that we can receive everything from the Lord by ourselves. I am not saying that we should follow blindly or that we should go along with others all the time. I am saying that we should not have the attitude that we can receive God's word by ourselves and solve every problem by ourselves. What did Paul do? "And Saul rose from the ground; and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. And they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without seeing, and he neither ate nor drank" (vv. 8-9). Paul was in the city for three days before anyone came to tell him what to do. Had he been impatient, he would not have been able to endure this. After three days, Ananias came. The name Ananias had not been mentioned before this, and we do not see his name mentioned after this. He was not a famous person. Yet the Lord seized him by His authority and sent him to help the greatest of all apostles. The great apostle could not enlighten his understanding by himself; he needed a little brother who was not known by many to open his understanding. Once Ananias met Paul, he laid hands on Paul and said, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Laying hands on Paul and calling him "Saul, brother" led him into the Body and filled him with the Holy Spirit; this brought him under the anointing.

Often the inner leading of the Holy Spirit leads us to the leading of others; He leads us to receive help from others. If we refuse help from others, we will lose many things. Some Christians make decisions according to their own feelings. Where then is the Body? They are living fully in the realm of individualism; they do not see the Body. Brothers and sisters, please consider how many of our actions in the past were in the Body. We have to see that we are members and that we are restricted. We have to receive help from other members. May the Lord show us the Body now. The kind of people who have seen the Body are those who seek fellowship, who are afraid of making mistakes,

and who dare not work individualistically.

## THE JUDGMENT OF THE BROTHERS

Matthew 18:15-16 says, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." It does not say that your brother has to feel that he is wrong; rather, it says that if two or three brothers say that he is wrong, he is wrong. It is a matter of whether or not he is wrong. It is not a matter of whether or not he feels that he is wrong. Suppose a brother says to you, "You have offended me in a certain way." However, you do not feel that you were wrong, and you pray. After you pray, you may still feel that you were not wrong; therefore, you may tell the brother, "Although you said that I offended you, I do not feel that way. I have prayed and still feel that I have not offended you. I did not pray lightly; I prayed seriously, but I do not feel that I was wrong. I am not reluctant to confess my wrong; I would much rather admit that I was wrong, but I do not see that I was wrong." Then the brother may tell another brother, and both of them come and say that you are wrong. You are a humble person and do not want to refuse confession, yet you do not see any wrong. You feel that you cannot confess your wrong. After you pray again, there may still be no change. However, at that point the Lord may say, "When the brothers say that you are wrong, you are wrong no matter how you feel."

Matthew 18:20 reveals the reason that we are wrong even when we think we are right—the brothers think we are wrong. "For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." It is wrong to take this verse as a promise. The Lord had no intention that this verse be used as the basis for seeking His presence. This verse says that when two or three are gathered into His name, He is in their midst. The meaning of being gathered into His name is to be free from individualism, no longer trusting in oneself, but standing on the ground of the Body of Christ. When we all have Christ, He will be in our midst. If two or three deny themselves and stand for Christ, the Lord will manifest Himself. When they are in harmony with one another, they will have the Body.

When we stand on the ground of the Body, the Lord's authority is there. When Christ is in our midst, we can represent Christ. Hence, when brothers see that we are wrong and we do not see that we are wrong, we should listen to the two or three rather than to ourselves. I am not saying that we should listen to others indiscriminately. I am saying that if two or three deny themselves and are gathered into the Lord's name, we would be wise to accept and trust their judgment and to admit that we are wrong.

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There are four kinds of people in the church who can represent the Body: (1) apostles, (2) elders, (3) individual believers who are commissioned by the Lord, such as Ananias who was commissioned by the Lord to speak to Paul, and (4) the two or three believers who have denied themselves and gathered into the Lord's name. These four groups of people represent the Body. If you are wrong, the Lord will send an individual believer to come and speak to you. If you do not take the word of the individual believer, he will tell two or three other believers. If you do not take the word of the two or three believers, the elders should come to help you. You cannot act individualistically. Many unsolvable problems require the apostles to come. They are the ones the Lord has chosen particularly to represent the Body. We should inform the elders and the apostles of all important matters, lest there be any ambiguity. We should do this in order to receive their help. We cannot neglect the Body and cannot neglect the representatives of the Body. If we neglect the representatives of the Body, we will not be able to practice the Body life. May God grant us not only the revelation of the Body but also the testimony of the Body, and may He cause us to submit to the representatives of the Body.

Once a man is saved, he is brought into the fellowship of the Body. May the Lord cause us to submit not only to the Lord but also to the Body. May the Lord truly deliver us from individualistic and independent acts so that we can fully live out the Body life.

# MESSAGE TEN

## SERVING AS MEMBERS

## •Outline

### •One—Two

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:4-5

Rom. 12:4-5 "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

### ONE

Brothers and sisters, we know that we are believers. But how many of us know that we are not just believers but members as well? We know that part of the Adamic life is sinful and natural, and we have to deal with both of these things. However, we also have to deal with the individualistic life. What is the individualistic life? It is the life that exists independently, lives independently, and acts independently. It is the life which lives as if it is the only life on this earth. This individualistic life frustrates us from being blended into the Body of Christ. We must realize that the opposite of the Body is individualism. In order to be blended into the Body, we have to be delivered from our individualism.

The Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is something that we have to enter into. If we do not enter into the Body, we will not know the Body. Those who are saved can easily spot those who are not yet saved. In the same way, those who are in the Body can easily spot those who are not in the Body. At the time you were saved, you did not merely hear the doctrine of salvation; you saw Christ as a vibrant life. Some are in the Body of Christ already, while others are not in it. Brothers and sisters, when you were saved, you were brought into a new realm. After you entered that new realm, you clearly could see the condition of those

who were not saved. In the same way, those who are living in the Body clearly see the condition of those who are not in the Body. Those who are not in the Body of Christ feel that they are the only person living on the earth and that they are everything. A man can understand the book of Romans and still not be saved. In the same way, a man can understand the book of Ephesians and still not see the Body of Christ. We are delivered from sin, and we are in Christ. It is true that we are saved, but we need another salvation that delivers us from individualism into the Body of Christ.

It is all right for us to live as individuals, but it is not all right for us to be individualistic. God allows us to be individuals, but He does not allow us to be individualistic. Before we enter the Body of Christ, we are saturated with individualism; even our spiritual pursuit is based on our individualism. Why do we want to be holy? We want to be holy for ourselves. Why do we want power? We want power for ourselves. Why do we want fruit for our work? We want fruit for ourselves. Why do we pursue the kingdom? We pursue it because we ourselves want to gain it. Why are we seeking? We are seeking for ourselves. Everything is centered around "ourselves." But this is not the Body. This is individualism. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people were saved. We may think that it would be wonderful if we could save three thousand in one day and bear so much fruit, but we have to remember that eleven apostles also stood up together with Peter. Did the other apostles say, "Peter can save men, and so can we. Is Peter the only one who can have a platform and who can save men?" We know, of course, that no such words were spoken. God is not after individual vessels; He is after a corporate vessel. Those who have genuinely seen the Body of Christ are not jealous of others. It does not matter who is doing the work. Everything is in the Body and has nothing to do with individuals.

Therefore, we must consider ourselves not only as believers but also as members. I am a member; therefore, I am not the whole or even the half. I am only a small part of the Body. If you see the Body and see that you are only a member, this will be a great salvation to you. In the past you might have considered everything in an individualistic way. Your work was an individual work, and your life was an individual life. Everything was individual. When you

see the Body, you are spontaneously delivered from individualism. You see Christ, and then you are saved. In the same principle, you see the Body, and then you are spontaneously delivered from individualism to become a member. You do not look at a situation that confronts you and then deliberate whether or not you should act according to the principle of the Body. Rather, you receive the vision and revelation and are brought into the Body. Then spontaneously you act according to the principle of the Body. Once your natural life is dealt with, you spontaneously see that you are a member.

What does being a member mean? It means that all of our work and living are based on the Body; the Body is the unit of operation. When my hands work, it is not my hands that are working, but my body that is working. When my feet walk, it is not my feet that are walking, but my body that is walking. Every move of the members has the Body as its unit of operation. What one member does is what the whole Body does. When the members walk, the Body is walking. Nothing that the members do is for themselves. Everything that the members do is for the Body. Every move of the members is based on the Body, not on the members. We are happy if God puts us in the first place, and equally happy even if He puts us in the last place. Only the ones who do not see the Body can be proud, and only they can be jealous of others.

We have to see the relationship between the members and the Body. A member cannot replace the Body; yet it can affect the Body. Even our personal failures or uncleanness affect the Body. Although no one knows or sees our own personal, hidden failures, the devil knows and sees. When a member fails, the Body is affected. Therefore, our pursuit of a life of love, holiness, and spiritual growth is something for the Body.

Brothers and sisters, we should ask ourselves, "Are we independent persons, or are we members? Are we merely believers, or are we members?" Brothers and sisters, it is true that we are Christians, but when we contact others, we may be at odds with them in less than five minutes; we cannot be one with them. This proves that we are not living as a member. The Lord is not satisfied with this. May He give us light so that we will have a clear vision of this. Once we see the Body, spontaneously we will be delivered from individualism, and spontaneously

we will become living members.

If our individualism is not smashed, God cannot secure a vessel to fulfill His plan or express the fullness of Christ. God wants a Body to be His vessel. Yet this vessel can only be realized when all the members are joined together as a Body; anything less falls short of God's goal.

## TWO

Every member has a part in the service of the Body of Christ. Everyone who belongs to the Lord has his portion and has Christ living within. Everyone has received something special, and this becomes the special portion of his service. We serve the Body with what we have received of Christ.

Our portion of service in the Body of Christ is based on our knowledge of Christ. This knowledge is not a common knowledge; common knowledge is not enough. Only by having a specific knowledge of Christ can we have a specific ministry to serve the Body of Christ. Our special service is based on our special knowledge of Christ. We can only serve after we have learned something that others have not learned, something special from the Lord, some special knowledge of Christ. The eyes see, the ears hear, and the nose smells. Every part has a special function. It is not necessary for all the members to see, hear, or smell. Yet every member has something special that they can do; that is their ministry. What is our special ministry? It is what we have learned from the Lord, what we have acquired in a particular way from Him. Once we have a special knowledge of Christ, that knowledge becomes our particular ministry. Only those who have a special ministry can serve the Body and cause the Body to grow. Only that which comes from above can cause the Body to grow. Only after we have learned something from the Lord can we transmit the life of the Head to the Body, and only then can we supply the church with what it does not have. Therefore, every member must press on continually and must receive from the Lord what the Body has not yet received and transmit that to the Body of Christ. Today the Lord is seeking men into whom He can dispense His life and through whom the life of the Body can grow. Through these ones the church will receive a measure of life which it has not yet received. The measure of the church's stature

will increase, and they will become a channel of life to the Body. When the life which they have received from the Lord flows out to others, the stature of the Body of Christ grows. God is increasing the stature of the Body of Christ through the members.

The meaning of serving the Body of Christ is to receive life from the Head for the supply of the Body. It is to transmit the life that is in the Head to the church. When the eyes see, the body sees. The eyes supply the body with their seeing; this is what it means to serve as members. The hands cannot detect the smell of an object; it takes the nose to serve the body with its smelling function. Smell is the specific ministry of the nose. The ears serve the body with their hearing. Hearing is the specific ministry of the ears. The result of the work of every ministry is the growth of the stature of the Body. In other words, it is the Body gaining more of Christ. The ministry of the members is the ministry of Christ to the church; it is to dispense Christ to others.

Service in the Body of Christ is based on the knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge does not come from doctrines; rather, it comes from the experience of life. One great problem is that many people replace life with doctrines. Doctrines are useless. Even if one becomes very familiar with doctrines and can recite and speak about them, he can still be completely blind and ignorant. A man does not receive help through understanding doctrines. Understanding doctrines only provides more thoughts for the mind. God needs life to express the doctrines. God first gives us life, and then He gives us the doctrines. This is true in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

God first gained Abraham as a man of faith. When others see Abraham, they see the doctrine of faith. Abel saw that man could not come to God without the shedding of blood. Hence, Abel carries with him the doctrine of justification in the blood (Rom. 5:9).

First there is life, and then there is the doctrine. First there is the problem, and then there is the solution. First there is the experience, and then there is the doctrine. Martin Luther went through painful experiences in search of justification. One day God showed him that man is justified by faith. Through faith he was justified. Later we were given the doctrine of justification by faith.

First there is life, and then there is doctrine.

We must never spend all our time in researching, analyzing, or studying doctrines. These are works of reeds; they will not help us when we are faced with real difficulties. The only things that will be of any use to us are the experiences that God brings us through. Experience must come first; then doctrine can follow.

The New Testament begins with the Gospels. The Epistles are after the Gospels. The Gospels tell us what Christ did, and the Epistles explain the reasons. First there are the experiences of Christ, and then there are the doctrines of Christ. First we have the life of Christ, and then we have the teachings of Christ.

If a man does not have a special knowledge of Christ, he cannot have a ministry. A man will have a ministry only after he receives something special from Christ. Whatever special function a member has becomes the ministry of that member. The hand has its special functions, and these special functions become its ministry. God allows all kinds of pain, discipline, and trial to come upon us in order to constitute us with His word and so that we can have something to give to the Body. Other than Christ and other than life, nothing will minister to the Body of Christ. Christ is life, and the church will be built up only when Christ is supplied to it. Those who do not have life can kill a prayer meeting even when they say, "Amen." In contrast, those who have life can supply a prayer meeting with a simple word of "Amen." When a person of life sits in a meeting, others will feel the life. The measure of knowledge of Christ determines the amount of life supplied to the church.

Today God is looking for men. He wants to deposit great measures of Christ's life into them so that they can become a supply to others. Life requires a channel. God wants man to become a channel of life, through whom life can be transmitted to the Body. If life stops in you, you will not be able to supply others with life, and the church will suffer loss. You will be spreading death, not supplying life to the church. Failures of individuals invariably cause damage to the church. This is why all the members suffer when one member suffers in the Body of Christ. You may fail or neglect your prayer in your private room, but the Body will be the one who suffers. Every member affects everyone else. We must

not live by ourselves; we must hold to the Head and seek fellowship. Before we make any decision, we should first seek fellowship. Everything has to be in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body. We should do things in the Body and not as individuals. We should do things through the Body and not through individuals, and we should do things for the Body and not for individuals. May God open our eyes to see the Body, and may we serve the church with our ministry, a ministry which comes from our knowledge of Christ.

# MESSAGE ELEVEN

## THE FUNCTION AND HARMONY OF THE MEMBERS

### •Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:12-13, 15-16

Eph. 4:12-13 "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,"

15-16 "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love."

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One of the most important aspects of the walk of a person who lives for the Lord and who is free from the self is his function in the Body of Christ. In the Body of Christ, every member has a function. This is a fact. If you do not function as a member, this proves that you do not live for the Lord and that you are not yet free from your self. If you are free from your self inwardly, your living will spontaneously manifest the particular function that you have as a member of the Body of Christ. Whether you are a brother or a sister, you have a function in the church. You may feel that you are living for the Lord and that you are free from your self, but your feeling is not reliable as long as you are not functioning as a member in the Body.

If you are truly free from your self and truly living for the Lord, you will surely have your function as a brother or a sister in the church. Brothers and sisters, we should not deceive ourselves by thinking that we are free from the self and that we are living for the Lord. If we have not reached this stage yet and

our function has not been realized in the church, this is a strong proof that we are not yet living for the Lord outwardly and are not free from our self inwardly. If we are truly freed from our self inwardly and living for the Lord outwardly, we will function in the Body of Christ spontaneously.

Brothers and sisters, we should never think that the grace we have received is too small and that we have no function in the church or in the Body of Christ. As long as we are members, we have a definite function. Everyone who has the life of God is a member of the Body of Christ, and no member is so small that he does not have any function. Even the least of all the members has a function in the Body. We must never despise any member or consider him to be so small that he does not have a function. Every member has a function, and his function cannot be replaced by any other member. No matter how small his function is, no one can replace that function. The greatest function cannot replace the smallest function. Every member has a particular function, and no one else can replace him. I cannot replace your function, and you cannot replace my function. If we see this, we will jump with joy.

It is no wonder that there is a need for so many apostles. The Gospels in the New Testament were written by four people. When we read the Gospel of Matthew, we see one aspect of Christ. When we read the Gospel of Mark, we see another aspect of Christ. When we read the Gospel of Luke or the Gospel of John, we see yet other aspects of Christ—His holiness and His glory. When we read the Epistles of Peter, we see the greatness of Christ. When we read Paul's Epistles, we find things expressed in another way. When we read the Epistles of John, we find that he described the excellencies of Christ in a way like no one else.

Our Lord is so great that He requires all the believers past and present, here and everywhere, and throughout all the ages to express Him adequately. Brothers and sisters, the outflow of life is the expression of Christ. The Body is where life is manifested. This life is one; however, when it is expressed in different members, it is manifested in different functions. When this life flows to the ears, the ears hear. When this life flows to the eyes, the eyes see. When this life flows to the feet, the feet walk. When this life flows to the mouth, the mouth speaks. When this life flows to the teeth, the teeth bite. The life is one, yet there

are many functions. Although the functions are different, the life remains one. Brothers and sisters, what flows into you is the same as what flows into me; it is the life of Christ. Yet the function that is manifested in you is different from the function that is manifested in me. Many times the work that one brother is able to do could never be done by another brother. For certain things you have to go to certain brothers, and for certain other things you have to go to certain sisters. It will not work if you use another person. As a member you have a special function. The function which is manifested in you through the inflow of Christ's life can never be replaced by another. It does not matter how small you are, you will always have a function as a member.

Brothers and sisters, you can test yourself in the following way: If you are in a local church and your function has not been manifested, this proves that your living outwardly is not for the Lord and that your life inwardly is not yet freed from the self. This is a very specific test. I am not saying that you have a small function; I am saying that it does not seem to matter whether or not you are in the church. If your function is not manifested, you are not living for the Lord outwardly, and you are not yet broken by Him inwardly. We must realize that in order for the Lord to preach the gospel, carry out His work, and fulfill His will on earth, He must work through His Body. The Lord's will and way cannot be accomplished through one man. He cannot carry out His work through one man; He has to do it through the church.

The vessel that God uses is not individuals but the church. The life and power of Christ can only be fully manifested through the Body. Hence, the chief work of Satan is to "disintegrate" the Body. He is trying his best to do this. If we consider everything from this view, we will see the seriousness of Satan's work of disintegration. Brothers and sisters are suspicious of one another, and misunderstandings abound; this is the disintegrating work of Satan. We may complain about a brother or murmur against a sister, but if we looked into the reason for this, we would find that there is no great reason other than Satan's disintegrating work among us. Satan wants to divide God's children; he wants to disintegrate them. God's work is to integrate us, whereas Satan's work is to disintegrate us. He is doing his disintegrating work through our corrupted flesh,

our strong self, and the world we love. Strictly speaking, the most crucial matter is not whether we deal with the flesh, deny ourselves, or love the world. The crucial matter is that Satan is doing his disintegrating work through these things. When we allow these things to remain in us, we are giving ground to Satan.

Brothers and sisters, what is oneness? Oneness is God Himself. Why do we say that oneness is God Himself? When we drop all the things outside of God and live in God, He Himself becomes the oneness within us. Oneness is God gaining the full ground within us—we are after God and God is filling us. Only when God's children are filled with God can they be in harmony with one another. Satan does not need to make us argue or fight with one another. As long as he can put a little impurity within us and as long as there are things that usurp the place of God, this is enough to disintegrate us. Whenever mud sticks to the sand that is used in mixing cement, the resulting concrete will not be compact. In order to destroy the oneness, Satan does not have to do much; all he has to do is sprinkle a little dust within us—things that are incompatible with God's life—and we will be disintegrated. There is no need for us to argue or fight. As long as he can sprinkle a little dust within us, that is enough. We can still break bread and drink the cup together, but we are disintegrated.

The Body of Christ is absolutely not a doctrine or an organization; it is a life. What is the church? The church is not a matter of scriptural doctrines or scriptural ways. The church is a life; it is the expression of the life of Christ. Oneness is only in life. There is no need for argument or dispute; as long as Satan can put a little impurity in us and others, we will become disintegrated unconsciously! May the Lord be merciful to us and remove all impurities in us, and may He sift us with the cross and the indwelling Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, do our own inclinations occupy a place within us? Do our own goals occupy a place within us? Does our own work occupy a place within us? Or do we allow the life of Christ to have all the ground within us? Every one of us has to turn back to God. We do not need outward revivals. We have only one need—to turn back to God, allowing Him to cleanse us and sift us with the cross and the Spirit. We pray that the sifting work of the cross and the Spirit will remove the satanic mixture within us. In order for this to happen, we

have to turn back to God.

May the Lord be merciful to us so that we will not put any trust in ourselves. Brothers and sisters, even right things can be used by Satan to disintegrate us. We have to learn to turn back to God and receive His enlightening, and we have to learn to go to the brothers and sisters and receive their corrections. We have to learn to pay the greatest price to receive the dealing of the cross so that we can function as members in the church. Have we not said that we love the Lord? Have we not said that we are consecrated? If we have, we have to leave no ground for ourselves and be ready to pay any price. May the Lord cleanse us and remove the mixture and elements that cause disharmony so that the life of Christ can be expressed through us and so that through this same one life we can manifest the functions of the members and live out the testimony of the Body of Christ.

# MESSAGE TWELVE

## LIFE IN THE DEPTHS

## ●Outline

- ●A Shallow Life
  - ▫Shallowness of Ground
  - ▫Lacking in Root
  - ▫The Rocky Place
- ●The Scorching Of The Sun
- ●Life In The Depths

## ●Scripture Reading: Mark 4:5-6, 16-17; Hosea 14:5-7; S.S. 4:12

Mark 4:5-6 "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered."

16-17 "And likewise, these are the ones being sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. Yet they have no root in themselves, but last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled."

Hosea 14:5-7 "I will be like the dew to Israel; / He will bud like the lily / And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon. His shoots will go forth; / And his splendor will be like that of the olive tree, / And his fragrance, like that of the trees of Lebanon. Those who sit under his shade will return; / They will revive like grain / And will bud like the vine; / His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon."

S.S. 4:12 "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, / A spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

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From the above three passages we can see the kind of Christian living that God delights in and the kind of living that is enduring and unchanging, one that survives blows and withstands tests. Why do some Christians look quite promising at the beginning of their Christian experience, yet are nowhere to be found after a period of time? Why do some drop out halfway? Why are some unable to follow the Lord to the end? The answer is very much related to the way a Christian lives. If a Christian does not live a normal Christian life, he is shaky, and it is easy for him to drop out. Therefore, we must not neglect this problem.

## A SHALLOW LIFE

Mark 4:5-6 says, "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered." This is one of the many parables the Lord Jesus spoke on the sowing of seeds. In verses 16 and 17 the Lord explains the parable to the disciples: "And likewise, these are the ones being sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. Yet they have no root in themselves, but last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled." From the Lord's explanation we see that a shallow life cannot endure or stand the test of trials. Apparently this kind of life has a good start, but eventually, it ends miserably. The appearance of this kind of life is that "immediately it sprang up." Since it has sprung up, the outer shell of the seed has burst, and it has sprouted. This means that the word is no longer merely a doctrine to a person. It has been transformed into life. It has sprouted and sprung up immediately. As far as its appearance is concerned, it has advanced very fast and progressed in a wonderful way. One should be satisfied with such a growth. However, its end is disappointing because it becomes scorched when the sun comes up and it withers away. It springs up immediately but withers quickly. Sprouts that cannot withstand the heat of the sun have little hope of ripening and wither away quickly.

This is the condition of many Christians. Shortly after they hear the word, they receive it with joy under the illusion that they have everything, understand everything, and are prepared to pay any price and embark on any way. Before God they have the will and the consecration; before men they bear their testimony and zeal. However, when trials soon befall them, they immediately shake and become dismayed. They find things to be unbearable. They flinch through fear and eventually fall away. Brothers and sisters, as long as we are Christians, the scorching of the sun is indispensable; it helps our growth and assists our ripening. If we are shaken and fall away as soon as we meet the scorching of the sun, it indicates that we are shallow. The scorching of the sun only exposes our true condition; it will not rob us of what we really possess. Does the word of God wither at the scorching of the sun? No. The problem is how we received the word. Why does God's word sprout immediately and then wither away as soon as it is exposed to the scorching of the sun? What is the reason for this? The Bible shows us three reasons.

## Shallowness of Ground

The first reason that the word withers away is the shallowness of the ground. This means there is not much soil and consequently no depth; there is only a little soil on the ground. A Christian with shallow ground has very little inside of him. When such a person hears the word, every sentence seems to be well received and easily comprehended. He is apt to relay the word to other people and ready to bear witness before men. However, it is just as easy for this kind of person to lose the truth, overthrow the truth, and deny what he has said to other people. He is satisfied easily, and he becomes hungry easily. He is happy and sad easily; he is excited and cooled easily; he laughs and weeps easily. Such a person is very shallow; he lives in his emotions and circumstances.

We know that if a tree is big, its roots must be deep. Some trees can reach a depth of several hundred feet. A tree which cannot absorb water from the surface will send its roots deep until it finds a source of water. The palm trees in the Arabian Desert survive with green foliage, despite the scorching of the sun, because they draw water from the depths, enabling them to defy the blazing sun.

If a Christian sends his roots down, he will not need to fear the scorching of the sun. Everyone who lives by his circumstances or in his feelings is living on shallow ground. Those who are prone to be swayed by their emotions or influenced by circumstances are similarly shallow. However, those whose lives are deeply rooted do not care about their circumstances; they do not live by feeling but solely by faith. They do not look to or depend upon circumstances. Instead they look to the Lord behind the circumstances. Such persons receive their sustenance, support, and power from God instead of from the circumstances. If a person lives by his emotions and circumstances, instead of trusting in the Lord behind the circumstances, he will not be able to hold fast to a single truth or teaching. When circumstances are favorable, he will be energetic and elated, but as soon as he encounters trials, he will become disheartened and depressed. He will fall as soon as he is confronted with the cross. Brothers and sisters, if you retreat when trials come, it proves that you are a shallow person. When the sun scorches, you will wither away immediately.

## Lacking in Root

The second reason that the word withers away is the lack of root. What are roots? The section of a tree that is above the ground is the trunk, and the section that is hidden under the ground is the root. The visible life-section is the branches; the invisible life-section is the root. Therefore, the root represents the hidden life. Those who are rootless in the Lord live a dry life. Those who have no hidden spiritual life, except that which is manifest before men, have no root. The root is the hidden, invisible part. What is exposed and visible is not the root. Brothers and sisters, we should ask ourselves: Besides the part of our life which is visible before men, how much hidden life do we have before the Lord? If all that we have is that which is exposed, it is no wonder that we wither away as soon as the sun comes and scorches us. In our spiritual life nothing sustains us like the hidden life. If we see a brother or sister falling away, do not regard the fall as an accidental or sudden occurrence. Instead, we should realize that there must be something wrong with his hidden life before God. Since he has no root, he falls when the sun rises to scorch him.

In Matthew 6:6 the Lord Jesus said, "But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." To shut the door is to have a hidden life, and this is to have roots. The Lord spoke in a very peculiar way: The Father will see in secret. Oh, praying can be seen! We think that praying is heard, but the Lord said that it is seen. Sometimes when we are before the Lord, we have no words; there is only an attitude—this is precious also. Brothers and sisters, what proportion of our life is seen by God in secret? Is all that we have apparent before men? How much of our spiritual life before God has never been divulged? How much experience do we have which is comparable to what Paul kept secret from other people for fourteen years (2 Cor. 12:2)? If we have none, it indicates that we have no root. If we are persons without root, we will immediately fall away when the sun comes up to scorch us. Brothers and sisters, only the part of us which can survive the test of trials is reliable. If our roots are not deep enough, we are bound to fail.

## The Rocky Place

The third reason that the word withers away is that there are rocks underneath the shallow earth. A person with shallow earth may be willing to send his roots deep, but rocks may obstruct them. Outwardly, he is the same as other people, but within him there are hidden sins and a hardened self. In the Bible the word rock has several meanings—one relates to a stony heart (Ezek. 36:26). If we wish to send our spiritual roots deep, we should not harden our hearts (Heb. 3:8). Many Christians have never experienced the breaking of their concepts and have never been broken. They give many reasons to reject God's will and insist on their own views. They always have opinions as to whether something should be done this way or that way. They have rocks within, and their hearts are very hard. God has to blast these inner rocks away before they can strike their roots. There is only one kind of people who can strike roots: those who tremble at the word of the Lord (Isa. 66:5). Brothers and sisters, a heart that is not submissive to God is a stony heart. We should ask God to enlighten us and show us how big the rocks within us are. If we have rocks inside,

we cannot strike roots, and when the sun comes up and scorches, how can we escape from withering away?

Rocks not only stand for a hardened heart but also for hidden sins. Perhaps there is a particular sin in your life which you have not given up because the price is too high, and you do not have the courage to deal with it. Perhaps God's demand is strong; consequently, you reason and argue with God because you cannot obey. If you allow your hidden sins to remain, you cannot strike roots. When the sun comes up and scorches, how can you escape from withering away?

## THE SCORCHING OF THE SUN

Brothers and sisters, without light we will not realize how shallow we are. Without the scorching of the sun, we will not understand why those who spring up fast also wither away fast. How often we are deceived into complacency with our spiritual state! Yet we regard ourselves as wonderful people! To our great surprise, when the sun comes up and scorches us, we immediately wither away.

Why does God permit the scorching of the sun to come to us? Why does He allow difficulties to befall us? Brothers and sisters, this is the ultimate expression of the Lord's love—the cross. There is nothing which can cultivate our spiritual life as much as the cross; no trial can be better than the cross. When we heard the word of truth, we immediately accepted it with joy and consecrated ourselves to God. Perhaps we fancied that we were all right. In reality we overestimated ourselves. God purposely sent us trials and the cross so that we would see ourselves. Yet sometimes we end up having an argument with God because He acts contrary to our expectations. He tells us to go to places that we do not want to go to. He assigns us to work that we do not want to do. Therefore, we are dissatisfied. Inevitably, we misunderstand God, blame God, and have an argument with Him. Brothers and sisters, please remember that arguments bring us into dryness. All spiritual dryness has its beginnings in our controversy with God. If God gives way and we win, we will be doomed to wither away.

Therefore, the cross is a test to us; it decides whether our life will end in richness or dryness. In other words, whether our life will be abundant or dry depends on how we deal with our argument with God. If we prevail and God

yields, the only result for our life will be dryness. Therefore, we must never rejoice in our apparent victory or delight in our freedom. This merely points out the fact that our life is withering away and that our living will soon degenerate. The experience of many Christians testifies to this fact. Our life does not remain abundant when God yields. If there is an unresolved dispute, an unsolved problem, or an unclarified point between God and ourselves concerning His will, we must be extremely careful. If we are double-minded and not satisfied with God's arrangement, choosing the path which we consider to be good, we will not have to wait until the issue becomes apparent; we will begin to wither away immediately.

Brothers and sisters, we should not imagine that we can acquire something simply by listening to a message. God has to create an environment for us to actually feel the need for the word we hear. This will test whether we have accepted the word genuinely or superficially. God has to create an environment to show us that no teaching of the Bible can be ours without paying a price. For example, after we have listened to a word on endurance, God will arrange tribulation for us because "tribulation produces endurance" (Rom. 5:3). After we have heard a word on obedience, God will confront us with hardship so that we can learn obedience from the things which we suffer (Heb. 5:8). After we have heard a word on gentleness, God will bring us face to face with many irritating people and matters so that we will be "gentle toward all" (2 Tim. 2:24). After we have heard a word on faith, God will seem to hide Himself from us and take no notice of us when we call upon Him so that we will not "doubt in unbelief" but be "empowered by faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20). Each time we hear a word, something always seems to be waiting to test us. Brothers and sisters, if we can stand the test, the word will become real in us.

God will never allow us to simply listen to a message or consecrate ourselves; He must test us. He can only use the vessels which stand firm after the tests. Once an older sister, long in the service of the Lord, spoke to a young brother who was about to embark on the Lord's service, and said, "Every piece of bread that is consecrated to the Lord's hands must be broken before it can be distributed to others. Unbroken bread cannot multiply and will not sustain

others' lives. We often consecrate ourselves to God yet hope in our heart: `Lord, I have consecrated myself to You, but please do not break me up!' We all want the bread to remain intact forever and stay permanently untouched. But every piece of bread in the Lord's hands must be broken. If you do not want to be broken, do not place yourself in His hands." Brothers and sisters, these are words of experience by one who knew the Lord. All the bread that is placed in the Lord's hands will be broken by Him. This is where the difficulty lies with many Christians. They listen to a sermon and joyfully say, "Lord, I consecrate everything to You." But when the Lord breaks them, they yearn to be delivered from their environment. Brothers and sisters, on the one hand, we are captured by God, but on the other hand, we are unwilling to be broken by Him. This is a struggling life. If we want to have an abundant life, we must allow God to send many trials to us.

## LIFE IN THE DEPTHS

Hosea 14:5-7 reads, "I will be like the dew to Israel;/He will bud like the lily/And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon./His shoots will go forth;/And his splendor will be like that of the olive tree,/And his fragrance, like that of the trees of Lebanon./Those who sit under his shade will return;/They will revive like grain/And will bud like the vine;/His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon." In this passage, Lebanon is spoken of three times: once in relation to the lily, once in relation to the olive tree, and once in relation to the vine. Why is there such an emphasis on Lebanon? There is such an emphasis because the cedars on the mountain of Lebanon are very tall and the roots are very deep. The Bible uses the cedars of Lebanon to represent the tallest and biggest trees on earth; they also signify people who strike their roots deep. In this passage Lebanon is first spoken of with reference to the lily, then the olive tree, and finally the vine. For the Bible to speak in this way is profoundly significant. Let us briefly consider these verses.

Why is the lily linked to Lebanon? A lily is pure and beautiful. The lily that is referred to grows in the wilderness, not in a house garden. No gardener cultivates this lily; it depends solely upon sunshine, rain, and dew for sustenance.

Christians are lilies of the valleys (S.S. 2:1); we rely entirely upon God's cultivation and maintenance. A pure and beautiful spiritual life is derived from uninterrupted fellowship with God. Hence, "he will bud like the lily/And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon."

Why is the olive tree linked to Lebanon? In the eyes of man, an olive tree has no splendor at all. If we said that something has splendor like a peony plant, it would be easy to understand. But to compare splendor to an olive tree does not sound very appropriate. However, the Bible shows us that splendor to God is not a superficial splendor but genuine fruit. The olive tree bears oil-yielding drupe—its splendor is in its fruit. The splendor of a Christian is in the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. This can be achieved only by going inward and striking roots in the depths. Therefore, his splendor is said to be as the olive tree and his fragrance as Lebanon.

Why is the vine linked to Lebanon? The verse says, "They will...bud like the vine." Have we ever seen the budding of a vine? Vine blossoms are tiny! Very soon after budding, the buds are turned into grapes. We never see vine blossoms in a flower vase. Why does the verse not say that the budding is like that of the peach tree or the chrysanthemum? This is because the budding which God honors is not something for man's appreciation but something that bears fruit like the vine. God requires a Christian to strike roots and bear fruit abundantly. That is why the verse says that they shall bud like the vine and their renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

Lebanon is referred to three times—all for the purpose of drawing attention to a life in the depths. Although this life in the depths is a secluded life (like the lily in the valley), a life that is outwardly unattractive (like the olive tree), and a life that is not prominent (like the budding vine), it looks to God in simplicity and is capable of bearing much fruit. This is the kind of life a Christian should have. Yet it is impossible to have this kind of life unless one strikes deep roots; there has to be a regular daily exercise. We must set aside a little time every day to pray and study God's Word—reading and praying simultaneously in the presence of God. If possible, we should also appropriate some time to pray for the saints, the churches, and God's work. If a Christian does not read the Bible or

pray every morning, he simply does not have any life in the depths. To strike roots is not a matter of words but is an actual practice in our daily life. At the beginning of this practice, one has to pay a price. May God's love attract and lead us into the depths day after day so that our roots may go down deeper and deeper.

In order to live a life in the depths, it is necessary to have direct and intimate fellowship with the Lord. Song of Songs 4:12 says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse;/a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." What is spoken of here is a garden. According to the Bible, a garden is God's very first thought. A garden is not an ordinary plot of land; it is not for general- purpose planting. Neither is it a field, which is specifically for tillage. A garden exists solely for the purpose of beauty and enjoyment. In a garden there may be trees, but their purpose is not for wood. There may be fruit trees, but their purpose is not for fruit bearing. The importance of a garden is in its flowers. They are planted only for their beauty. Flowers are for the pleasure of the eyes. The description of the garden as "enclosed" means that it is not a public park which everybody has access to for enjoyment. Rather, it is enclosed exclusively for Christ. The inward beauty is to be seen and appreciated by Christ alone. This kind of life is not one that pleases men but one that only pleases Christ. This life is "a spring shut up." The word "spring" can be translated "well." A well is for man's use. Although this well is for man's use, it is still under the restriction of the Lord. This life is also "a fountain sealed." A well is produced artificially, but a fountain is not. A well is for man, but a fountain is for God. A fountain stands for the joy and contentment we acquire before God. We cannot consciously divulge our experience to men, because it is a sealed fountain.

A Christian should not consciously exhibit his beauty, pursuit, and spiritual experience to others. Everything should be silently sealed up for the Lord. Only this kind of life in the depths will satisfy the Lord's heart.

Brothers and sisters, our life is often too shallow, and a large portion of it is exposed on the surface. May the Lord grant us grace and do a deeper work in us through the cross so that we may strike roots and have a life in the depths to fulfill God's requirements and satisfy His heart.

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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 8



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 8

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## MESSAGE ONE

# THE BLOOD AND A WORSHIP

# THAT DRAWS NEAR TO GOD

## •Scripture Reading: Heb. 10:19-25

Heb. 10:19-25 "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, Which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh, And having a great Priest over the house of God, Let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope unwavering, for He who has promised is faithful; And let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works, Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near."

*　　*　　*　　*

Today we will speak a little on the way to worship God. When we come before God, some people may come with a depressed feeling. Some may feel that they have not done well during the previous week, that they have disobeyed God's word, or that they have backslidden. As a result of these feelings, a person can be frustrated from worshipping God and drawing near to Him in a spontaneous and sweet way.

Today we will consider one matter. This matter is true not only in the Old Testament but in the New Testament as well. How can man come to God? Many people think that they can worship God when they have some merit, when they have performed good works, or when they deserve God's praise. Others think that because they have not performed well and have done many things that displease God, they cannot come to God to worship Him.

But whether or not our works are good has nothing to do with our coming to God. Please read verse 19, "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus." This verse tells us that our coming to God is in nothing else other than the blood of the Lord Jesus. Good works, zeal, or spiritual experiences cannot qualify us to come before God or make us more worthy to draw near to Him. Only the blood of the Lord Jesus enables us to draw near to God. If you think that the blood of the Lord Jesus is not enough for you to draw near to Him, I will tell you honestly that you will never be able to come to Him or worship Him.

Different persons have different conditions and situations. Some may have some shortcomings; others may have some sins. Some may have fallen seriously; others may be better. If coming to God is based on a person's spiritual condition, how can we worship God together in oneness? None of our hands are clean; they are all mud-stained and defiled. But by the blood, we can come boldly to God to worship Him. Without the blood, no one can worship, and there is no worship. The Lord's blood is effective not only on earth but in heaven as well. Not only was it effective on the cross, but it is effective on the throne as well, so that we can now come to the Holy of Holies to worship God.

Some may say that God is too gracious in this way, but we must realize that it is through the blood that we are qualified to worship. It is true that God is full of grace, but it is not all grace. If God were to forgive our sins carelessly and allow us to come before Him to worship Him carelessly, that would indeed be great grace. But those who have considerable Bible knowledge and deep spiritual experience, and who are excellent in life and conduct, are no more qualified than we are in coming to worship God. Everyone who comes before God must have the blood; everyone needs the cleansing of the blood before he can come before God. We are the same as everyone else, and we must come to God by the blood. If there is a meeting where the blood is replaced with good works or spiritual experience and where there is trust in these things to come to God, this worship is not acceptable to God. If anyone bases their worship on the works they have performed during the previous week, they do not know what worship means. Let us learn to worship by the blood and come to God through the blood.

Many people say that there are many similarities between Christians and Israelites. They say that with the Israelites, there were three kinds of worshippers: those who offered the sacrifices outside the tabernacle, those who served in the Holy Place, and those who served the Lord in the Holy of Holies. They say that, in a similar way, there are three kinds of Christian worshippers. Those who say this do not know what worship is. We have to know that the Israelites are different from us. Every one of us can come to the Holy of Holies to worship, while the Israelites could not. The picture in the Old Testament is a picture of estrangement. The congregation could not do anything. They could not worship directly or even slaughter the goats and bulls themselves; they had to depend on the priests to do this for them. They were estranged from God and could not worship Him directly. The New Testament is different. Every believer can worship within the Holy of Holies, and no one can worship in place of another. Strictly speaking, even the Lord Jesus cannot replace us in our worshipping. It is true that the Old Testament divides the worshippers into the congregation, the priests, and the high priest. Only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood. No other person could enter into it. But every one of us is like the high priest; we can all enter into the Holy of Holies. We say that the Lord Jesus is the High Priest; it is true that He is our High Priest before God in heaven and that we are all individual priests. But at the time of worship, it is a different story.

Some say that we need the Lord Jesus to do everything for us and that He is our Mediator and go-between. But there is no such thing. Verses 19 and 20 tell us that the Lord died for us in order that we could come directly to God. Both in the Old Testament and New Testament, the blood on the altar is for the remission of sins. But at the same time, the blood shed on the cross is also for us to draw near to God. Some have thought that a person receives forgiveness through the blood but that he worships and draws near to God through his works. This is why some think that when they do well that week, read the Bible, and pray all the time, they can come boldly to worship God, sing, and pray. Others think that they have not done well and therefore are not worthy to worship; they cannot sing and have no faith to pray. By doing this, they have

made the blood worthless. We worship God through the blood, just as we are forgiven through the blood.

The book of Romans mentions the blood and the book of Hebrews also mentions the blood. But these two references are different. Romans speaks of the blood on the propitiation cover that is for redemption, whereas Hebrews speaks of the blood before the veil that is for drawing near to God and worshipping Him. The blood not only forgives and cleanses us from our sins but brings us near to God and leads us to worship. You may argue, in spite of this, that you have not done well this week and cannot come boldly to God. What should you do? Let me ask you, when will you ever do well? When will you ever be able to think that you are good and can worship Him with all boldness? When will you ever be able to cry out "Hallelujah"? If you have to wait until you are able to do these things, you will wait until you are raptured before you can worship Him. You cannot determine your eligibility for worshipping based on your good or bad conduct. Instead, your worship should be based on the blood.

Suppose the Lord's beloved disciples, Peter, John, or Paul, could meet with us today. The way they would come and worship before God is the same way we come and worship before God. They have to trust in the blood. Do not think that they are nearer to God, more acceptable to Him, and more capable of worshipping. There is no such thing. If anyone says this, I will be the first one to stand up to refute it. Peter, John, and Paul are the same as we are; everyone has to draw near to God through the blood alone.

I heard that someone said that as long as he can crawl into heaven and stand inside the gate, he will be satisfied. But no, we do not crawl before the Lord and worship Him in such a fearful way. We come to God in boldness and without fear. We have the right to be God's children; this is God's promise to us. When I was young, whenever I went to visit someone, my heart would pound wildly. I was afraid that others would not be happy to see me. When I knocked at someone's door, I dared not knock twice out of fear that I would make others unhappy, or that the person inside would open the door to rebuke me and immediately shut the door. I did not have the boldness to meet people. But this is not the way we come to God. We come with authority and a commission. We come to Him as if

coming to our own house; we knock at the door boldly and enter naturally. We should all come to the Holy of Holies and meet God with such an attitude. If we know the worth of the blood, we will surely have boldness. The knowledge of the blood's worth is the condition for worship. If we want to have power in our worship, we have to abide under the blood. Even the weakest and poorest believer has the same authority as the apostles did to worship God. His weakness can never lower the value and effectiveness of the blood. Every time we worship, we do so according to the blood. Our good works cannot add anything to the worth of the blood.

Our breaking of the bread (the Body) is a sign that the veil (the Lord's body) has been broken. The barrier has been removed, and we can now enter the Holy of Holies. The cup is a symbol that the Lord has died for us and that His blood has led us to come near to God. I have to emphasize again that our qualification for coming to God has nothing to do with our weakness; we come because of the blood. If we look up to the blood, we can come before God every day, and we will not lose our boldness. Consider how you came to God the first time with your burden of sin, drew near to Him, and called on Him. Similarly, when we come to Him to worship Him, we can come boldly without being hindered by our own work or feeling but with a single heart that looks up to the blood. May we realize this more and more. In this way, we will be able to worship and praise God in oneness and harmony. By the Lord's blood, we can serve and worship our God boldly and with authority.

## MESSAGE TWO

# THE BETTER BLOOD

**•Scripture Reading: Gen. 4:8-11; Heb. 12:24; 1 John 5:6, 8**

Gen. 4:8-11 "And Cain said to Abel his brother, Let us go into the field. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. Then Jehovah said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And He said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."

Heb. 12:24 "And to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks something better than that of Abel."

1 John 5:6 "This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood;"

8 "The Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are unto the one thing."

* * * *

These verses mention the blood of the Lord and the blood of Abel. Hebrews 12:24 tells us concerning the Lord's blood that "the blood...speaks something better than that of Abel." The blood of the Lord Jesus speaks something better than that of Abel. Why does the blood of the Lord Jesus speak something better than that of Abel? Today I would like to speak briefly about this.

Why was Abel killed? Cain killed him because he envied him. God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but He did not look with favor on Cain and his offering. Therefore, Cain became jealous of Abel and killed him in the field. Why did the Jews bring the Lord Jesus to the Praetorium before the governor? According to Pilate, "he knew that it was because of envy that they had delivered

Him up" (Matt. 27:18). The only reason the Jews killed the Lord Jesus was that they envied the Lord. Abel was envied by Cain and killed by Cain. The Lord Jesus was envied by the Jews and killed by the Jews.

Why does the blood of the Lord Jesus speak something better than that of Abel? Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground, demanding God to avenge Him according to righteousness and judge the sin of the man who caused him to bleed. The blood of the Lord Jesus voiced its plea that God treat man with grace and forgive those who caused Him to bleed. The blood of Abel required that God execute righteousness. Once God executed righteousness, Adam's child, the sinful Cain, had no place to hide. The blood of the Lord Jesus requires God to execute righteousness also. But when God executes righteousness, He forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The Lord Jesus died for us. Since God punished Him, He cannot punish us. God asked Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" He said, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" What if God asks us today, "Where is your brother Abel?" We thank and praise God that today we can answer: "He was killed by us, but His blood does not accuse us." The blood of the Lord Jesus does not accuse us. This is an amazing salvation!

Why does the Bible say that the blood can speak? First John says the blood testifies. The blood has two functions. One is to propitiate for us before God; the other is to provide a guarantee for us before God. Many people only see that the blood of the Lord Jesus propitiates for us but do not see that the blood of the Lord Jesus provides us a guarantee before God. The blood of the Lord is for redemption on the earth and for a testimony in the heavens; it testifies that redemption is accomplished on the earth. On earth the Lord shed His blood to be our Savior; in heaven He serves as our eternal Savior.

What happened on the great day of propitiation? The blood was poured onto the ground from the altar, and it was also brought into the Holy of Holies by the high priest and put on the ark. The blood shed on the ground was gone after several days; it dried out and became dust. But the blood brought into the Holy of Holies speaks for us eternally. The blood shed on the ground is for propitiation, while the blood brought into the Holy of Holies speaks before Jehovah and testifies. On the one hand, the Lord shed His blood to forgive our sins and to

make propitiation for us; on the other hand, the blood is put before God to speak and testify for us. The sprinkled blood in heaven testifies to the fact of the shed blood (propitiation) on the earth.

What does this blood testify? For the blood to be before God means that the fact of propitiation is before God. The blood voicelessly testifies before God and guarantees our eternal peace. If there was no shedding of blood (propitiation) on earth, where did this sprinkled blood before God come from? The blood testifies for God; it tells us that God loves us. Otherwise, where does this blood come from? At the same time, the blood testifies for us that we are saved. Otherwise, why was this blood shed? The blood testifies, on the one hand, the love of God and, on the other hand, our salvation. At the same time, it testifies to Satan so that he can no longer accuse us. Thank and praise God; what the blood of the Lord Jesus speaks is better than that of Abel. This blood is for forgiving, not for avenging; it is for peace, not for accusation.

Our Lord shed His blood once and accomplished everything. Today before God, we have the proof of our salvation. Some say that they are saved because of a certain time of repentance. Some say that they are saved because they were so happy after they prayed a certain time. But these feelings are not dependable. I am a saved person because the Lord's blood testifies before God. What the blood of the Lord speaks of is better than that of Abel. Abel's blood spoke from the ground and demanded the blood of the one who killed him. The blood of the Lord speaks from heaven and declares His forgiveness of the one who killed Him. The blood of the Lord testifies for us in heaven forever.

Brothers and sisters, we thank and praise God that the blood of the Lord testifies in heaven! We seldom realize how the blood of the Lord speaks. If we did, our table here would take on new significance. The cup not only stands for and expresses something but also tells us that the blood is speaking. We thank and praise God because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all our sins. At the same time, the blood of Christ testifies for us before God. With this testimony, God cannot refuse us anything. Christ has already died and resurrected. Who can accuse us? We thank and praise God!

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE TWO RESTS

## •Outline

- **•The Rest Of Salvation**
- **•The Rest Of Victory**

**A. "Take My Yoke"**

**B. "Learn from Me"**

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 11:20-30

Matt. 11:20-30 Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His works of power took place, because they did not repent: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the works of power which took place in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, to Hades you will be brought down. For if the works of power which took place in you had taken place in Sodom, it would have remained until today. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you. At that time Jesus answered and said, I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

*  *  *  *

Although I read this long portion of the word today, now I will only pay special attention to three verses. They are verses 28, 29, and 30, which say, "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

In this portion of the word, the Lord Jesus spoke about His own feeling. Before He spoke this word, He had been provoked greatly. Something happened which provoked the Lord. He had performed many mighty works and miracles in different cities, especially in three big cities—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He had helped many people and healed many sick ones in the cities. However, the end result was that "they did not repent" (v. 20). Regardless of how they had heard and known that the Lord Jesus was the One descended from heaven to be the Savior and the Messiah, they would not repent or believe. They could say things with their mouths, but within their hearts they still did not believe nor repent. When they did this, everything that the Lord had done became vain. Therefore, Matthew presented to us here the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us consider the first words in verse 25: "At that time." It was under this kind of situation the Lord Jesus prayed. The Lord prayed to the Father and said, "I extol You, Father, ...because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." The people in the big city considered themselves to be clever and wise. That was why they could not receive the Lord Jesus. Although the Lord desired to see the people in the big city getting saved, He was more pleased to obey the will of God. Therefore, even though He was rejected by them, He could say to God, "I extol You, Father,...because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." Under the most difficult and disappointing time, He could still focus and delight in God's will. He did not care for His own will and said, "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." He did not say "no" but "yes." At any time He could still say, "Yes, Father," because He only

minded the good will of the Father. He knew that "all things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one fully knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Therefore, the people in the big cities may not have known the Son and may not have repented, but His heart was fully satisfied. Here is the reason and the secret why the Lord Jesus had peace in His heart and was unshaken by the environment. He rested by relying on His relationship with the Father. As long as the Father knew, it was enough. It was sufficient that there was only the Father's approval and praise. However people may have treated Him, it was not worthwhile for Him to be bothered or offended. As long as there was the smiling face of the Father and the carrying out of His will, it was good enough. There was no need to be concerned about the consequence among men in the world.

Before the Lord prayed, His circumstances were not good, and His background was not favorable. He was greatly misunderstood. He poured out everything to them wholeheartedly. However, they would not receive Him. They rejected Him without any reason. If it had happened to you or me, I am afraid that we would be like John, asking God to send down fire to consume them. If we were in the Lord's situation, we would have wondered why we should encounter such events. We would be murmuring and would have no peace. However, although the Lord was so greatly misunderstood, He only said, "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." If we were in this kind of situation, we would have no peace in our heart, and we would be in turmoil. Even if we were not in turmoil, we would be doubting. Even if we were not doubting, we would be unhappy. However, the Lord said, "I extol You, Father." Within His heart there was no unrest. In verse 27 He reveals to us the secret of His restfulness. What was spoken before this verse was the background, which explains how the Lord could be at rest and not be moved in His heart in this kind of situation. Now He tells us the reason why He was not affected. In verses 28 and 29, the Lord shows us what we should do in order to be at rest if we encounter the same treatment. Today we want to speak on these two verses of the Bible. There is a difference between verses 28 and 29. Verse 28 speaks of one kind of rest, while

verse 29 speaks of another kind of rest. The two rests are different, and one is deeper than the other.

## THE REST OF SALVATION

The rest in verse 28 is spoken of this way: "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest." This rest is the rest of salvation. Verse 29 is the rest of victory. The first rest is the rest of being reconciled with God. The second rest is the rest within us. The first rest is the rest of our salvation. The second rest is our rest on earth.

"Come to Me all who toil and are burdened," Brothers and sisters, perhaps you do not realize what the world is. There are many people whose days on the earth are not many, yet they have much experience of the world. They would tell you that the world is in a fever. When I cross the big streets, I see many people walking to and fro. All of them are so busy. I would ask, "What are they doing? Are they mad?" I pity them. Probably the whole world is in a fever. Oh, they do not have rest. The Lord did not say here, "Come to Me all who are sinful and wicked, and I will give you rest." This is because the pleasure of sin is sweet, and a sinner desires to have more pleasure in sin. Therefore, the Lord used another term and said, "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest." You are toiling, and you are burdened. Some people may feel that sin is pleasant and sweet. But everyone feels that he is toiling. Many people do not think that sin is painful. But everyone feels that their experiences are painful. Therefore, regardless if a person is a millionaire, a high-ranking person in the political world, a renowned scholar, a student, a businessman, a civilian, a coolie, or a beggar, no one is satisfied with himself.

For a while I thought that those who pull rickshaws surely would sigh, but that millionaires do not need to sigh. However, one time when I was staying in a millionaire's home, I heard him sigh also. There is the pleasure of sin, but at the same time the labor of life makes a person sigh also. One time when I preached to an illiterate lady, she said, "Ah, unfortunately I do not know how to read; otherwise, I could believe and read the Bible." I thought if an illiterate lady would sigh, "Ah," perhaps a well-educated college professor would not sigh, "Ah."

Actually, both sigh just the same. There was a foreign college professor in a certain school who was always very pessimistic. He always sighed, "Ah!" no matter what he saw. One day the sun was bright, the sky was clear, and the grass was green. The campus grounds were filled with the fragrance of flowers and the singing of birds. A few colleagues of the professor came to speak to him, saying, "See how wonderful today is? There is no need to sigh 'Ah,' today." He looked at the sky and everything around him; there was indeed nothing for him to sigh about. But did he stop sighing? Not at all. In the end he said, "Ah, unfortunately this time will not last long. Ah!"

One can see men toiling and restless everywhere. All day long, they are unsettled in their worries. Where should they settle down? I am afraid that you are not at rest and are still laboring.

Many people feel the weight of their burden and the toil of their labor. They realize that they do not have rest. I did not realize how heavy a burden can be until one time when I went down to a village to preach the gospel. The village where I went was on the other side of a mountain, and no steamboat could get there. I traveled first by a small steamboat to one place. After getting off the boat, I had to walk over the mountain to reach that place. The weather was very hot at that time. I brought with me gospel books and tracts, food, clothing, etc. I was not able to hire anyone to carry these things for me and had to carry them myself. I did not feel anything when I walked the first twenty steps. But after that, I began to find them too heavy for me to carry. I thought how nice it would be if I could get home soon and have a little rest. There were no trees on the mountain to provide shade. Just then, I realized how painful are those sinners who are toiling and are burdened. They would probably think that it would be nice if they could rest for a little while. Today among those in the audience, there are still some who have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus. You do not have rest. What will be your end? Come and hear the Lord Jesus' word today, which says, "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

Oh! This world is a tiresome world. Many people have money, yet they say, "I am tired!" Many people are in business, yet they say, "I am tired!" Many people have received fame and love in this world, yet they are tired. They think they can

never rest until they have gained a certain item. The world realizes clearly that rest is good, but because their burdens are too heavy, they dare not seek after rest; they would be happy enough if their labor could be reduced. They are like the Israelites in the Old Testament, who only hoped that Pharaoh would reduce their labor and had no hope for rest. The condition of the Israelites represents the world. The Israelites only hoped that their labor could be lightened; they dared not hope for rest. In the same way, you only hope that your burden would be reduced a little, and that you would be free from tiredness and worries. However, I must tell you that what our Lord Jesus gives is not only a reduction of your toil but absolute rest; He causes you to stop everything. I wonder if you know what rest is? Rest means not to work or to stop working. You have suffered from the heavy burden and entanglement of sin and lust and do not have rest. You have to understand that the Lord Jesus wants you to come and have rest. You do not have to do anything to have this rest.

When I was young, my parents always spoke to me concerning how Jesus became the Savior to appease God's wrath. Then I began to consider how good I would have to behave in order for God not to hate me but to save me to heaven. Many people also think the same way. But here, the Lord says, "You do not have to do anything; just come and have rest." What He wants to give to us is rest. He does not ask us to suffer and to do good. Man enjoys rest. But he always thinks that God is not pleased with him, and that he has to do some good work before God will be pleased with him. But the Lord Jesus calls people to come to rest and not to work. You may think that God hates you, and that you must do good before God will be pleased with you. But the Lord Jesus says that there is no need to work. This is the gospel! Why can the Lord Jesus give rest to people, and why does He not want them to work? The Bible says that the Lord Jesus has already accomplished all the work whether it be the work for going to heaven, the work of redemption, the work related to your being judged before God, the work of justification, or any work related to light, eternal life, and justification. The Lord Jesus has accomplished them all. He only bids you to come to have rest.

Let me tell you another story. In a certain village there was a Christian who had an unbelieving carpenter as his neighbor. The Christian understood the

truth, and he was always trying to persuade the carpenter to believe in Jesus. The carpenter thought that although Jesus had accomplished the work of redemption, it was still not sufficient, and that he still had to do some good work and improve himself before he could believe in Jesus. To him, while it was true that Jesus had redeemed men, men must also do something. For this reason, he did not believe. One night, a thief came to the house of the Christian and tried to enter the main door to steal something. But he heard some noise inside the house and was afraid to go in. As a result, he stole the main door. The next morning when the Christian saw that the main door was taken, he asked his neighbor, the carpenter, to make him another door. The carpenter thought that since this was his neighbor and his good friend, he would select the best wood and hurry to finish the door that same afternoon. When he was ready to put in the door, the Christian said to him, "You have not finished this door; it is still not good enough." He spoke in such a blunt way that the carpenter felt very embarrassed and very upset. The carpenter asked, "I have used the best material and have finished it with extra effort. Why is it still not good?" Nonetheless the Christian insisted that he had not done a good job. Finally the carpenter said, "If this door is not done well, how should it be done to be well?" The Christian said, "Go home and bring me some wood, nails, and a hammer; let me show you how to do it." When the material came, the Christian hammered the boards onto the door haphazardly. The carpenter was both upset and amused. He thought that the Christian's mind must have become muddled up from the break-in and must have become crazy. The Christian then said to him, "Friend, do not be angry. Let us have a talk. Was your door finished?" He said, "Of course, it was finished." The Christian said, "Is it not very good that I added something on?" The carpenter said, "The door was already finished. By adding these boards and nails, you made it no more a door." The Christian said, "The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus is already accomplished. John 19:30 says that it is finished. However, you said that although the Lord Jesus has finished His work, you still have to add something to improve and repair it. This is why I added the nails and the boards to the door which you have already completed." The carpenter understood then and believed in the Lord. The Christian lost a door the night before, but God gained a sinner

that day. The Lord Jesus asks us not to work but to come and rest. He has died to bear our sins and has resurrected to secure a new position for us before God. Therefore, we do not have to work. All we have to do is to come to Him and rest. This is the gospel!

Many people live a life of toil and burden with respect to the world. But many others toil and are burdened with respect to their salvation also. They think that by gritting their teeth to do something and by suffering a little, God may have pity on them and save them. Many Hindus do this. They put nails onto a door with the spikes pointing upward. Then they lie on such doors full of sharp nails, thinking that by suffering this way, the God whom they do not know may by chance have pity on them and forgive their sins. Many people think that if they suffer more, God will forgive their sins. Even a little child would think this way. Once a little child told me, "After I commit a sin, the first thing I have to do is to make myself suffer to the uttermost; then God will forgive my sin." Not only do little children think this way, most people in the world think this way also. They think that by laboring strenuously, they can work themselves to the point where God will forgive them. They do not realize that this is a lie. It is a self-deception and will never earn them anything. It is not by bearing more burdens and suffering more toil that one can have rest before God. The calling today says, "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Redemption has been accomplished, and the Lord has borne our sins. Whosoever will may come to the Lord to have rest. No sinner can obtain rest by himself. If you come before the Lord, you will have rest.

## THE REST OF VICTORY

Now I will speak concerning another rest to those who have believed. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). Christians ought to have this rest. Sinners ought to have the first rest. A sinner will have no rest until he is accepted by God. A believer has rest because his sins have been forgiven. He can now rest because the question of salvation is solved, and the questions of justification and eternal life are also solved. He is resting in the Lamb; he has obtained the rest in

the precious blood. However, a Christian will still at times have no rest. He may feel that there is no rest in worldly affairs and in his living. His heart may run like boiling water. He may have the "rest" of Matthew 11:28, but not the "rest" of verse 29.

This "rest" in verse 29 is a special "rest." In the original language, the word soul is the same as the psuche in psychology. Therefore, it is talking about the psychological rest. The Bible says the same thing in Psalm 42:5, which says, "Why are you bowed down, O my soul? / And why do you groan within me?" The soul can make one feel cast down and disquieted. The rest that the Lord gives us is the rest for the soul; it saves us from anxieties and disquietness in our living on the earth.

Following this, the Lord tells us the reason for His having rest in His own soul. Verse 29 says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." The first reason is meekness, and the second reason is lowliness. What is to be "meek"? To be meek is to be gentle, to be without hardness; it is to have nothing irritating and to be absolutely tender, yielding, unresisting, and unobstructing; it is to not protect oneself, to not reject others, and to be soft as water, and to remain so even when one is beaten. This is the life the Lord expressed on earth.

Many people are very gentle to others, but they are not lowly in heart. Outwardly they may be lowly, but in their heart, they are neither lowly nor yielding. To be "lowly" implies being mean and humble. The Lord was humble in His motive; He considered the kind of treatment He received to be what He deserved. He did not expect anything better; He only expected this kind of treatment. When the Lord was preaching in the big cities, people were opposing Him. Yet He "departed from their midst" in a good way. We may think that this is good enough. But He did more than this; within Him he did not expect any better treatment. He was not only meek but was also lowly. The Lord knew that the kind of life He lived on earth was the portion for Him; He did not expect anything higher. The meaning of the word pride is not merely something outward but something inward. If we want something better than what others have, if we crave something that God has not given us, and if we long for and plan anything for ourselves, it is pride.

The Lord's attitude on earth was meek and lowly. If we desire to have rest, there are two things that we have to do. First, we have to "take My yoke," and second, we have to "learn from Me." To take the yoke and to learn from Him are two things. A "yoke" is a piece of wood placed on the back of an ox to keep it from going free and to force it to work hard. The Jews always put two oxen to one yoke; they never put one ox to a yoke alone. The yoke is given by the master; the ox does not know how to bear the yoke by itself. This is why the Lord said to us, "Take My yoke." This means that the yoke is apportioned to you by God; it does not come from any person nor from the devil. It is God who has put it on you. However, it is up to us to learn from Him.

## A. "Take My Yoke"

When I take up whatever God has apportioned to me, I will be happy. If I am satisfied and contented with these things, I will have peace and will not be sad because I have not escaped God's yoke. I have a schoolmate who grew up in an orphanage. He was very intelligent and studied very well. He was a churchgoer but not a Christian. His hope was to have a high education, an outstanding name, and to make a great deal of money. The year of his graduation, a missionary offered to help him to go to the United States to study. He asked him to go first to St. John University in Shanghai to finish his remaining two years of study. The school had prepared a scholarship to take care of him. However, he had been saved a few months before that and heard God's calling to serve Him wholeheartedly. At that time God's yoke was upon him. He thought of how much suffering he would have to bear as a preacher and of the preaching he would have to do among the villages where food, clothing, and lodging would not be comfortable, and he would not have much income. All his hopes fell through! His mother's and uncle's only hope had been on him; such hopes would also fall through! He was reluctant to bear God's yoke and wanted to escape. He promised the principal that he would accept the offer for further education.

One day I purposely looked for him and asked him, "Have you settled your future?" He said, "I have already decided to go to the university to study." Because I knew that God had called him, I spoke to him straightforwardly: "You

have chosen the wrong path. Do you think you can have rest this way?" He said, "My mother and my uncle have put all their hopes on me. I will study theology as well as literature. I can do some work to gain people on the campus. Will this not satisfy both sides?" I said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice. The Lord is not pleased with the cattle of a thousand hills and the sheep of ten thousand mountains. He is not pleased with oil and burnt offering. He wants man to obey Him." He said, "I have already made my decision." I said, "You have taken the wrong path. If you go to St. John University, you will be poisoned by modern theology, and I am afraid it will overturn even your basic faith. You and I cannot walk on the same path anymore. So long!" After I left, he took a walk around the ballfield and felt very sad; he did not have any peace. Afterwards he went to the school chapel and knelt down to pray. On the one hand, he thought of his deceased father and his widowed mother, and on the other hand, he thought of his future. He could not help but weep. He thought of forsaking God's yoke, yet his heart felt unpeaceful. However he also felt it difficult to obey. Finally, he realized that he had to obey God's will, and he promised before God to give up the opportunity of further study and to preach His word instead. After he obeyed in this way, he rose up from prayer; his heart was very peaceful, and he was full of joy. Immediately he went to see the principal to explain to him the reason for his change and declined the scholarship as well as the tuition assistance from the Westerner for his study abroad. Right away he packed and left the school. He said that night was the happiest night in his whole life. (Please note that my intention is not to discourage you from your study. However if God has called you to preach His word, you should obey. If God has not called you, it is all right even if you study for ten or twenty years.)

I know that a number of Christians here have this kind of experience. When you bargain with God and want God to give in, while you would not give in, how restless an experience that is. Your conscience is there telling you that you are wrong. How sad you are! However, when you say to God, "I am willing to bear the yoke," you will have rest. Today what God is leading us into is not only to bear God's yoke in the big matters of our life, but also to bear His yoke in the small matters in our daily life. There are some preachers who feel that it is difficult to

work with other co-workers. Some sisters feel that it is very difficult to have peace with their aunts and in-laws in their homes. Some feel that it is difficult to be at peace with colleagues; students feel that it is difficult to deal with other students and their teachers. This is your yoke. You may feel that they are bothersome, and that you would much rather leave them alone or that they would leave you alone. You feel irritated, and you have no peace. But, brothers and sisters, this is the yoke God apportions to you. This is what God wants you to bear. This is the portion God assigns to you. God wants you to humble yourself under this kind of environment so that His life can be expressed. You should not ask for any change in your environment; you should know that for God to put you in this environment means that this environment is the best for you.

What does it mean to bear the cross? It does not mean that you should spend a few thousand dollars to go to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem to buy a wooden cross and to bear it. Rather, it means that everyone should bear his yoke where he is. This is the portion God has allotted to you. You think that your environment is not good, that it is best to exchange it with somebody. However, this is not bearing the yoke. Sometimes God puts a careful person together with a careless one, a strong one with a weak one, a healthy one with a sick one, a smart one with an ignorant one, a quick one with a slow one, a tidy one with a not-so-tidy one, in order that they might become the yoke of each other, in order that everyone will have the opportunity to manifest the grace they receive from the Lord and express Christ's nature. If you struggle against this arrangement, you will never have rest. If you say to God, "I will bear your yoke; I am willing to be placed in the position you have given me," and if you are willing to obey absolutely, you will have rest and joy.

The reason Christians cannot bear a good testimony today is that they reject God's yoke. They want to change the environment. Yet the Christian character can only be manifested under that kind of environment. The highest living is one which welcomes everything which one dislikes—things that contradict one's own heart. If you are willing to receive and bear the yoke God gives you, you will be filled with a deep rest within. However, this is not the rest of salvation, which is secured by the redemption of Christ, by what He has accomplished, and by His

bearing the cross. This rest is obtained by your own obedience, by your own attitude of denying the self, and by your own bearing of the cross. I hope that after everyone returns home, he will have a new rest. You do not have to brush off your environment as you brush off snow from your clothes on a snowy day. You do not have to strive and struggle in your environment. You only have to say to God, "I thank You, because this is Your yoke." "Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight." If you do this, you will have joy. Although the environment the Lord Jesus had would justify the worst complaint, He did not complain or murmur and was not anxious to scheme for any change. He only obeyed; therefore, He could rejoice. We should not obey God on the basis of happiness; rather, we have happiness because we obey God. There are countless numbers of people whom you cannot love or work together with. But I hope that from this day on, you will receive God's yoke from His hand, that is, the yoke of meekness and lowliness.

### B. "Learn from Me"

Not only do we have to take the yoke, we also have to learn from the Lord. The Lord's pattern is recorded in Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross." There are two things we should consider concerning the Lord's pattern.

The first is that the Lord did not stand up to speak for His own right. "Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself." This is to forsake His legal right. Originally, our Lord was equal with God, having the same glory and sharing the same authority. He was the same as God. However, He did not uplift Himself; on the contrary, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave. Originally, there was nothing wrong with His being equal with God. He was not like the devil, who was a created being, an archangel, yet who tried to lift himself up to become equal with God. The Lord was totally opposite from the devil. He did not strive to become

equal with God; rather, He emptied Himself. Therefore, we have to remember that none of us should speak anything for our own rights. Everyone should give up his legal right willingly and joyfully.

There was a sister who lived like a king at home. After she believed in the Lord, she became like a servant. If she wanted some pocket money from her parents, they would not give it to her so willingly as before. However, she was willing to forsake the position and right she had as their child. Since we belong to Christ, we should not expect our parents to treat us like regular children or our friends to treat us as nice as before. If they do not provide for you, you cannot beg. You ought to place yourselves in the hand of God and learn from Him. "Who, existing in the form of God...emptied Himself." He never spoke anything for Himself; we also should not speak anything for ourselves.

The rest in our Christian life lies not only in not taking advantage of others, but in being able to endure when others take advantage of us. Many young Christians took advantage of others before they believed in the Lord. After they believe in the Lord, they begin to treat others justly. Now when they see others being unjust, they become indignant. Little do they realize that the Christian standard does not stop merely at being just but at enduring the unjust. What the Lord received was not justice. If it had been according to justice, the Lord would have had no need to come to be a man and would not have needed to save man. But for our sake, He was willing to endure all kinds of unjust treatment.

The second matter is His "taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men." This is to say that He became limited. Originally when our Lord was in the heavens, He could come and go freely like the angels; He could also appear to man like the angels did in the Old Testament. However, He descended to the earth and was made in the likeness of men to become an infant and then an adult. He grew up year after year in the human way; like all other men, He also needed to eat, drink, sleep, work, and rest. This is the limitation on His divinity that He received. However, He was not only made in the likeness of men, but also took the form of a slave. Although He had given up His freedom as God, He could still have His freedom as a man, and He could still enjoy whatever the other men could enjoy. Yet He took the form of a slave and sacrificed even the

freedom He had as an ordinary man. In every aspect He endured the entanglement and limitations which are unbearable to man. Besides God's—the Father's—will, He did not know anything else. This was the restriction on His humanity. Although He was God, He was limited. Although He was a man, He was limited. How about us?

Our hearts would rather rebel. How we wish to break off all the entanglements and restrictions so that we can move freely. How we wish everything and everyone in the world would go along with our desires and according to our hearts' delight. We are not like the Lord; although He was God, He still was restricted. Among us, many mothers would wish not to be mothers but would prefer to go out to preach the word freely instead. There was a wife who once told me that if her husband would allow her, she would leave her three children behind and go to Tibet to preach the gospel. She thought that it would be wonderful if she could break all the entanglements and fly away. However, this is not the Lord's pattern. The Lord was God, but He still obeyed His parents and took care of His younger brothers and sisters. We ought to obey and not be ambitious. Since God has used your children to limit you and your family to restrict you, you should submit willingly and joyously. It is wrong for a businessman to think, "It would be nice if I did not have to be in business," or a student to think, "It would be nice if I did not have to study." It would be wrong for a worker to think, "It would be nice if I did not have to work," and for a teacher to think, "It would be nice if I did not have to teach." If we would be like our Lord who accepts all kinds of restriction without any struggling, we would have rest.

Therefore, an unbeliever can have rest, the rest of being reconciled to God. At the same time, if a worrisome, restless, and troubled Christian is willing to bear the yoke of meekness and lowliness, learn from the Lord's limitation, and not stand up to speak for his own rights day after day, but is willing to accept the yoke which God has apportioned to him day after day and choose for himself a life of restriction, he will surely have rest in his heart.

The Lord said, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Every person who is experienced in the Lord will say "amen" to this. How rough are the roads

we have chosen for ourselves! How troublesome are the things which we do according to our own desire! How pitiful are the consequences and how many difficulties there are along the way! If we are willing to take up the Lord's yoke and learn from Him, we will see that the things He gives us, the demand he has upon us, and the environment which He has arranged for us are all easy and light. Nothing that He causes us to pass through is unbearable for us. He knows how to apportion His yoke; He knows our strength. We can be at rest. He will not require of us what we cannot do. Whatever He apportions is what each brother and sister can bear. As one would not put an iron yoke on a three-month-old calf, the Lord will not ask a person to encounter something in his environment that he cannot endure. Before something comes upon us, God has already decided that we are able and have the strength to pass through such a thing. God does not make a mistake. Therefore, we should not murmur. Instead, we should quietly, humbly, gently, and joyfully accept all the yokes and burdens He gives us, even though many of these are not according to our desire.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## THE SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## •Outline

### I. The Holy Spirit As A Seal

### II. The Holy Spirit Being An Earnest

**A. Deposit**

**B. Sample**

### III. Grieving Not The Holy Spirit

## •Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30

Eph. 1:13-14 "In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, Who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory."

4:30 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption."

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The two passages we just read are the only places in the whole Bible that mention the Holy Spirit as a seal. Today I am going to talk about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Christian. There is one item concerning the Holy Spirit which I would ask you to pay special attention to. Many people think that after a man is saved, he still needs to seek the Holy Spirit. I will now prove whether or not this statement is true. Please do not believe something just because I have said it. One must see what the Bible says, for only the word of the Bible is reliable.

Let us consider Ephesians 1:13: "In whom you also, having heard the word

of the truth, the gospel of your salvation." What is the word of the truth? It is the gospel of salvation. After we hear the gospel, we believe in Christ. What we believe is a person, Christ, and not a doctrine or a theory. The word of the truth tells us about the Christ who can save us. Its aim is to bring us to have faith in Christ through the hearing of the gospel; its purpose is not to bring us to have faith in some gospel sermons or some doctrines written on pieces of paper. The latter are not the genuine thing and will not save us. What we hear is the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation. What we believe is Christ. Therefore, the first step is that we hear the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation, and the second step is that we believe in Christ.

After a person has heard the word of the truth and believed in Christ, he is "sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." The words "you were sealed" are very important. It means at that moment when one believes, he receives the Holy Spirit of promise. It does not mean that one has to wait for a while; it does not mean that one has to wait for three days, five days, or for some time before he can receive the Holy Spirit. When the Bible tells us that "you were sealed," it means "you were sealed." Brothers and sisters, while you are sitting here, I would like to ask if you have heard the word of the truth and believed in Christ. If your answer is yes, do you not think that you have the Holy Spirit? The Bible tells us that "you were sealed"; the Holy Spirit dwells in the believers like the sealing of a seal. Do we have the Holy Spirit? Let me say this. Even if you are a backsliding or very bad Christian, the Holy Spirit is still dwelling in you in the same way that he is dwelling in other believers.

In a minute I will show you the difference between a sanctified believer's feeling and an unsanctified believer's feeling towards the Holy Spirit; I will show you the difference between an obedient believer's feeling and a disobedient believer's feeling toward the Holy Spirit. However, whether it is the sanctified believer or unsanctified believer, the obedient one or disobedient one, the Holy Spirit dwells in them all; there is no difference, and there is no distinction whatsoever. Even though there may be differences in other matters, there is no difference as far as the Holy Spirit dwelling in them as a seal. If you have heard the gospel and have believed in Christ, the Holy Spirit will dwell in you in the

same way He dwells in other believers. But if you have not believed in Christ, there will surely be a difference. It does not matter what kind of a person one is, whether he lives a good life or a bad one, whether he is advancing or backsliding, obedient or disobedient to God; there is no difference between them. If you think that you have the Holy Spirit because you obey God, love Him, have a joyful feeling, see some visions or some tongues of fire, etc., and that, unless you have these things, you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are in a heresy. Whoever believes in the Lord has the Holy Spirit. At the time we believe, the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Here it says that one receives "the Holy Spirit of the promise" (v. 13). What is a "promise"? The whole book of Galatians tells us that a "promise" is something received freely. A "promise" is of grace; it is not a wage. It is given to us freely by God. Most people do not understand why every Christian, that is, every saved person, has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. They think that their spiritual condition must reach a certain level before the Holy Spirit will dwell in them. Yet the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit dwells in us because of the work of the Lord Jesus' redemption and not because of our own work. We can understand this by looking at one of the types in the Old Testament. Leviticus 14:25 says, "Then he shall slaughter the lamb of the trespass offering; and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering and put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot." What happened after this? Following this, verse 28 says, "Then the priest shall put some of the oil which is in his palm on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot—upon the place of the blood of the trespass offering." Those who received the application of the blood received the anointing of the oil. Where there is no blood, there is no oil. The oil is put upon a person after the blood is first put upon him. The Holy Spirit comes down because the blood is there already. God pours down the Holy Spirit of promise not because of our good behavior, but because of the blood. Therefore, all those who have heard the word of the truth and believed in Christ have received the Holy Spirit.

## I. THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A SEAL

What does the last part of verse 13 tell us about the Holy Spirit? It is like a "seal." Thank God that the Holy Spirit is like a "seal." Brothers and sisters, do you know why the sealing is needed and what "the seal" means? Second Timothy 2:19 says, "Having this seal, [1] The Lord knows those who are His, and, [2] Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." Therefore, there are two meanings to the sealing. First, once something is sealed, it signifies that the thing belongs to the man who sealed it. Second, what is being sealed bears the resemblance of the seal. "The Lord knows those who are His," indicates that all those who are sealed by the Lord belong to Him. "And, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness," indicates that all those sealed by the Lord should bear His image. The first meaning of the sealing is that we belong to the Lord. The second meaning is that we are the same as the Lord and bear His image. For instance, when I put a seal on an envelope with sealing wax, the seal on the envelope is just like my seal. Sometimes we see sons that look like their fathers and daughters that look like their mothers. We say that they must have come out of the same mold. This is the second meaning of the Holy Spirit as a seal. Therefore, the Holy Spirit as a seal tells us two things. First, I belong to Him; second, I should bear His image, for He is holy.

The Ephesians understood the Holy Spirit as a seal much better than we do, for their city was engaged in lumber business. Ephesus was close to a harbor, and the trees were cut on the mountain and floated downstream to the harbor. Once I read a book about Ephesus. It said that many merchants went there to buy lumber. Each of them brought with him a different seal of iron, like a hammer. When they completed negotiation on a load of lumber, each of them would seal the lumber he bought with his own hammer-seal before he went home. It did not matter if they did not come back after three or five months; some did not have need for the lumber right away. Whenever they wanted their lumber, they would send their men to get it, bringing along the hammer-seal used previously. They only needed to compare the seals on the wood with their own seal. All the pieces that had their seal belonged to them, and they could take them away. No mistake

could be made this way. This is the way the lumber merchants in Foochow conducted business also. They would buy the lumber in the upper part of the Ming River and seal it with their hammer-seals. Then the wood would be floated down the Ming River to Foochow. There the buyers would come and check their purchase by comparing it with their seal.

God has not only sealed us with the Holy Spirit as a seal, indicating that we belong to Him now, but has also told us that we are sealed unto the day of redemption. Hence, Ephesians 4:30 says, "You were sealed unto the day of redemption." It does not say "for a while" but "unto the day of redemption." What does "the day of redemption" refer to? It refers to the day our body is redeemed and raptured. When the Lord comes to reap and rapture the believers, there will be some in Shanghai, some in Southeast Asia, some in China, some in England, some in Africa, and some elsewhere. How can the Lord recognize His people? It is by the seal. The seal is just for the day of redemption. Where there is the seal, there will be no confusion and no mistake. God is like the lumber merchant. He only accepts those who belong to Him according to His seal. Those without the Holy Spirit are not His, and He will not accept them. Those with the Holy Spirit are His, and He will reap, raise them up, and take them home at the proper time. (Here, we will not cover the matter of the times and the order of rapture, for it is beyond the scope of this subject.) Our Christian life begins with salvation and ends with our redemption. From the beginning to the end, the Holy Spirit is always like a seal.

The Holy Spirit is the seal of God. The Holy Spirit is not the sealer but the seal. It is God who puts the Holy Spirit into us as a seal. If you have not believed in the Lord Jesus, your position is very dangerous. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus as Savior and as Lord, no matter if you are a new believer or have been a believer for a long time, you are safe and sound, for the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you. How long will this indwelling last? It will last unto the day of redemption. Some may think that if they are not good, if they stumble, or if they commit sins, the Holy Spirit will cease to dwell in them. But the Bible says, "Unto the day of redemption." There is something called "the chart of the heart" printed by some churches. It contains some excellent truths. But its teaching concerning

the Holy Spirit is completely wrong. It shows the Holy Spirit as a dove which flies away when a believer commits a serious sin, and man's heart is left without the Holy Spirit but with the devil and all kinds of lust. This is a great mistake. The Bible tells us very clearly that in the New Testament age, the Holy Spirit dwells in us unto the day of redemption; He never leaves us halfway through. Once God seals us with the Holy Spirit, it indicates that we belong to Him; it means that we will belong to Him forever, and this fact can never be changed.

But this is not all. There is another very glorious gift, which is that we can have the power to be like Him. When God seals us, not only does it indicate that we belong to Him, but that we, the sealed ones, bear the image of His seal. We know that if we put a seal on soft wax, it will naturally bear the image of the seal. When we are sealed within by God with the Holy Spirit, we will have God's nature and life. Such a nature and life are God-like. If we live according to them, we will have a living on earth that is God-like.

Many people are misled to think that they should try to improve and cultivate themselves and work hard before they can be like God, but this is not true. At the time we are saved, God has already made us like Him and given us something of Himself in our inner being. God has never commanded us to be like Him, because it is impossible for us to do it by ourselves. Yet we do have our responsibility, which is to express this image and not allow it to be covered by anything of the world. What a glorious truth that God's seal is in us! By this seal, that is, the Holy Spirit, we can live out God's life. With such a provision, nothing is impossible! Now we must realize that in us there is a treasure out of which we can bring forth many precious things.

As those who have the seal of God, our only responsibilities are, on the one hand, to reckon ourselves as being dead to sin and believe that everything that is against such an image has been dealt with by the Lord's cross. On the other hand, we have to consecrate ourselves to God and let the Holy Spirit live out God's life. When we fail and stumble, we still have not lost the image given by God's seal; we have only covered up this image and not lived out a life that is of God.

## II. THE HOLY SPIRIT BEING AN EARNEST

Now let us look at verse 14: “Who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory.” Paul told us in verse 13 that the Holy Spirit has sealed us. First, this indicates that we belong to God and, second, it makes us like God. He told us in verse 14 that the Holy Spirit is like a pledge (or what we commonly know as a deposit). What does this mean? Paul told us not only that the Holy Spirit has sealed us, but also that the Holy Spirit was given as a pledge, a deposit. In the original language, deposit means an actual deposit and a sample.

## A. Deposit

What is a “deposit”? Suppose I am buying a piece of land for two thousand dollars. I pay one hundred dollars in advance as a deposit. This means that the seller receives one hundred dollars first, and I give him the balance later. I only pay him a portion at first, while I must pay the balance later. If I am faithful, I will pay him the balance of one thousand nine hundred dollars. God does likewise. He gives us the Holy Spirit as a pledge. This means that He gives to us part of the heavenly blessing first as a guarantee that He will give us all the heavenly inheritance later. God puts Himself in a legally unchangeable position. He has paid the deposit and must therefore pay the whole later. God’s Holy Spirit is the guarantee of His promise. The Bible says that we, the believers, will receive much in abundance. Yet, how do we know He will carry out His word? We know it through the Holy Spirit. God makes the Holy Spirit a deposit and proves to us that none of His promise will fail. Since God has given us the Holy Spirit as a “deposit,” He is saying to us through the Holy Spirit that all of His will be ours. Once He does this, it becomes impossible for Him to change. Is there anyone in the world who has paid a deposit and will not pay the rest unless he is dishonest? God is faithful and righteous. Once He pays the deposit, He will surely pay the balance.

Mr. Philip Mauro said, “What is the deposit like? It is just like an engagement ring.” It means that now your fiancé gives you a small part, and that he will give you all that he has on the wedding day. Therefore, God gives us the Holy Spirit as a “deposit” indicating that all the riches in the heavens will be ours.

## B. Sample

People in ancient times had another custom. At the time of the sale of a piece of land, not only did the buyer pay some money as a deposit to the seller, but the seller also gave some of the soil as a sample to the buyer. This meant that the soil one received on that day would be the same as the soil he would receive in the future. God has given us the Holy Spirit not only as a deposit but also as a sample so that we can enjoy a foretaste of the heavenly things. By this, we know that what is given to us by God today will be the same in nature as what He will give to us in the future. If silver is given today, silver will be given in the future. If gold is given today, gold will be given in the future. God gives us the Holy Spirit today in order that we can have a foretaste of the heavenly things on earth today.

Brothers and sisters, have you ever tasted the heavenly things? The Bible tells us that Paul heard unspeakable words and tasted heavenly things. We fellowship with God, and we also fellowship with one another in the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the means through which we fellowship with God and by which we receive the heavenly joy and the bestowing of the Lord's love. When we come to the Lord, worship Him, or fellowship with one another, do we not feel the Lord's love and joy? This is the foretaste of the heavenly things! Once a brother talked about the Lord's love with me. He said, "When the Lord's love comes upon me, I cannot sit still. I want to go out and run for a while." What we taste today is good and rich. Yet in the future it will be better and richer. Sometimes we feel the Lord's love and joy burning within us like a fire. Yet what we taste today is still only a little. There will be much more in the future! What we taste today is just a little—a little today, a little tomorrow, and a little the day after. What we will taste in the future is not just this little. We cannot imagine how good it will be. It will be so good that we will say, "Even eternity is too short!"

We must remember that there are two meanings to the Holy Spirit being a deposit from God to us today. The first is that God gives us a part today and that He will give us the whole in the future. The other is that what God gives us today, He will give us in the future. When the spies of Israel cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes from the brook of Eshcol, and two carried it, they told Moses, "We came to the land to which you sent us; and surely it flows with milk and

honey, and this is its fruit" (Num. 13:27). This cluster of grapes indicated the nature of the land of Canaan. Surely it flowed with milk and honey! The Holy Spirit dwelling in us is also like this cluster of grapes. The taste today is just like what the heavenly taste will be in the future. We thank and praise God that He has given us the Holy Spirit, not only as our deposit, guaranteeing that He will give us the whole, but as a foretaste of the heavenly things.

## III. GRIEVING NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT

What we have covered thus far is the grace of God that has been given to us. Now we will consider the responsibility that we should bear. Let us read Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption." Paul exhorted us with the fact that the Holy Spirit is a seal. He meant that since we have the Holy Spirit as a seal, we should not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

What does "grieve" mean? Does it say here, "Let not the Holy Spirit of God be angry"? No, it does not say this. The Bible clearly says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." It is not "being angry with," but "grieve." This is a matter of love! Where there is hatred, there is anger. One cannot make the Holy Spirit of God angry, but one can grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We thank and praise God for the Holy Spirit of God within us only grieves; He never becomes angry through hatred. No matter how bad we are, the Holy Spirit only "grieves"; He does not become angry. I have heard someone say, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit to the point that He runs away." This is impossible. When Paul said, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God," he continued immediately with, "In whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption." No Christians can pray as David did: "Do not take the Spirit of Your holiness away from me" (Psa. 51:11). This is a prayer of the Old Testament age. No one in the New Testament can ever pray this prayer. No Christian, rightly taught, would pray like this. If a Christian knows the gospel, he would never pray such a prayer. Since the Holy Spirit can never run away, Paul entreated the believers in Ephesus, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." When a person is not good, others will either become angry with him or run away from him. Man may become angry or run away, but the Holy Spirit will never run away.

The Holy Spirit can only grieve. If He could run away, He would not have to grieve. The Holy Spirit cannot become angry because He loves you! Neither can the Holy Spirit run away because He loves you! Therefore, you should not grieve Him.

What does "grieve" mean? It is the same word as "sorrowful" in Matthew 26:37. Brothers and sisters, what kind of sorrow is this sorrow? It is the sorrow of our Lord Jesus at Gethsemane when God put upon Him all sins; He was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. If a Christian becomes weak and commits sins, the indwelling Holy Spirit will be sorrowful as the Lord was sorrowful even unto death. He will continually grieve within us. We should know that this is not a small thing. The Holy Spirit within us can be in either of two states: He can either be happy or sorrowful. Therefore, we should ask ourselves whether the indwelling Holy Spirit is happy or sorrowful. If He is not happy, He must be sorrowful. We can make Him either happy or sorrowful. May God enlighten us to know ourselves and see how rebellious, sinful, and evil we are. Yet the Holy Spirit never becomes angry within us, and He never runs away from us. He loves us and would only grieve within us.

When the Lord was at Gethsemane, He said to the disciples, "So were you not able to watch with Me for one hour?" (Matt. 26:40b). The Lord's sorrow was just for a while or for one hour. But the Holy Spirit dwells within us unto the day of redemption. As such, His sorrow is an enduring one. The sorrow of our Lord Jesus was over after a while, but the Holy Spirit is under the pressure of our sins moment by moment and day after day. If we disobey Him and refuse to listen to His voice all the time, do we realize how much He grieves within us? I do not know whether the Holy Spirit is happy or sorrowful in you. But you should know that either you are making Him happy, or you are making Him sorrowful.

What makes the Holy Spirit sorrowful? It is sins! Offenses against others, filthiness, fondness in criticisms, stealing of others' secrets and gossiping about them, finding fault with others, not forgiving others, not being faithful to the work of the Lord, to ones' own family, or to all things, inability to love others, or hunting for opportunity to profit oneself—these sins will grieve the Holy Spirit within us! Not only do sins grieve Him, even our disobedience to God's will, the

choosing of our own way, or taking the wrong way, also grieves Him! This is not all. Young Christians who love the world, who are reluctant to give up the world, to suffer, to testify for the Lord, or who do not care for the souls of sinners but have a cold heart, not caring if others are saved or perishing, also grieve the Holy Spirit!

You can grieve the Holy Spirit, but He will never leave, and He never becomes angry. He loves you. This is why He is sorrowful in you! Sometimes you may say, "Why am I not happy?" Let me tell you: if the Holy Spirit is not happy, you cannot be happy. If the Holy Spirit is happy, you can be happy. If the Holy Spirit grieves, how can you be happy? Even if you have worldly happiness, you cannot make the Holy Spirit within you happy. If you know what you must do, yet you do not do it according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, you will grieve the Holy Spirit within you, and you cannot be genuinely happy. You can only have "joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). If the Holy Spirit does not rejoice in you, you cannot rejoice in Him either.

May God enlighten us today to truly know that the Holy Spirit is like a seal and a deposit. Our responsibility on earth today is not to grieve the Holy Spirit. This is what we should be watchful to do every day. May God bless us!

## MESSAGE FIVE

# THE OTHER ASPECT OF THE TRESPASS OFFERING

## •Outline

- •The Relationship Between The Trespass Offering And The Other Four Offerings
  - A. Burnt Offering
  - B. Meal Offering
  - C. Peace Offering
  - D. Sin Offering
  - E. Trespass Offering
- •The Two Parts Of The Trespass Offering
- •The Significance Of The Trespass Offering
- •The Trespass Offering With Respect To Offenses Toward Men
- •Some Sins Against Man
  - A. Unfaithful to What Was Entrusted
  - B. Lying in Business
  - C. Robbing
  - D. Deceiving One's Fellowman
  - E. Taking What Others Have Lost
  - F. Swearing Falsely
- •The Way To Deal With The Trespasses
- •Adding The Fifth Part
- •The Time Of Repaying
- •The Offering Of The Trespass Offering

## •Scripture Reading: Lev. 6:1-7

Lev. 6:1-7 "Then Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, If anyone sins and acts unfaithfully against Jehovah and deceives his associate in regard to a deposit or a security, or by robbery, or has extorted from his associate, Or has found a lost item and lied about it, if he has sworn falsely in any one of all these things a man may do, and sins thereby; Then if he has sinned and is guilty, he shall restore that which he took by robbery, or the thing which he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost item which he found, Or anything about which he has sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in full, and shall add to it a fifth part of it. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs, on the day he is found guilty. And he shall bring to Jehovah his trespass offering, a ram without blemish out of the flock according to your valuation for a trespass offering; to the priest he shall bring it. And the priest shall make expiation for him before Jehovah, and he will be forgiven for any of the things which he may have done so as to be guilty."

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Today we want to read carefully before God this portion of the Scripture which talks about the trespass offering. The trespass offering is very important in the Bible. Altogether there are five offerings spoken of in Leviticus 1—6. These five offerings typify the five aspects of our Lord Jesus' offering of Himself as an offering. Jesus Christ is one offering; however, viewed from our side, this offering has five aspects. Our view can only be complete with these five aspects. If only one is used to typify the Lord, our view will not be complete. There need to be five offerings to typify the Lord. Therefore, these five offerings are very important.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TRESPASS OFFERING AND THE OTHER FOUR OFFERINGS

What relationship does the trespass offering have with the other four offerings? In order to answer this, we need to consider the four offerings. Then we will talk about the trespass offering. We need to understand the offerings one by one. In this way we will not over-emphasize the trespass offering.

### A. Burnt Offering

First, the burnt offering typifies our Lord's offering His whole being to God. This is very important. This offering is not for the propitiation of sin. However, if the Lord did not offer Himself absolutely to God, He could not propitiate our sins.

### B. Meal Offering

Second, the meal offering, which has no blood, typifies the Lord's living; His living in this world was very pure. Flour can be food for man. Our Lord lived before God in a very pure and fine way. This offering emphasizes His perfection. We can say that He was a perfect man.

### C. Peace Offering

Third, the peace offering signifies that the Lord has accomplished peace between God and man. This not only enabled God to be at peace with us, but it also enabled us to be at peace with God.

### D. Sin Offering

Fourth, the sin offering typifies the Lord's propitiation of our sin, enabling us to be reconciled with God. The Lord propitiated our sin so that we could be saved through His blood.

### E. Trespass Offering

The fifth offering is the trespass offering. Some may ask what the difference between the sin and trespass offering is. Sin denotes our sin generally; this is the sin before God. Trespasses are the individual sins we commit day by day; they can be counted. We may say that the sin offering is for all of our sins, the totality of sin, while the trespass offering is for our particular sins which can be counted.

## THE TWO PARTS OF THE TRESPASS OFFERING

The trespass offering is divided into two parts. One part is recorded in Leviticus 5; the other part is recorded in Leviticus 6. Chapter five talks about what we must do before God day by day when we sin against Him. Chapter six talks about what we must do before man day by day when we sin against man. I am not going to speak on chapter five. Rather, I want to speak on chapter six, that is, on what we must do if we sin against man in certain areas after we were

saved.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRESPASS OFFERING

I am not saying that this offering can bring salvation to a man. After we have the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, and the sin offering, we are saved and have life. The trespass offering mentioned in chapters five and six speaks of our fellowship with God. Receiving life is one thing; having fellowship with God is another. When you believe that Christ died for you and receive the Lord as your Savior, you have life. But this does not mean that from now on you will never lose your fellowship with God. The minute you were saved, you began to have fellowship with God. After you are saved, however, if you sin again and do not repent, you will lose your fellowship with God. You will feel that God is very far from you and that it is very difficult to pray and very hard to read the Bible. This does not mean that you have become unsaved again. Once a person believes, he is saved; this can never be changed. But his fellowship with God may change. If you have sinned and do not deal with it, you will lose your fellowship with Him. Many people are saved, but they cannot freely pray, and they find it difficult to read the Bible. The reason may be that their daily trespasses have not been dealt with properly.

At the time we were saved, we surely had a kind of joy; it was the joy of salvation. We wished that we could tell everyone about our salvation. How joyful we were. Unfortunately, this joy did not last very long. How was this joy lost? Perhaps we said some harsh words and offended someone. We became ashamed to face God. We sinned against man, but lost our joy. We sinned against man, but we lost our fellowship with God.

Today we must learn the lesson that a person should not remain merely saved, but should learn day by day to pray well, read the Bible well, testify well, and maintain a living fellowship with God. A man may lose his fellowship, but he can never lose his salvation. “They shall by no means perish forever, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29). This is what our Lord has said. Eternal life can never be lost; life can

never be lost. But the one thing that can be lost, perhaps more than ten times a day, is our fellowship with God.

Suppose a father tells his son to be good and not do certain things. If the son opens the cabinet, steals a piece of candy, and eats it, or if he soils his clothes, or if he plays with bad children, he will be somewhat afraid to see his father when he hears him calling. They are still father and son. But since he has done something which displeases his father, he dares not see his father right away. When he hears his father calling, his little heart jumps because he knows that something has gone wrong between him and his father. He will think that he cannot face his father when his clothes are soiled or his toys are ruined. He dares not see his father's face. But does this mean that he is no longer his father's son? This can never happen. The relationship of the father to the son can never change; it is the fellowship between the father and son that changes. The Father and son relationship that we have with God and the relationship in life can never be lost because of some change in our daily living. However, one thing can be lost: our daily fellowship with God.

The trespass offering is to bring us back into fellowship with God. The sin offering is to bring a sinner into believing in the Lord Jesus, while the trespass offering is to bring a Christian into fellowship with God. The sin offering removed our sin when we were unbelievers; the trespass offering removes the sins which hinder our daily fellowship with God. One gives us life, and the other gives us fellowship.

## THE TRESPASS OFFERING
## WITH RESPECT TO OFFENSES TOWARD MEN

I have already said that the trespass offering consists of two parts. One part concerns an offense toward God. This is covered in Leviticus 5. The other part concerns an offense toward man. This is covered in Leviticus 6. I want to speak on what to do when we have offended man. This is the subject of chapter six. Today's topic can be called, "What we must do if we have lost our fellowship with God due to our offense against others." We must remember that chapter six is not on salvation and receiving life, but on our fellowship with God.

## SOME SINS AGAINST MAN

Verse 1 says, "And Jehovah spoke to Moses." This tells us that what follows is from God and not from Moses. Let us see which sins, according to God, are against man. It seems as if God has put together a list which shows various kinds of trespasses. At the bottom of the list, a total of all these trespasses is given.

Verse 2 says, "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against Jehovah..." Since the following trespasses are all against man, why does it say that they are against the Lord? When a person sins against a man, he also sins against God. God is the Creator, and every human being is created by Him. Therefore, offending man is the same as offending God. Let us now consider some of the trespasses against man:

### A. Unfaithful to What Was Entrusted

Verse 2 says, "Lies to his fellowman in regard to a deposit." This sin will cause us to lose our fellowship with God. Brothers, has anyone delivered something to us to keep? Once when I went home to Foochow, someone asked me to bring some mangoes to my second aunt. But mangoes rot easily. Although I tried to prevent them from rotting, some still changed color and had almost become rotten. I thought that since all of them might be rotten by the time I arrived home, why not give them away to the people on the boat? So I selected three of the greenest ones, kept them, and gave the rest away. As I came closer to home, my heart felt a little uneasy. This was being unfaithful in the thing delivered to me by my neighbor. The mangoes were not mine. Regardless of being good or rotten, I had to bring them to my second aunt. I felt a little ashamed explaining this to my aunt, but I could not let it go unexplained because that would be unrighteousness. Finally, I cleared the matter up.

If someone entrusts fifty dollars to us, we may be faithful to it. But if someone entrusts fifty cents to us, we may not be truthful about it. Since the amount is small, we may think that it is unimportant. But this is deceitful; it is a sin which will cause us to lose our fellowship with God. Perhaps someone entrusts a letter to us to deliver. Even if we do not open the letter and read it, we sometimes like to look at the outside. It is all right if we unintentionally glance at

it; but if we have the intention to pry into others' secrets, we are wrong. This matter will hinder our real and intimate fellowship with God. I am afraid that the reason many people cannot read the Bible well is that they have sins which are not properly dealt with. If we are careless and do not deal with such sins, we will not be able to fellowship with God freely.

## B. Lying in Business

Verse 2 says, "Lies to his fellowman in regard to...a security." The previous case is general. This case is not general; it is very specific. This is to sin in business. However, this is not directed only at those who are in business, but to every brother and sister. Not only can businessmen commit this sin, every brother and sister can commit this sin as well. I heard that once a mother with her three sons was sitting on a bus. When the bus conductor came to collect the fares, the mother told one of her sons to give the conductor seventy cents. Four tickets should cost seventy-two cents, but she paid only seventy cents. She kept back two cents. This was not dishonesty on the part of the conductor, but dishonesty on the part of the one who purchased the tickets. Sometimes a person rides on a tram and passes three stations beyond his destination. Should he pay according to his original destination, or according to the station that he finally gets off at? He may think that it is better for him to profit than for the tram conductor to profit, and he may decide not to pay for the three stations. This is unrighteousness. The tram conductor may cheat, but how can a Christian cheat? As a Christian, he cannot allow these things to carelessly occur. Sometimes when we buy things, others may give us twenty cents more for change. If we do not return it, we are not honest. If we covet the extra twenty cents, we are delighting in sin. These are very small matters, but we should not let them pass lightly.

Some brothers say that without lying, one cannot be successful in business. But I tell you that we must conduct our business in honesty. We may suffer in the beginning, but eventually we will come out on top. This is what many brothers have told me. We do not have to lie, and we must not lie. If we lie intentionally in our business, we will lose our fellowship with God. We must deal with this.

## C. Robbing

Verse 2 says, "Or through robbery." Robbing, taking things away by violence, and usurping belong to the same kind of sin. To gain by force or to gain by improper means is to rob. Suppose someone asks you to be the executor of a will. After he dies, are you going to execute his will, or are you going to keep some for yourself? He has died, and the things are in your hands. If you willfully change the will, this is robbing. Some may have been soldiers or may have worked in the customs office. If you have used improper means to gain some possessions, this is robbing.

It is a fact that one receives life by believing in the Lord. It is also a fact that everyone who is saved through the blood of the Lord has his sins forgiven before God. However, when you sin against someone, God cannot forgive you on that person's behalf. For example, if I offend Brother Wang and I confess before God, God cannot forgive me on behalf of Brother Wang. If you offend man and do not deal with it properly, this sin will not cause you to lose your life, but it will cause you to lose your fellowship.

### D. Deceiving One's Fellowman

Verse 2 says, "Extorted from his fellowman." "Fellowman" in the Old Testament denotes other people; it does not necessarily mean the person next door. This is a kind of Jewish idiomatic expression. The fellowman denotes other people. How many mothers-in-law have deceived their daughters-in-law? How many parents have deceived their children? How many teachers have deceived their pupils? How many in high positions have deceived those under them? All of these are deceiving their fellowman, and all these matters displease God. None of us can act foolishly or live our lives foolishly. We must deal with these matters. Many are harsh husbands, harsh wives, or harsh mothers. Many mothers use improper ways to deceive their children. In our daily life, we deceive others in many ways. We often speak words that deceive others on the street. We often resort to force with the cab drivers or rickshaw drivers. We often are too harsh in dealing with others. These all deceive our fellowman. Servants and drivers were all created by God, and we cannot treat them in a harsh way. Very often they may be wrong and unreasonable. But do they have your kind of background? Do they

have your kind of position? Do they have your kind of education? They do not have your background, position, and education. How can you expect them to be as reasonable as you are? Even if they are wrong, you do not have to oppress them. Christians ought not to be unrighteous toward others. For Christians to deceive others is displeasing to God.

## E. Taking What Others Have Lost

Verse 3 says, "Or has found what was lost and lied about it." We may think that this matter is not very important, but this is deceitful. We may think that picking up things left behind by others is not unrighteous. But God says that this is deceitful. No Christian can claim what others have lost as his own. If we are on a tram and we see others deceiving, that is not our business. We cannot control them. We have no way to change the morals of society; the Lord will take care of it when He comes. Many pick up money and put it into their own pocket because they are afraid that the money would otherwise go into someone else's pocket. This is unrighteousness. Once I saw a man counting coins in a tram, and he dropped one. Another man stepped on the coin so that the owner would not see it. When the owner got off the tram, the other man also got off. I do not know if he paid the fare for the two additional stops just to get that one coin.

Whether it is a handkerchief, hat, fountain pen, or someone's letter, anything that is left on the street can never be claimed as our own. This is unrighteousness. In the past we may have picked up others' possessions. But whether it is money or objects, something big or small, as long as it is not ours, we cannot have it as our possession. If at all possible, we must return it. When we see something left on the street, we should wait for the owner to come and find it, or we should hand it to the local officials. Otherwise, God will say we have sinned.

## F. Swearing Falsely

Verse 3 says, "And has sworn falsely." Swearing has two aspects in the original language. One is in the context of the previous trespass, and the other is independent of it. In the context of the previous trespass, it means that when after picking up another's thing and being caught and questioned, one lies and

swears that he has not picked it up and that if he had, he would have done such and such. It is wrong for you to pick up another's thing and to lie and swear that you did not do it. This is condemned by God. We can never lie this way to avoid trouble.

Generally speaking, lying is a way of avoiding being blamed for sin. I have said that there are three big reasons for lying. One reason is pride. Lying may keep one's pride intact. After one has done something wrong and people ask him about it, he either says that he did not do it or says something else to cover it up in order to save his face. Another reason for lying is that one fears that others may become too strict toward him. An overly strict mother will have lying children. An overly strict teacher will have lying pupils. An overly strict master will have lying servants. Being too strict will cause others to lie. If you can tolerate the mistakes of others, they may be willing to tell you the truth. But if you have a whip in your hand and cannot forgive the smallest matter, others cannot help but lie because lying may help them avoid difficulty and save them. The third reason for lying is what we have been speaking about today, that is, lying in order to gain profit. If I can gain one hundred dollars by just a little lie, why should I not lie? It is possible to gain some benefit or money by lying. Some lie because of pride; some lie because others are too strict. These are lesser sins. But lying in order to gain a profit is a more serious sin. God condemns any lie that is done for profit. Lying is condemned already; but lying for profit is condemned even more.

Some who work as nurses may take some cotton swatches and medicine from the hospital. Their intention may be to bring them home for their own use. But when the pharmacist asks them what they are doing, they may say that these are for their patients. They may be successful in taking those things, but this is lying for profit. It is very easy for us to acquire things that belong to the government by way of lying. This is wrong. As Christians, we cannot do this. I have no objection to man giving you something or allowing you to take something. If others have the authority to give something to you, I have no objection.

Some may be working in an organization where everyone is allotted papers,

envelopes, pencils, etc. If you conserve some of them and give them to your children, that is all right because they are your portion. But if you tell the one allotting the stationery that you do not have enough and need more, it is a sin. You are profiting by improper means, and this is not pleasing to God.

## THE WAY TO DEAL WITH THE TRESPASSES

If we have committed these trespasses, what shall we do? The following verses tell us what to do in our practice. Once we realize that there is sin, we should deal with it.

Verse 4 says, "When he sins and is guilty." Sinning is an act, while being guilty is something before God; it is having a case of sin before God. We can see what needs to be done when there is a case of sin from the following verses.

Verse 4 continues, and verse 5 says, "He shall return what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was deposited with him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more; he shall give it to whom it belongs on the day he is found guilty." The most important command is first to restore and give the things back to others. Whatever is not yours can no longer remain in your house. If a Christian is not clean, one cannot blame society for being unclean. If a Christian covets others' possessions, one cannot blame many government officials for coveting others' possessions. If a Christian is loath to part with the things which he has obtained, one cannot blame others for being loath to part with the things they have obtained. Every Christian has to be clean. If at all possible, we have to repay others and confess to others.

There is one main difference between the sin offering and the trespass offering. The sin offering is to "propitiate," and the trespass offering is to "repay." We cannot repay God for our offenses against Him; neither can we propitiate our offenses against men. We have sinned and can only be propitiated to God by the Lord's blood. When we have offended others, we cannot propitiate, but we must repay. If we are not faithful to what others have entrusted to us, or if we have gained something by base means, we have to repay others. If we are not willing to repay others, we cannot offer the trespass offering. By the blood of the Lord

Jesus, we can receive forgiveness from God for our sins. This is the truth. However, if we have offended others and are not willing to deal with the offenses, we will lose our fellowship with God. Whenever we think about it, we will feel bound, uneasy in our conscience, and that we are unable to fellowship with God.

The meetings at Keswick started fifty-one years ago. Once Mr. F.B. Meyer was invited to speak. What did Mr. Meyer say in his first message? He said, "If we expect God to bless and revive us, we must first take care of things properly. If there is any bill still being kept in your house that you have not paid, you should not expect any blessing or revival." There may be a bill of ten dollars in your house that has not been paid for a long time. Bringing a lawsuit against you is too much, but ignoring it will mean that the bill will remain with you forever. After Mr. Meyer said this, the result was immediate. The next day, all the money orders at the Keswick post office were sold out. From this, we can see how many unrighteous Christians there are.

Many can say, "I have never killed anyone, and I have not set fire to anyone's house." But to take a little advantage of others can cause us to lose our fellowship with God. The blood of Christ will only wash us of our sins and wash our conscience; it will not wash our heart. Only after we have dealt with all our earthly relationships will our heart be washed clean.

Some things are harder than others to deal with. Many people have their assets built on unrighteousness. If these are not dealt with clearly, they cannot have good fellowship with God. These things will hold them back from further advance. If there is anyone whose assets are built on unrighteousness, if at all possible, they should give all these things back to others today. If at all possible, they should settle these things properly. Of course, if it is not possible, God will still accept their heart. There was a brother who owed others tens of thousands of dollars. He had acquired the money by illegal means and later spent almost all of it. At this time he had only three or four thousand dollars left. He had a few children to feed, and he asked me what he should do. I said to him, "If you had fifty thousand dollars in the bank, what would you do? If you had fifty thousand dollars and did not want to repay what you owed, it would be a different story because then it would not be a matter of not having the money, but a matter of

not being willing to repay the money. However, God will not let you go. If there is an accusation in your conscience, you will not have peace. In this case you should return to the others what little you have." We would rather be poor and peaceful in our conscience. If we do not deal with our sins clearly, all our energy will be wasted away.

## ADDING THE FIFTH PART

Verse 5 says, "He shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more." For example, if we owe someone five dollars, we have to repay him six dollars. This extra dollar is counted as the interest. The fifth part must be added when we restore to others all that we have taken advantage of them in. This includes all money and materials gained by improper means. This additional fifth part is to compensate for the loss suffered by others. When we pay others back, it is not too much to give a little extra. When we restore things to others, we should not restore just the exact amount. We should always give a little extra; otherwise, we may shortchange others. This is a most important principle. Suppose I apologize to Brother Wang after I have an argument with him, and I say, "I should not have argued with you today; I did not behave like a Christian. However, you should not have argued with me either." I confess, but that confession can only be considered a restoring of the principal; it is exact accounting. This kind of confession does not have the fifth part added. When we confess, it does no harm to confess a little more. Not only should we restore the principal, but we should add the extra fifth part. This is a principle. We should extend the limit a little. If we are still complaining about others when we confess, this means we still have hatred in our heart. We should only confess our own sins, and we should not implicate others when we confess. We should add an extra fifth part to God's ordination. It is not enough to confess five- fifths; we have to confess six-fifths. If we are going to confess, we have to extend the boundary a little further.

## THE TIME OF REPAYING

Verse 5 says, "He shall make restitution for it in full...on the day he is found guilty." This tells us that we should give back on the same day as our trespass

offering and not wait any longer. Once we are clear about something, there is no need to wait for the Holy Spirit to move us anymore; the Holy Spirit has already moved us and made known to us our trespass. We need not wait; we should make restitution immediately. If we delay in our restitution, there may be two undesirable consequences. First, our conscience may become more and more quiet. It is precious to have the conscience speak again and again; it is terrible to be without its speaking. Second, the condemnation of our conscience may become more and more acute, so that we become unable to open our mouth before others. Then we cannot preach and have no peace at all. If we know about our trespasses and delay and wait, there surely will be these two consequences.

Therefore, if we have offended someone, we have to deal with the matter clearly. If we have shortchanged someone or gained things by unrighteous means, we have to give them back and settle the matters properly. We should never be deceived to think that we only need to confess to God when we offend others, and that there is no need to confess to men. This is absolutely wrong. God can forgive us because of the Lord's blood, but God cannot forgive us on behalf of others. We have to repay the same day. Whenever it becomes known to us, that is the time to take care of it. If we wait one or two days, we will find that we have less power to do it. Doing this requires strength, and today is when the strength is most available.

## THE OFFERING OF THE TRESPASS OFFERING

Verse 6 says, "Then he shall bring to the priest his trespass offering to Jehovah, a ram without blemish from the flock, according to the valuation, for a trespass offering." This is the second thing that needs to be done. Even though we have paid others back, there is still one more thing we need to do. Even if we have paid others back, it will not bring us forgiveness before God. We still have to offer up the trespass offering. No one in the world can be forgiven just by confessing. If we have offended God, we can only receive forgiveness by the Lord's blood. If we have offended man, we have to clear the offense with man, and this needs to be done first. At the same time, we have to say, "O God, I know that I have offended someone in a certain matter, and I have already cleared it up

with him. Now, please forgive my trespass by the blood of the Lord Jesus." If we clear it up with others and confess to God today, He will surely forgive our trespasses according to the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 7 says, "And the priest shall make propitiation for him before Jehovah, and he shall be forgiven for whatever he may have done by which he has become guilty." There is no trespass in the world that is too great for God to forgive. The question is whether or not we will confess. But we cannot lay aside the blood of the Lord Jesus. It is through the Lord's blood that we can have fellowship with God.

Today I would like all of us to see the place of confession in the Bible. Some may say we can be forgiven without confession; this is not enough. Others may say that through confession we are forgiven; this is too much. The Bible says that once we have offended someone, on the one hand, we need to deal clearly with man, and on the other hand, we need to confess clearly to God. God will forgive us by the blood of the Lord Jesus. If we do not clearly settle with man and only confess to God, our conscience will not be at peace, and we will not have the strength to believe that the Lord's blood can bring us forgiveness. Without the Lord's blood, our trespasses cannot be forgiven; however, if we do not confess to man, our trespasses will still not be forgiven just by trusting in the Lord's blood.

Today my only hope is that we would clearly settle before God all of our offenses against others. Otherwise we will lose our fellowship with God.

## MESSAGE SIX

# THE REASON THE LORD WAS NOT DISAPPOINTED

**•Scripture Reading: John 4:13-14; 2:23-24; 6:15; 7:3-4, 6, 9; 12:24; 13:37-38; 16:31-33**

John 4:13-14 "Jesus answered and said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life."

2:23-24 "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed into His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus Himself did not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men,"

6:15 "Then Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him King, withdrew again to the mountain, Himself alone."

7:3-4 "His brothers therefore said to Him, Depart from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing; For no one does anything in secret and himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, manifest Yourself to the world."

6 "Jesus therefore said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready."

9 "And having said these things to them, He remained in Galilee."

12:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

13:37-38 "Peter said to Him, Lord, why can't I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You. Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, A rooster shall by no means crow until you deny Me three times."

16:31-33 "Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming, and has come, that you will be scattered each to his own place and will

leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have affliction, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

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"Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:13-14, KJV)

Our Lord did everything well when He was on earth. There is one verse in Mark that says that He has done all things well (Mark 7:37). Indeed, everything He did was done well. Today we will speak on what the Lord has done. At the same time we will pay particular attention to the words of John 4:13 and 14.

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. He tells us how He will fill the heart of a Christian and quench all his unquenchable desires. This is the Lord's own promise to us: "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever." Whoever drinks of the water that the Lord gives will be quenched of his desires forever; he will never feel that he is lacking in something and will never be disappointed. Our next question is, can this be possible? Yes, it is possible that those who have received the Lord Jesus will never thirst again. But why are some people still not satisfied? Some have said that they are still thirsty, that they still have not received what they want, and that there is still something they are after. Does this mean that the Lord's promise is not fulfilled? No, it does not because the Lord says that whoever drinks of the water He gives will by no means thirst forever. The Lord satisfies forever.

Why then are we still thirsty? Why then are we not satisfied and still filled with desires? Why are there still sorrows, worries, demands, and self-pity? The reason is that we only see the promise of verse 14 but have forgotten the declaration of verse 13. The Lord not only says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever," He also says before this that "everyone who drinks of this water [the world's water, the water left by Jacob,

which is the best water in the world] shall thirst again."

Many people do not understand the nature of the water of this world. They do not understand the nature of the things that the world can give to them, whether they last, and how long they last. They cannot tell, first of all, the difference between the temporary and the eternal, the seen and the unseen, the physical and the spiritual. This is why they do not understand that to have the promise of the Lord in verse 14, in which He promises to satisfy their hearts, there must first be the realization of verse 13 which says that the water of this world cannot satisfy their hearts. We must first know that "everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again" before we understand the Lord's word, "by no means thirst forever." The Lord wants us to be satisfied; He does not want us to take one thing and hope for another over and over again and never find ourselves satisfied.

Today I am not speaking about the world's water and how it cannot satisfy man's heart. I am here to explain why Christians feel thirsty in this world. Why are Christians thirsty? The reason we are thirsty is because we turn back to drink the water of verse 13. Why do we become disappointed? If there is no hope, there will be no disappointment. If there was never a hope, there would never be a disappointment. If we never hope to have money, we will never be disappointed by the lack of money. In the same way, if we hope that the water of this world can satisfy us, our eyes will be turned in the wrong direction, and we will feel thirsty. This is the reason we become heartbroken, uneasy, and disappointed.

Why is it that we cannot be satisfied? We want to satisfy our desires with the things that are soon passing away. If we want transient things, transient fame and fortune, we will never be satisfied. Once these things fall into our hands, we will find that they do not gratify us; they will not make us happy or satisfied. We feel that we have more desires; we want more things. We are thirsty again and have to drink again. Our mistake lies in the fact that we try to satisfy ourselves with transient things. If our hands are holding onto these transient things and our hearts are set on these transient things, we will never be satisfied in our hearts.

Today I will speak about the Lord's own words exclusively from the Gospel of John. In addition to the Gospel of John, the other three Gospels record many of the Lord's words. Our Lord was never discouraged. What He experienced and encountered in His environment during His lifetime should have given Him much discouragement and disappointment. But He was not discouraged or disappointed. Isaiah 49 says something concerning the Lord. It says that God intends for Christ to bring Jacob back again to Him and gather Israel back again to Himself. But outwardly everything seemed to have failed completely. How did He feel? It says, "I have labored in vain; / I have used up my strength for nothing and vanity; / Yet surely the justice due to me is with Jehovah, / And my recompense with my God" (v. 4). He was not disappointed. Isaiah 42 also says that the Lord did not faint and was not discouraged. Although what He encountered could have caused Him to faint and be discouraged, He did not behave that way.

The emphasis of the Gospel of John is different from that of the Gospel of Matthew. The Lord in the Gospel of John was rejected by men from the beginning. The Lord in the Gospel of Matthew was not rejected until after chapter twelve. John 1 records that the Lord came to His own, and His own received Him not. He came to bear the sins of the people of Israel and the Gentiles. Yet men did not want Him; they rejected Him and would not receive Him. When He was on the cross, men rejected Him, and God also rejected Him. We would have been disappointed, discouraged, saddened, and grieved. But John 19 records that the Lord cried on the cross, "It is finished!" We would have cried, "It is over!" But He was shouting like a victorious army, "It is finished!" Throughout His life, He took satisfaction in God. He had no hope toward the world and did not expect to receive anything from it. His only hope was in God, and His only satisfaction was in God. He said that no one knows the Son except the Father, that He did not receive glory from men, that He did not come to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him, and that He always did the will of the One who sent Him. Our Lord had God's will as His satisfaction all His life. He was satisfied only with God. This is why He was not disappointed no matter how people, events, and things in this world changed. Those who take their satisfaction in God will never

be disappointed.

On the negative side, we should not cherish any hope concerning the world. If we do not expect any fame, glory, help, comfort, or support from this world, we will never be thirsty. We should take care of the way we view the water of this world. Our view concerning the world will surely determine our hope towards those in the world.

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed into His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus Himself did not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men" (John 2:23-24).

In John 2 the Lord performed two great miracles. After He performed the first miracle, the disciples believed in Him. After He performed the second miracle, many who saw His miracles also believed in Him (v. 23). When we see the congregation growing and the number of believers increasing through our preaching, our hearts subconsciously go to the work. But the Lord was not this way. Verse 24 says, "But Jesus Himself did not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men." He would not take any enjoyment from men. He did not entrust Himself to men because He knew that they would eventually be the ones to crucify Him on the cross. The Lord was glad when so many believed in Him. But He would not entrust Himself to them. He would not allow them to gain His heart. The work might be successful, but it did not occupy His heart. This is why He could maintain His transcendency.

"I do not receive glory from men" (John 5:41).

In this chapter there was a man who was ill for thirty-eight years. He was healed by the Lord in an instant. After this, many who had opposed Him no longer opposed Him. Many were giving glory to God. But the Lord Jesus said, "I do not receive glory from men." The Lord said that He would not receive glory from men. We would have gladly welcomed glory from men. If we expect glory from men, we will rejoice when men give us glory and will be disappointed when they do not give us glory. But the Lord would not accept any glory from men on the negative side. He would not accept anything. He did not expect anything and would not accept anything. As a result, He was not disappointed in anything.

"Then Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and take Him by force to

make Him King, withdrew again to the mountain, Himself alone" (John 6:15).

At that time, there were a few thousand people gathering there. They saw the miracle of the multiplying of the loaves and exclaimed that this man was indeed their king. Although many people exalted the Lord, He rejected them all. He would not receive glory from men. He would not take anything from men and drink of the water of this world. The God within Him was enough to satisfy His heart. This was why He could reject everything that the world would give Him. To "withdraw" is the best attitude. Withdrawing will preserve a worker of the Lord from the damage of being uplifted. Withdrawing gives a person the opportunity to prove that God is the satisfaction; it is also the result of being satisfied in God.

"His brothers therefore said to Him, Depart from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing; for no one does anything in secret and himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, manifest Yourself to the world...Jesus therefore said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready...And having said these things to them, He remained in Galilee" (John 7:3-4, 6, 9).

At that time, the brothers of the Lord thought that He could become famous by performing more miracles. Therefore, they said to the Lord, "If You want a name, You should go to places with many people. If Your disciples had not seen You, they would not have believed in You, and if the Jews do not see You, they will not believe in You either. Jerusalem is a big place and has many people. If You go there, men will believe in You, and You will be famous." Yet the Lord "remained in Galilee." Although it was an easy thing to move to another place, and although such a move would have given Him many conveniences, He would not do it. Most people are curious and many will utter praises out of curiosity. If the Lord had accommodated them, there would have been hundreds of opportunities for Him to receive praise. But the Lord did not entrust Himself to them. He did not want special praises from men. He had something within Him and had no need of any outward thing. He knew the nature of the water of this world. This is why He could say to the few women who wept for Him when He was crucified on the cross, "Do not weep over Me, but weep over yourselves and over your children"

(Luke 23:28). He was not disappointed.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). In this chapter, we see the most glorious day the Lord had on earth. Not only did many Jews believe in Him, and not only did His friends believe in Him, even the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are not doing anything worthwhile; behold, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19). Not only did His enemies concede their defeat, His friends trust in Him, and the Jews believe in Him, but the Gentiles also believed in Him. At that time, a few Greeks asked Philip to tell the Lord Jesus that they wanted to see Him. These groups of people all confessed that this was the day of victory for the Lord Jesus. If we were in such a situation, we would have been riding on the clouds and basking in our own glory. But what did the Lord Jesus do? At that very instant, He told His disciples, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The Lord said this with reference to His own death (see 12:33). It seems as if the Lord was saying to Philip, "The way the Father has commissioned me to take is not always one that rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. It is not always a way that men welcome." The world was willing to give everything to Him, but He did not enjoy it and would not accept it. He did not drink any of the water of this world. He rejected everything from man and set His eyes on what God gave to Him.

We should learn this lesson. In particular, the workers of the Lord should learn this lesson. Although men may turn their face towards us today, they may kick their heels at us tomorrow. The ones who cried, "Hosanna," to the Lord one day were the same ones who cried, "Take Him away," the next day. The Lord was not discouraged or disappointed by them. He rejected in a hidden way all the excellent treatment from men. He would never have any direct relationship with His environment. His direct concern was God and His will. This is why His way in the world was not crooked. But our way in the world is crooked. Our Lord did not allow His friends to make His way crooked; He did not allow men's praise to influence His pathway, nor did He allow the enemy's opposition to change His journey.

“Peter said to Him, Lord, why can’t I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You. Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, A rooster shall by no means crow until you deny Me three times” (John 13:37-38).

All the temptations mentioned above were either from men’s glory or the enemy’s suggestions. This was a harder temptation for the Lord from Peter. Peter said, “Why can’t I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You.” The Lord replied to Him saying, “A rooster shall by no means crow until you deny Me three times.” To our impression, Peter often went before the Lord to help Him. But the Lord would not entrust Himself to him. If I had a disciple—of course, I do not have any—and if he was always helping me at my side, I am afraid I would give him a fierce look if he denied me in the middle of my trial in court. The look would say, in effect, “Why do you deny me?” But the Lord turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). That one look caused Peter to go out and cry.

One of the our hymns says:

What has stripped the seeming beauty
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty,
But the sight of peerless worth.
‘Tis that look that melted Peter,
‘Tis that face that Stephen saw,
‘Tis that heart that wept with Mary,
Can alone from idols draw.

Once He takes a look at us with His two eyes, we melt.

But there is another revelation in His looking at Peter. We have put too much hope in “our Peter.” When he says some untrustworthy words, offends us, or talks about us, we become disappointed, discouraged, and even grieved. We cannot stand our Peter’s misunderstanding and unfaithfulness. But if we drink of the water of this world, hoping that our friends, relatives, or others will satisfy us, we will surely be thirsty again. If we are happy about our house, friends, food, and all the other things because they are from God, we can be satisfied with God and will not be disappointed when our situation changes. We will not be

stumbled or hurt.

"Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming, and has come, that you will be scattered each to his own place and will leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have affliction, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:31-33).

At that time, the disciples had all believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord asked, "Do you now believe?" He also said, "You will be scattered each to his own place and will leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." John 17 is the last prayer of the Lord, while John 16 is His last discourse with the disciples. The consummation of His discourse is in the last few sentences of chapter sixteen. He said that everyone would be scattered and that He would be left alone. We would have complained to God if we had been left alone, but the Lord said that the Father was with Him. He could try to draw comfort from all the disciples who had been with Him for years, but He did not put His hope in any one of them. Although they all left Him, He did not feel hurt or unsettled. On the contrary, He told them His experience so that they would have peace in Him. He knew that those who drink of the water of this world will be thirsty again, and He would not drink it even when there was water readily available to Him. Those who do not drink of this water but drink of the living water will never thirst again.

Why can we not live a satisfied life? Why are we disappointed? It is because we have hopes. In fact, we have great hopes. But when we cannot get what we hope for and cannot be satisfied, we become disappointed. I can testify that many times I was ridiculed, but many times I was praised also. Sometimes even Satan would praise me. At such times the Lord would remind me of this verse, and I was reminded to drink less of this water. In this way I would not become thirsty after a while and be disappointed again. When human love, help, money, fame, ease, and comfort come our way, we may think that they are ours and that we may drink as much of them as we want. But if we drink so much of them, one day we will become thirsty! The amount we drink in the world will be the degree of thirst we will have.

Some Christians have asked me why they do not feel the preciousness of the Lord when others feel so much of His preciousness. My answer to them is that they have drunk too many kinds of water besides the Lord. This is why the Lord is not precious to them. We only need to see how much we have consecrated on earth and how much we have forsaken on earth to know how much we treasure the Lord.

Paul did say that he was for the excellency of Christ. But that was not all he said; he also said that he forsook something. He considered all things as loss. He forsook all things, and at the same time he went after the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. If we have nothing apart from the Lord, we will see that everything in the Lord is precious to us and will satisfy us. According to John 4, the amount we forsake will be the amount we receive. However much we reject the world, we will enjoy that much of the Lord's riches.

Friends, if others give you love, fame, comfort, glory, and fortune, what will you do? Do you think that the Samaritan woman stopped drinking the world's water just because she had the living water? No, she still had to drink of the world's water. We cannot stop drinking water. This is why when the world, friends, and relatives render us glory, fame, fortune, comfort, and help, we can let them do it. However, we must not indulge ourselves in these things; we must not entrust ourselves to them and should not be moved by them. We should not demand anything from them and should neither drink nor ask to drink. If you do this, you will not be disappointed.

Isaiah 53:2 is a word concerning the Lord Jesus which I treasure very much: "For He grew up like a tender plant before Him, / And like a root out of dry ground." What does this mean? In a place where there is water, trees grow easily and quickly. However, the Lord's environment was such that it did not render Him any help at all. His surroundings did not give Him anything. The world did not help Him at all. His enemies did not give Him any help; neither did the devil nor the angels give Him any help. Everything He had was from God; He did not receive anything from His surroundings that would encourage, support, or comfort Him. His life was a straight line. We know that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Our Lord took the straight path from this

world to His destiny. He said that no one who puts his hand on the plow and looks behind is fit for the kingdom of God. What does this mean? Those who have their hands on the plow must look forward; otherwise, the furrows will be crooked. When the eyes look forward, the plow will run straight. If a person looks behind him, the furrow he plows will not be straight. God does not want us to turn or to circle around. He is our satisfaction.

Why can we be satisfied? We can be satisfied because the water that He will give us will become in us a spring of water gushing up into eternal life. All outward fame and glory, everything outward is useless. Unless Christ is in us, and unless God's Spirit is in us, nothing will satisfy us. Indeed, other than the Lord, nothing can satisfy us. At the same time, if we are not satisfied with Him, we cannot remember Him here.

I thank Him because He has trodden the way for us. He is indeed our lovable Lord!

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## HAVING BEEN MADE DEAD TO THE LAW

## •Outline

- •Who Can Receive God's Deliverance
- •The Meaning Of Being Delivered From The Law
- •How To Be Delivered From The Law
- •Having Died In Christ
- •Being Joined To The Resurrection Life Of Christ

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 7:4, 15-19

Rom. 7:4 "So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God."

15-19 "For what I work out, I do not acknowledge; for what I will, this I do not practice; but what I hate, this I do. But if what I do not will, this I do, I agree with the law that it is good. Now then it is no longer I that work it out, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but to work out the good is not. For I do not do the good which I will; but the evil which I do not will, this I practice."

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Romans 7 is a very familiar chapter to us. Not only is it familiar to us in our reading, it is also familiar to us in our experience. We often read Romans 7 and often practice Romans 7. What the Lord wants me to speak on today is the way to be delivered from the demand of the law, that is, the way to be delivered from ourselves.

### WHO CAN RECEIVE GOD'S DELIVERANCE

Before we speak on the subject of deliverance and the way to be delivered, I will first mention one qualification. What type of persons are qualified to speak about deliverance? Brothers and sisters, although God's deliverance is for everyone, not everyone receives deliverance. Although it is possible for everyone to be delivered from the law, not everyone is actually delivered. The problem is absolutely not with God but with man, because man does not want to be delivered and has not paid the price for deliverance.

The apostle who wrote Romans 7 was eventually delivered because he paid the price; he hated something and he willed to do something. The biggest problem that confronts us today is that we are not yet delivered. Yet I would like to ask if we have deeply hated the temper that we have not been able to overcome. Have we deeply hated the sin that causes us to fall and the things that stumble us all the time? Or are we willing to say that sinning is something common to all Christians and is, therefore, unavoidable? Do we sense a hatred for the unclean thoughts, the sinful deeds, the entangling temper, and the evil lusts; do we look for deliverance from them? The apostle not only speaks of deliverance in this chapter but also of his feeling before his deliverance. Before he was delivered, he hated what he repeatedly did. He did not practice what he willed, and he did what he hated. The first question is whether we love or hate the things that we are doing. The apostle experienced deliverance because he deeply hated and desperately sought for deliverance. He was so disgusted with his life of sin that he could no longer tolerate it; he felt that he could no longer go along with it. He hated it so much that he wished to die. He would not allow it to go on for a moment longer. He experienced the deliverance because he had such a determination.

Brothers and sisters, do you have such a hunger within? Have you ever said that you cannot continue to live a life that is bound and entangled with sin? Have you realized how loathsome such a living is? Brothers and sisters, the words which God commissioned me to speak this morning are only for those who desire deliverance and consider that the level of their Christian life is too low. My words are not for those who are self-satisfied and content with living in sin and failure. They are for those who seek deliverance and have not found the way.

They are not for those who think it is all right to lose one's temper, to be lustful, or have unclean thoughts. Neither are they for those who think that they only need to confess when they have failed and that everything will be all right as soon as God forgives their sins. The victory in Romans 7 is for those who experience the failures like those in Romans 7. Anyone who is not saved cannot experience this kind of deliverance. Only those who hate their present living and do not wish to continue with such a living can experience this victory. Those who live in failure and sin, not realizing that they have to reject these things, will never find God's deliverance coming to them.

Every time a person wants to have spiritual growth in his life before God, he must first be dissatisfied with his present living. All growth begins from dissatisfaction. One must be pressed to such an extent that he feels he cannot go on anymore, that he has reached the end of himself, and that his living is unacceptable. He must consider that it is no longer acceptable to be bound by the self, the world, and sin; and it is no longer acceptable that what he wills, he does not do, and what he hates, he does. He has to recognize that such a contradictory life cannot go on and that there must be a way out. God will grant His deliverance only to those who are living under these conditions. Therefore, we have a great need before God to ask Him to give us the grace to not be content with our life of sin and failure. Every victory begins with a realization of our failure and wickedness. Everyone who desires deliverance must first be so pressed that he feels he cannot go on. Only then can he experience deliverance. I am merely telling the way; actual deliverance can only come from God. In other words, while I am giving the light, only God gives the revelation directly. Light cannot save; only revelation can save.

## THE MEANING OF BEING DELIVERED FROM THE LAW

Romans 7 is a great chapter, and we cannot cover all of it today. We will only mention verse 4. In this verse, the first thing mentioned is: "So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law." In other words, we are dead to the law. Brothers, have we realized that we need to be delivered from the law? If I say that we should be delivered from sin, everybody understands because sin is

loathsome, and it is right to be delivered from it. If I say that we should be delivered from the world, everyone also understands because the world has crucified our Lord and is indeed evil. If I say that we should be delivered from ourselves, everyone also understands because the flesh is something evil. If I say that we should be delivered from uncleanness or licentiousness, we can still understand. But if I say that we should be delivered from the law, some may say that they do not feel the need for such a deliverance. If the apostle says that we need to be delivered from the self, we say, "Amen." If he says that we need to be delivered from the world or sin, we would again say, "Amen." But when he says that we have been delivered from the law or that we are dead to the law, we do not know how to respond. We realize that what the apostle said cannot be wrong, but we do not understand why he said it. We understand deliverance from sin, from the self, and from the world. But we cannot understand the reason for deliverance from the law. Why did the apostle tell us that we are delivered from the law and that we are dead to the law? What does deliverance have to do with the law? It has a great deal to do with it. Deliverance from the law has a great deal to do with deliverance from the world, from sin, and from the self. Therefore, this is a very important matter.

Brothers and sisters, if we desire to experience deliverance, it is very important that we realize that God has no more hope in us. If we are seeking deliverance, we first need to understand ourselves and realize that we are hopeless. We have to clearly see how God evaluates us and how we evaluate ourselves. All of us belong to Christ; we are His. We may have been Christians for many years, but I am afraid that we have lived a life of failures and frequent stumblings and downfalls. But what happens after each failure? Almost everyone makes a resolution after a failure, saying to himself, "Next time I will do better and will not fail." Every failure brings another heartache and self-condemnation, and the question is raised once more, "Why did I do this? Why did I fail again? I am a believer and should not be this way. This is too poor!" You become very disheartened.

After you fail, as with almost everyone, there are two results. First, you resolve to do better the next time. Second, you feel sorry and sigh, looking back

at what you have done and asking why you are so bad. This is what you do all the time. When you fail, you are heartbroken and ask, "How could I have fallen so low? I will never do anything like that again. Lord, deliver me from this!" Your experience is similar to that of Romans 7. Before one heartache goes away, another occasion for heartache comes. One resolution has not worked, but you still find yourself making a second resolution. This goes on time after time and things still do not improve. This is your situation. What is the reason for this? The reason is that you have not yet been delivered from the law, and have not yet seen what the law is, and what being delivered from the law is.

If you want to understand what it is to be delivered from the law, you must first understand the relationship that the law has with us. The law is God's requirement on our flesh. The law is God telling us that we should or should not do something. It is what God says concerning what we ought and ought not to do. It is what God forbids or commands us to do. Therefore, the law is God's requirement on us. In brief, the law is all the demands that God places on those who are in Adam and all the commands that God gives to those who are in Adam, commands that tell them what they should or should not do. (God does this to prove the corruption and the hopelessness of the flesh.) Not only can God put us under the law, but we, who are in Adam, can also put ourselves under the law, hoping that we can please God. We set up ordinances for ourselves to keep, saying, "I should not do this. I should not do that." In addition to the commandments that God has given us, we have also given ourselves many other commandments which are just as severe as the ones God has given. Therefore, God puts His demands on us, and we also put demands on ourselves. This means that we still have a hope in the things of Adam, thinking that we can improve and striving to advance and overcome. Brothers and sisters, God has put us under the law, and at the same time we have put ourselves under the law.

What does it mean to be delivered from the law? It is to entirely lose hope in ourselves. Not only should we entirely lose hope in ourselves, but we should not hope at all. Do not hope for anything concerning ourselves any longer. This is the way to be delivered from the law. God allows us to sin day after day in order to make us realize that we are corrupt and unclean, and it is impossible to improve.

We cannot overcome, and we cannot keep the law. There is no possibility for us to be helped; we are completely useless, and we are not improving. God wants us to realize that the reason He crucified us on the cross, which He did in Christ, is because we are corrupt beyond any hope. When we consider ourselves to be hopeless and realize that God considers us to be hopeless, we will only stand on the position God gives us. God says that we are corrupt to the core and hopeless. We need to say the same thing, that we are corrupt to the core and hopeless. All that we can do is sin. We do not cherish any hope about ourselves anymore. This is what it is to be delivered from the law. What a great deliverance this is! The unique way of deliverance is to consider ourselves as being hopeless.

The last time I was in Canada, I met a certain Mr. G. He was a good man and was also good in the gospel. God used him to save many sinners. Now he is old, over sixty years of age. One day we were walking on the street and talking, and we came to this topic. He said that this is the lesson we have to preach to others all the time. I asked him what he meant, and he began to tell me his history: "When I was a young believer, I was very zealous. I wanted to serve the Lord well, advance, and make myself good. But things always turned out the opposite way. The more I tried, the worse I became, and the more I realized that I could not make it. I was disappointed as well as bewildered. I found no solution. One day another brother said to me, `Mr. G., God never cherishes the hope that you cherish for yourself. You have so much hope for yourself, but God has no hope in you!' I was very surprised and asked him what God had to say about me. He said, `God knows that you are powerless and that you cannot do anything. You are hopeless. This is why He crucified you on the cross. What you deserve is only crucifixion and nothing else.' From that day on, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes. I saw that God has not required anything of me, and I saw that I could do nothing. This is why He crucified me on the cross. If that is the case, why do I still need to struggle?"

Brothers and sisters, in theory and in doctrine we know very well that the old Adamic life is irreparable and incurable. But the surprising thing is that in our experience, we still try to repair and improve it; we still cherish hope for the Adamic life. Many people say, "I am surprised that I still commit such a sin!" But I

say that we should be surprised if we no longer committed such a sin! Is there any sin that we could not commit? We can commit any sin; the root of all sins is in us. God considers us hopeless and impossible to reform. This is why He crucified us on the cross. When the Lord died, we died also. God's crucifixion of us on the cross is His evaluation of us. In effect, God is saying that we deserve only death and annihilation.

Brothers and sisters, how different is our evaluation of ourselves from God's evaluation of us. We think that we are able to do something. We think that we can overcome, be holy, and make progress. But God does not cherish any such hope. All we are from head to toe is sin; we are absolutely useless. There is no way to save us except by the way of death. Without death, there can be no deliverance. We always think that there is still a chance for improvement and victory. But there is no such thing. Today we see the first fact, which is God's evaluation of us, how much He thinks we are worth. Brothers and sisters, the ones who see this are blessed before others. Countless numbers of Christians have experienced repeated stumblings, defilements, failures, disappointments, and journies of hopelessness before they see that God has absolutely no hope in them. The sooner we see this fact, the better it will be for us, because this is the starting point of all deliverance.

All genuine release of life begins here. We should see that we deserve nothing but death. The sooner we see this, the faster we will grow. The whole problem hinges on how we view the old Adamic life. We know and have mentioned this over a hundred times: the old Adamic life is irreparable and unalterable. But how many of us have really seen that we deserve to die? How many have seen that there is not another way besides death? Understanding the doctrine is one thing, knowing and seeing is another. Doctrines can only make us understand something in the mind, but seeing requires revelation in our spirit. All the things which do not come from God's revelation and from our seeing are the things that do not count; they are not effective at all.

The meaning of being delivered from the law is to be delivered from God's demands. This means that we have ceased all hope of pleasing God; this comes as a result of understanding the Adamic life and the work of Christ. We no longer

hope to do anything to please God. As long as we still hope to please God by our own effort, we are not yet delivered from the law, and we will not be able to avoid heartaches and disappointments. The only way not to be disappointed is for us to know that God has no more hope in us.

## HOW TO BE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW

We have seen that, first, we need to be delivered from the law. But how can we be delivered from the law? The only way is death. Death can deliver us from the law because as long as we live, the law will have a demand on us. A living person is not supposed to break the law because the law will punish him. This is what the apostle said, that as long as the husband lives, the law puts its demands on the wife. However, if he dies, the power of the law will not reach her and will not make demands on her. Therefore, to be delivered from the demand of the law, there is no way except by death. As long as we live, the law will continue to put its demand on us.

For now, I will not speak of how God's law puts its demand on us; I will only speak of how we make demands on ourselves by our own enacted law. When do we do this? If we get up late today, we resolve to get up early tomorrow. We make resolutions to overcome when we are very defiled, when we struggle day and night with sin, when we are in the turbulent current of the world, and when we feel that our life is very wrong. We think that we can make it, that we are able to make it, and that we will make it. In this way, we consider ourselves still to be alive. But by doing this, we will not see the clear work of Christ in us. If we truly know God, we will realize that He has completely given up hope in us. This is why He had no other option than to crucify us on the cross. If we really see that we are only worthy of death, all our resolutions will be gone. I can speak the same thing for myself. Many times I resolved that I would never do such and such a thing again. But afterward, I asked myself again, "Are you not worthy of death? If you are, why do you still make resolutions?" Therefore, we must see that the way to overcome is not by making resolutions but by standing on the ground where God has placed us. We should not cherish the hope that the next time will be better. Instead, we only stand on the ground where God has put us.

We should not make resolutions anymore, nor should we hope to advance. We should no longer struggle to overcome because we know that all these are the works of the old Adamic life. We have to put them in the place of death and ignore them. If we are truly standing in the place of death, we will overcome and experience deliverance from all these things. Therefore, death is our only way; it is the unique way of salvation. The world, sin, the self—nothing is able to touch a dead person. If we consider all these things as dead, they will not touch us anymore.

## HAVING DIED IN CHRIST

Now we will go one step further to consider how we have died. Verse 4 says, "So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ." From this we see that our death is "through the body of Christ." In the same way that Christ died, we died. The time that Christ died is the time that we died. Christ has died, and we have died too. This is not a spiritual suicide, in which we artificially consider ourselves to be dead. Nor is it a repeated declaration to ourselves that we are dead, in an effort to signal to ourselves that we are dead. Rather, when we see Christ's accomplished fact on the cross and realize that God has included us in this death of Christ, we are led to the inevitable conclusion that we have died. There are two spiritual experiences in this world which are most amazing. The first is seeing God's plan, that is, what God has planned for us and what God thinks we should do. For example, He has judged that we are dead. The second is to see what God has done in Christ for us. These two things are very wonderful. We see what God has ordained for us, we see how we have become one with Christ, and we see how, in Him, we can receive all that He has accomplished. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, we were included in His death because God has included us in Him. When His body was broken, we were broken as well. His crucifixion is our crucifixion. Therefore, we and Christ are one.

This is why we pay attention to the matter of baptism. Many people say that baptism is only an outward ritual and not important. No, it is altogether a testimony of something inward. We believe that when Christ died, we also died.

The first thing after a death is burial and this is why we bury ourselves in the water of baptism. If we do not believe that we are dead, we would not be buried. The fact that we are willing to be buried means that we believe we are dead. Therefore, baptism is to believe that Christ has died and that we also have died. This is why we bury ourselves. The burial is a proof that we are dead. Christ has been crucified. When He was crucified on the cross, we were included in Him. When the veil was rent, the cherubim were rent as well. The veil was rent from top to bottom; it was God who rent it from top to bottom. At the same time, the cherubim were also rent by God from top to bottom because the cherubim were sewn on the veil. We know that the veil is the body of Christ, while the cherubim are God's creatures. Therefore, when Christ died, all of God's creation died. This is what it means to be dead to the law through the body of Christ.

The way of deliverance is not to deliberately reckon ourselves dead. Those who have been preaching the doctrine of reckoning themselves dead are preaching the wrong teaching. What is the right teaching? The right teaching is to reckon ourselves dead in Christ. We do not die in ourselves; rather, we die through the body of Christ. Christ died, and since we are joined to Him, we also died. The secret to victory is never to look at ourselves apart from Christ and never to consider the self that is outside of Christ. This is what the Lord meant in John 15 when He said that we should abide in Him. It means that we should never look at ourselves apart from Christ. What is outside is still very uncomely and cannot be improved. If we want to look at ourselves, we can only look at ourselves in Christ. Once we look at the self outside of Christ, we will immediately fail. Many times we forget the facts that Christ has accomplished. We become angry and frustrated at ourselves and ask why we are the way we are. We continue to fail, fall, and suffer disappointment with a resulting loss of heart. Please remember that these are the things that a person does outside of Christ. Today, in Christ, I have died to the law. If anyone has not received this deliverance and freedom, I would invite you to look at yourself only in Christ. In Christ, God has crucified us because He has judged us irreparable. There is no way to save us except by death. Therefore, God has judged us to be dead, and He has crucified us together in Christ. We are therefore free and delivered from the

demands of the law.

There are two facts here which we have to absolutely stand on. The first is that God has considered us absolutely hopeless. Only death can deliver us from the law. The second is that in Christ God has crucified us on the cross. The first has to do with God's plan, while the second has to do with God's work. The first is what God has destined, while the second is what God has accomplished. God knows that there is no other way of salvation except through death. We have been broken into pieces, and there is no way for us to become whole again. Herein lies the basis of our redemption—the cross. For this reason, in our daily life we should accept this fact all the time so that we can be delivered from the law. If we stand on this ground, we will not find obstructions. Of course, we should confess and ask God for forgiveness when we fail. But we do not need to look back, because all the failures and degradations come from the old Adamic life. In man's eyes, there is nothing better than to ask the Lord to give us the strength not to do the same thing again. But in God's eyes, this is redundant, because if we have died in Christ, there is no need to make any more resolutions. We have died; our history is over and all our ideas and decisions are also over. Man always thinks that making resolutions is a good thing. But these are like reeds; they cannot fight the enemy, and they are absolutely useless before God.

## BEING JOINED TO THE RESURRECTION LIFE OF CHRIST

What we have seen thus far is that God has crucified us with Christ. This alone, however, is not enough; there needs to be something more. It is that we "might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God." Not only do we need a deliverance on the negative side, we also need a joining on the positive side. Without this, our work is still in vain. For this reason, God has not only crucified us on the negative side but has also joined us, who have been delivered from the law, to the resurrected Christ. Therefore, on the one side there is an exit, and on the other side there is an entrance. On the one side there is the severance, and on the other side there is the union. On the one side we are delivered from the law, and on the other side we are joined to Christ and belong to Christ. This is the resurrection that we have

been speaking about. Furthermore, this is not something individual; resurrection brings all the sons into glory. John 12:24 says, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Originally there was only one life. Now this life has entered into many seeds. Originally there was only one organism. Now it has become many organisms. Originally there was only one grain of wheat. Now this grain of wheat has become many grains of wheat. In the same way, when Christ died, He dispensed His life to all the believers. In Christ, there are also two facts. The first is that we have been included in the death of Christ. When Christ died, we also died. The second is that we were resurrected with Christ. God has dispensed His life to us. This is something that every regenerated person shares in common and possesses. I do not wish to say much about this; my emphasis is on the first fact.

We who are resurrected in Christ ought to bear fruit to glorify God. God has given us the life of Christ. By this we can live out His life. The one grain that was planted is exactly the same as the thirty, sixty, or hundred grains that will spring forth. If we plant barley, surely what will come out will not be wheat or cucumber. What is planted will be the same as what grows up; there will not be a change. If what is planted is wheat, surely wheat will grow up. How then can we live a life similar to Christ's life, a life that bears fruit to glorify God? There is only one way; we must allow Christ to be lived out of us and allow Him to live. Christ has not only died for us on the cross but also lives for us within us. How can we live a life of Christ? The only way this could be done is for Christ to give His life to us. Therefore, we must have the life of Christ before we can bear fruit to glorify God.

Today I have presented to you these things before God. May we see that God has given up hope in us and considers us incurable. Although we think that there is hope and strength in us, God has given up hope in us. He has crucified us on the cross. Whenever we are outside of Christ and feel that we are still alive and able, we will immediately fall. Therefore, we can only see ourselves in Christ. When we are in Christ, there are only two facts: we have died and we have resurrected. The resurrected part is in Christ. Therefore, God wants us to live by His life. At the same time, everything that is in Adam has died. If we lay hold of this fact, we are dead to the law. Please remember that we are not only dead to

the world, the self, and sin; we are also dead to the law. In this way, we will no longer have any hope for ourselves but will stand firmly in the position where God has placed us.

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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 9



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 9

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# MESSAGE ONE

## A BELIEVER'S WORTH BEFORE GOD

## •Outline

- **•The Worth Of Salvation**
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## •Scripture Reading: Exo. 30:11-16; Lev. 27:1-8

Exo. 30:11-16 "And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, When you take the sum of the children of Israel, according to their numbering, every man shall give a ransom for himself to Jehovah when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This they shall give, each one who was enrolled among their numbering, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a heave offering to Jehovah. Each one who was enrolled among their numbering, from twenty years old and over, shall give the heave offering of Jehovah. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than the half shekel, when you give the heave offering of Jehovah to make expiation for your souls. And you shall take the expiation silver from the children of Israel and shall give it for the service of the Tent of Meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before Jehovah to make expiation for your souls."

Lev. 27:1-8 "Then Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, When a man makes a special vow, the persons shall be for Jehovah according to your valuation of persons If your valuation is for the male from twenty years old even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it is for a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels. And if it is for one aged from five years old even to twenty years old, then your valuation for the male shall be twenty shekels and for the female ten shekels. And if it is for one aged from a

month old even to five years old, then your valuation for the male shall be five shekels of silver, and for the female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver. And if it is for one aged from sixty years old and upward, if it is for a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. But if it is for him who is poorer than your valuation, then he shall be set before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to the means of the one who vowed, the priest shall value him."

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Every time the life of a person is remembered before God, he will suffer a plague if he does not have a sin offering. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying...then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them" (Exo. 30:11-12). When David sent Joab to number Israel, God was displeased and sent pestilence upon Israel (1 Chron. 21). A man without the blood will be judged right away.

Now, we shall first outline the main points of the two passages recorded in Exodus 30 and Leviticus 27; then we will point out the meaning of these two passages.

Exodus records:

(1) "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them" (vv. 11-12).

(2) "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary...a half shekel shall be the offering of the Lord" (v. 13).

(3) "Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord" (v. 14).

(4) "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel" (v. 15).

Leviticus records:

(1) “And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When a man makes a special vow to Jehovah involving the valuation of persons” (vv. 1-2).

(2) “Then the valuation of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it is a female, the valuation shall be thirty shekels. If the person is from five years old up to twenty years old, the valuation for the male shall be twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels. And if the person is from a month old up to five years old, the valuation of the male shall be five shekels of silver, and for the female the valuation shall be three shekels of silver. If the person is from sixty years old and upward, if it is a male, the valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels” (vv. 3-7).

(3) “But if he is poorer than the valuation, then he shall be presented before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to the means of him who vowed, the priest shall value him” (v. 8).

We can see a big difference in these two passages. In the book of Exodus, whoever is numbered, whether male or female, rich or poor, must offer half a shekel and half a shekel only as long as he is twenty years old and above. But it is different in Leviticus. There the offering differs according to sex and according to whether one is rich or poor. Why is there such a difference? It is because Exodus speaks of the worth of the ransom of life, and Leviticus speaks of the valuation of the special vow.

## THE WORTH OF SALVATION

Since Exodus speaks of the worth of the ransom of life, half a shekel is required of a person who is twenty years of age and older, whether male or female because this is a matter of salvation. This half shekel is required of every man. If anyone fails to offer it, he will suffer a plague. Every person must have the Son of God in order to be saved. As to the position of the salvation of sinners, we all have the same worth before God.

“Half a shekel” is equivalent to the two denarii mentioned in Luke 10:35. These two denarii have been paid by the Lord Jesus for us. These two denarii are

sufficient for us to live in the inn (temporal life in the world) until the second coming of our Savior.

"Twenty years old" is the age when a person is able to take responsibility for himself. The teaching here is that whoever is responsible for himself must have the Son of God. For the Israelites, responsibility was determined on the basis of their physical age, but for us in the dispensation of the grace of salvation, no one knows when a person can be responsible for himself. It is possible that some people have reached this age of responsibility at seven or eight years of age.

"The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less." Because the precious blood is the price, there is no difference between the poor and rich. Poverty and riches can be compared to the deeds of men. Those who do not have good deeds cannot save themselves; likewise, those who have good deeds cannot save themselves. They all have to offer half a shekel. Man cannot add anything to or deduct anything from the salvation accomplished by the Lord. Man can only be saved by the precious blood. This blood is called the precious blood because it is indeed "precious," and is full of worth (1 Pet. 1:19). The precious blood is a high price!

## THE WORTH OF A SINGULAR VOW

But the worth of a special vow is at least six times more than that of the ransom for life because the least amount is three shekels (Lev. 27:6). In some cases there is a hundredfold difference because some have to offer fifty shekels (v. 3). Why is there such a difference? This is because Exodus talks about salvation, whereas Leviticus talks about consecration.

Consecration means that it is not a matter of how much one likes to offer. Rather, it is a matter of how much God thinks we are worth based on our willingness to consecrate. From the viewpoint of salvation, God considers all of us worth half a shekel; no one is worth more than another, and everyone is worth the same regardless of wealth and age. Our natural constitution is put aside completely by God because what causes us to be saved is the Son of God. No one can be saved by adding anything to or deducting anything from the Son of God. According to grace, all men are the same in that all have sinned, and the

price of salvation is the same for all. Through Christ, God sees our worth as the same. God treasures us and considers us of worth. Nevertheless, this worth is in His Son. Hence, our worth derived as a result of salvation is the same before God.

However, this fact does not prohibit God from esteeming some believers as having more value than others. Although believers are all saved the same way and are all children of God, some are greater in spiritual usefulness, and their consecrations are more thorough than those of others. As a result, God considers them as having more worth than others. Here we should note two things: one is a man's spiritual usefulness, and the other is his sincere consecration. God considers our worth based on our spiritual usefulness plus our sincere consecration. If we are useful spiritually yet without consecration, before God we do not have any value other than that obtained through Christ. If we are willing to consecrate and the consecration is sincere, we are of some worth in the eyes of God even though our age is only one month to five years old. It is very dreadful that a believer might not be worth anything before God! For the ransom of life, half a shekel is enough to guarantee his salvation. But with regard to consecration, if you would consecrate to God, you are of some value even though you may be only one month old.

The life of a man is divided into four periods: one month to five years old is childhood; five years to twenty years old is the period of youth; twenty years to sixty years old is the adult period; sixty years and above is the period of old age. As far as the Israelites were concerned, their age was based on their physical years. For believers, their age refers to the strength and depth of their spirituality.

Salvation is the same for all, whereas consecration depends on the individual. Every saved one should have some worth in the eyes of God. In Leviticus, ages of one month to five years old are valued at five shekels. Once a person is saved, he should be of some worth. God's estimation of the value of those between one month old and five years old is five shekels. He who is newly saved should at least have some worth before God. But this worth stems from his consecration. Without consecration, God does not view us as having any value. After a person is saved, the only work of the Holy Spirit is to lead him to

consecrate himself and live for God. Israelites of five years old to twenty years old can be compared to those young believers who are burning and have some spiritual experiences. The adult period signifies the strong, matured, and experienced believers.

But why is the value of those who are sixty and older reduced? Although Caleb was old in age, he was as strong as when he was young (Josh. 14:11). Psalm 92:14 says, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; / they shall be fat and flourishing." So we see that some old people are very good. Our spiritual condition indeed does not have to grow old. Yet there are some who have regressed in their later years! We should not think that our worth before God today will necessarily be maintained forever. It is possible that our spiritual condition may regress!

The worth of those between twenty and sixty years old was highest among all four groups. Not only so, God mentioned this group of people first in this portion of the Bible. What is the reason? This is because those who are twenty years and over are able fighters (Num. 1:3). When the twelve tribes were enumerated in Numbers 1, emphasis was put on the number of people who were over twenty years old and able to go forth to war. God's evaluation of His people today is the same. Whosoever is willing to consecrate is of worth before God. No matter how weak that person is, he will not be worthless. However, those who are willing to stand up for God's glory, who are willing to be one with God to destroy the evils, and who are willing to fight against Satan for God's rights, are of more worth than other believers. God's eyes are focused on the fighters.

Why is there a difference between the value of the male and the value of the female? This does not refer to the physical distinction (although for the Israelites it was according to the physical distinction), but to the strength or weakness of the spiritual life (1 Pet. 3:7). It is possible for one who has been saved for only one year to have more growth than another who has been saved for five years!

We know that there are differences in spiritual age among Christians, and there is the possibility of falling behind and also of advancing forward. In which condition are we?

"But if he is poorer than the valuation, then he shall be presented before the

priest, and the priest shall value him; according to the means of him who vowed, the priest shall value him" (Lev. 27:8). What does this mean? According to our spiritual age, we should offer a certain amount. But once we come under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we know that we do not have much to offer. We cannot afford what we should pay! At that time we can only come again to our High Priest and admit that we cannot afford it and ask Him to reevaluate us. We have to start all over again.

The weighing of silver is according to the shekel of the sanctuary. This means you are worth exactly how much God says you are worth; none can be more accurate than that. Our standard is not accurate, but the standard of the sanctuary is extremely accurate. What God values cannot be wrong by even one thousandth of a grain.

Our half shekel for salvation has been paid. Today we all should ask God, "O God! What is my value in Your hands?"

## MESSAGE TWO

# LOVING GOD

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 22:37-38

Matt. 22:37-38 "And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the great and first commandment."

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Several months ago, a certain Western missionary passed away in Fukien province. I once remarked that among the people I have known, she was a very deep person in the Lord. Since I am more knowledgeable about her affairs, I have considered writing a biography for her and have been collecting her lectures, articles, and essays for editing purposes. A package of her belongings arrived several days ago including a piece of paper with the following words written on it: "O God, I thank You, because You have a commandment saying you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind!" Oh! How profound this is! I do not know how many Christians would say, "God, I thank You because You have a commandment which says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Indeed, since we are all believers, we ought to love God. No other religion speaks of loving God like ours. Loving God is unique to Christianity.

The Bible says that he who believes in the Son has life. Believing is adequate because it does not say to believe with all your heart. He that believes will have eternal life. We are never told to believe with all our heart. However, loving God requires all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind.

This is the first commandment. No matter where it is placed, this commandment is always the first. This is also the greatest commandment. Wherever it may be, it is the greatest. Today we must praise God for

commanding us to love Him.

God desires that we love Him because this profits Him. To believe in the Lord and have eternal life are for our profit. God not only wants us to believe in Him, but also to love Him. Loving God profits Him.

What kind of condition will we enjoy if we love God? We must look at several matters:

First John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him." If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The love of the Father is something that can be put in us or can leave us. If we let this love of the Father be placed in us, we are able to love the Father.

Many young ones cannot forsake the world. When they are stirred by others in a meeting, it seems that they will not love the world anymore. At a different time they seem to be totally inseparable from the world. We must possess something better within us in order to drop the heart that loves the world. Once there was an art exhibition. While most of the works could be appreciated from a distance, it was necessary to study one of the paintings from close-up in order to understand its meaning. This particular painting, involving a child who was oblivious to all the lovely toys on the floor surrounding him, aptly illustrates a Christian's experience. The child's attention was focused on the windowsill, and he had up-lifted eyes and outstretched arms. The scene was perplexing from a distance, yet after careful observation, one could see a beautiful dove on the windowsill. The caption explained that in order to have the little dove, the child dropped all the toys on the floor. The moral of the painting was that one only discards the second best for the very best. God never demands that we throw anything away. He only places what is better in front of us. In order to obtain it, we will spontaneously forsake many other things.

A young believer who lived with me for two months once told me that he could not forsake the world. He told an old believer, "You can sacrifice because you have tasted all that this world has to offer. But I cannot." This young man knew about believing in God, but not about loving God. While believing in God can save us from sin, only loving God will deliver us from the world. Brothers and

sisters, we must allow God's love to enter into us. Once the love of God enters, the world simply slips away.

First John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." This is a familiar verse to many, including unbelievers. This verse does not refer to loving the brother in your family, but your brother in Christ. Although the attitudes and behavior of many discourage you from loving them, once God's love enters into you, you will be able to love them. It is not loving the brother whom you love, but all the brothers. It is also not loving a lovable brother, but all the brothers. If you do not love all the brothers, the love of the Father is not in you; but if you have the love of God, you cannot help but love them.

The father of a man was killed; afterwards, the man was determined to get revenge. However, he was a genuine Christian. During the bread-breaking meeting one day, he found himself, along with others around a huge round table, sitting next to his adversary, the one who had killed his father. He left the table and went out because a battle had risen up within him. Should he kill him, or should he return to take the bread with him? At that instant God showed him the love of Christ. He saw that though he himself was an enemy to God, Christ saved him. He was melted by God's love. Wiping his tears, he went in to break bread with his enemy. When they were leaving, he no longer looked upon the man as his adversary, but his brother in Christ. If we truly have the love of God, we are able to love even an unlovable brother.

First John 5:2-3 says, "In this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." Why is it that we can keep God's commandments when we love Him? Let us look at John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me." This says that if we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments. Brothers and sisters, who among us dares to say that he has kept all the commandments that God has given us? Never mind the unknown commandments, were all the known ones kept? Having God's commandments

means to find them. How many believers plug their ears for fear that God may speak a commandment to them? We not only ought to obey when God commands us, we ought to find His commandments. Furthermore, we must keep them once they are found. Seeking God's commandments is our care for Him. This is loving God.

"He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21b). This speaks of the benefit of loving God. Though I have met many well-known children of God, I have yet to see but a few who know God. Many can read the Bible, but they do not know God. They may understand the Bible, but they do not know the power of God. Others preach without knowing what they are preaching because the Lord has not manifested Himself to them. Even if the Lord were to stand before them, they still could not know Him without His revelation. Many have not experienced the Lord's manifestation because they do not love the Lord; neither do they keep the commandments of the Lord. Only one kind of people love the Lord on this earth—the faithful ones.

Never go to big and popular places to look for those who know the Lord. Oftentimes you will find one serving God in a secluded place or in a simple house. When you see such a one, you meet God's presence. Some people always stir my respect. Others may be zealous, capable, kind, humble, and gentle, but one does not necessarily see God through them. A certain one asked me once, "What were the strong points of this missionary?" I said, "There was always the sensation of God every time I saw her." This is God's revelation. You should remember the great woman of Shunem who said to her husband, "I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4:9). What had Elisha shown this woman? He did not perform any miracles. Rather, every time he came, he gave the woman the sensation of God. Brothers and sisters, do we love God's manifestation? If we do, we should employ every means to find God's commandments and keep them.

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him" (John 14:23). God and Christ are present with all who believe in Him; however, God and Christ only make an

abode with those who love Him. It is not just a matter of presence, but of an abode. A presence at times cannot be felt. But when one faithfully seeks God's commandments at all costs, he will experience the Lord making an abode with him.

John 15:9-10 says, "As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." What does abiding in the Lord's love mean? We all sensed how much the Lord loved us when we were first saved. But today we do not sense His love that much. Though we can still speak of the depth of the Lord's love, we do not feel it. If we abide in the Lord's love, we should always sense such a love. Abiding in the Lord's love is just affording Him the opportunity to love. In other words, it is to be enveloped in His love. When others oppose and forsake us, we will really know how the Lord loves us. If we always find God's commandments and obey them, we will abide in His love. Did the Lord not sense the Father's love for even a single moment? He was constantly in the Father's love because He kept God's commandments. In order to abide in the Lord's love, we must always keep His commandments. If the love of God is in us, we can keep even the most difficult of His commandments. Some forsook their parents, some their wives, others their positions, and still others their fame, all because they loved God. They were enabled by the very love of God.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God." Many know this verse well. Only one kind of people enjoy the good: those who love God. If you do not love God, perhaps not even one thing is working for you. God does not alter things; He changes your heart. If you love God, then all things, though unaltered, will work for your good. Sometimes you complain about everything that comes your way. You complain concerning this and concerning that. Yet if love is there, all these will mean nothing to you. Loving God will make an unsatisfactory environment a profitable one.

First Corinthians 2:9-10 says, "But as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But to us God has revealed

them through the Spirit." What do we see in these two verses? What God has prepared for those who believe is eternal life, yet the thing which God has prepared for those who love Him is in the future. Only those who love God can know of this coming blessing. If someone tells you about a marvelous thing he saw, it surely will not be comparable because the coming blessing has not yet been seen by eyes. If someone tells you about a wonderful thing he heard, it also must be a lesser thing than the coming blessing because no ears have heard it. If someone can indeed imagine the unsurpassable best, it still cannot compare to the coming blessing because it has not yet entered into the heart of man. Nevertheless, God has revealed to us by His Spirit this thing which no eyes have seen, no ears have heard, and what has not entered into man's heart. In other words, a lover of the Lord may enjoy what men have not seen, heard, nor dreamed of in this life. When God discloses His glory to you, you will exclaim, "Oh, what joy!" This heavenly glory is so much that you will find it hardly bearable.

Brothers and sisters, we must suffer for the Lord and willingly pay the price to take this way. We must love the Lord so that He can reveal His glory to us.

James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, because when he has become approved by testing, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him." We often think of the labor we need to perform in order to obtain a crown of life. However, one of the conditions required to gain the crown is to love the Lord. Brothers and sisters, our love toward God is lacking! It seems as if we have already lost our first love! This is most regrettable!

In John 21 the Lord asked Peter if he loved Him and told him to feed His lambs. If someone truly loves the Lord, he will definitely care for people's souls. One cannot love the Lord while neglecting the souls of men. You must care for the souls of your colleagues, relatives, and whoever is close to you.

John 14:28 says, "If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." When we love the Lord, we will not only love the brothers and keep God's commandments, but we will also rejoice that the Lord Jesus went to the Father. In other words, we will surely rejoice that the Lord Jesus has gone to the Father to obtain His glory. This is too profound!

Many have no realization of the magnitude of glory when the Lord ascended to the Father who is greater than He. Without such a realization, we cannot worship God. We care that those we love will obtain glory, but if we love the Lord, we will definitely rejoice at the Lord's going to the Father.

Matthew 10:37 and 38 say, "He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." After reading these two verses, we should realize that only by dropping all considerations can we love the Lord more dearly. A certain believer remarked that when we worship, we should not only be aware of God's greatness but also of His loveliness. This is a most meaningful word. We come before Him and draw near to Him because of His loveliness.

How does God love us? The Bible speaks a great deal about God's loving us. Concerning the individual aspect, it says that He "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Concerning the corporate aspect, it says that "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Romans 5:8 tells us that "God commends His own love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." First John 4:10 says, "Herein is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins." He loved us and sent His Son to die for us. There is no love apart from the cross. Why did the Lord ordain that we break bread once a week? The Lord did not want us to forsake Him or forget Him; He wants to draw us back. If we recall the pain of being sinners and the greatness of the Lord's salvation towards us, how can we not love Him? In the wilderness, the Israelites thought of the melons and leeks of Egypt, forgetting Pharaoh's torment with the pain of slavery and God's deliverance of them out of their anguish. Their hearts would not give up Egypt. If we forget the cross, we will forget God's love; when we forget God's love, we cannot but think of the world.

How can we love God? Luke 7:47 says, "For this reason I say to you, Her sins which are many are forgiven, because she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, he loves little." If we would only recall how our sins were forgiven, we cannot help but love the Lord. The day the cross ceases to inspire you, you have

already fallen. Mr. Evan Roberts wept for months over his inability to receive the cross's inspiration until God touched him. The result was the mighty revival in Wales. Since then there has not been a more prevailing revival. The woman could wash the Lord's feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and kiss them with her mouth because she remembered that her sins had been forgiven.

Brothers and sisters, we must stand beneath the cross. Even if our spiritual condition becomes a hundredfold stronger, we should still remember how our sins have been forgiven.

First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed! The Lord comes!" This is a most serious word! If anyone does not love the Lord, he is accursed.

Ephesians 6:24 says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility." To whom is grace given here? God gives it to those who love the Lord in incorruptibility. If others would ask you, "Do you believe in the Lord?", the whole world would marvel if you answer, "I am one who loves the Lord."

First Peter 1:8 says, "Whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." This verse says that we love Him because we believe in Him. What is born out of this love through believing? It is joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

Finally, brothers and sisters, I wish to repeat what that old believer said to the departing young man: "May you be a passionate lover of the Lord Jesus!"

# MESSAGE THREE

## WASTE AND PRAGMATISM

## ●Outline

- ●What Mary Did
- ●The Disciples' Attitude

## ●Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:6-13

Matt. 26:6-13 "Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, A woman came to Him, having an alabaster flask of ointment of great value, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table. But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, Why this waste? For this could have been sold for much and given to the poor. But Jesus, knowing it, said to them, Why do you trouble the woman? She has done a noble deed to Me. For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me. For in pouring out this ointment on My body, she has done it for My burial. Truly I say to you, Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her."

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We have spoken twice on this passage. There are many significances to this portion of the Scripture, and I will not repeat what I have said. Last Monday evening during the Bible study meeting, I said that, the Lord willing, we would specifically speak on this passage on the Lord's Day. Hence, we will spend some time on this passage. This portion of the Word is on the story of Mary. But in this Gospel, her name is not mentioned. In the other Gospels, her name is mentioned; therefore, we know that this woman is Mary. Why does Matthew mention her only as a woman? It shows us that what she did can be done by any ordinary woman; it was not something that could be done only by someone called Mary.

The use of the word woman means that it does not refer to any person in particular. Moreover, the fact that she is only mentioned anonymously as a woman shows that the person does not mean much; it is the Lord who is worthy of our attention.

We know that Mary did not have a servant at home. There was no one else in her house except her sister, Martha, and her brother, Lazarus. She served the Lord personally. We also know that she did not have a rich family. But it is an amazing thing that she bought a pound of ointment of pure nard (we are told of this in the other Gospels), and the pure nard was "very valuable" (John 12:3). Hence, this ointment must have been very expensive. Perhaps one cannot even find such expensive ointment today. When she poured the ointment on Jesus' head, she was criticized by many. They murmured that it was a waste of three hundred denarii to anoint the head of the Lord, and that the money could have been given to the poor and taken care of many people. But the Lord said, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13). Therefore, I believe that wherever the gospel is preached, the story of Mary is to be preached also. It would not be proper to preach the gospel without speaking about the story of Mary. As long as there is the gospel, there should be the story of Mary. In other words, after a man understands the gospel, he should also know the story of Mary. Unfortunately, the gospel is preached in many places, but the story of Mary is not preached.

Some wonder why three hundred denarii are so important. Since the Lord was sold for three hundred denarii, Mary's three hundred denarii had a tremendous significance. (Do not misunderstand when I say that the gospel was worth three hundred denarii and the enemy's valuation of the Lord Jesus was also three hundred denarii. The Lord was worth three hundred denarii only in the eyes of the enemy.) Since a flask of ointment was worth three hundred denarii, Mary sold herself for three hundred denarii worth of ointment. Putting it in another way, Mary was that flask of ointment; she put herself into that flask and sold herself to the Lord.

The story of Mary must be spoken of wherever the gospel is preached

because every time the gospel is preached, there is the need of the story of Mary to maintain the balance of the truth. If there is a place which only preaches the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary, the truth is unbalanced. It is easy for men to preach the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary. It is possible for the gospel to be preached too much without having the proper balance. Preaching the gospel is easy today. The gospel preached among us and everywhere in the world is a gospel that satisfies men. A man believes in the gospel because he wants to profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something. If we profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something, we feel satisfied. Many people believe in Christ only to be saved from death and hell and to receive eternal life and go to heaven. Many people have not believed in Christ to the extent that they give themselves to the Lord. Many preach the gospel by telling others that they can pass from death to life, and from judgment to eternal life and salvation. Men like to hear this kind of gospel. But if you tell them that after they have believed, they should offer themselves to God, obey God, and be His prisoners and slaves, they would refuse to accept. Many people see salvation only as deliverance from judgment; they have not seen that salvation is also deliverance from self. The salvation of many people is merely a salvation from hell; they have not seen that salvation is also a deliverance from the world. Many people only see that being saved is receiving eternal life and blessing; they have not seen that being saved is for the Lord to gain them. If they realized that salvation is a matter of putting oneself absolutely in the hand of the Lord, many would turn away.

This distinction was present at the time of Jesus. It was recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which speaks of a man preparing a great feast and asking servants to invite the lame and crippled to come to the feast. This is the feast of the gospel, and many people came to the feast. The Lord spreads a feast before man, and whosoever will may come. Indeed men came. The Bible says that many people walked with Jesus. They thought that the gospel was wonderful because it was a word of grace out of the mouth of the Son of God. But the Lord told them that if they would not take up their cross to follow Him, they could not be His disciples, and that if they loved their parents more than they loved Him, they were not worthy to be His disciples, or if they would not leave behind everything

in this world, they could not be His disciples. The Lord mentioned His relationship with us immediately after He preached the gospel.

Many people consider salvation as merely a deliverance from judgment and hell; they do not have Christ's concept. Many believe in Christ, not because Christ is believable, but because He is one of the ways for them to be saved. Many believe in Christ, not because they realize that Christ is the goal, but because they think that through Christ they can go to God and heaven. The Lord Jesus says that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Many believe that Christ is the way, the method. But they do not see that Christ is the life. They think that they should trust in Christ because He is a wonderful way for them to be saved. Many people want to come to God, go to heaven, or be saved through Christ; but they have not seen that Christ is the life and the goal. Many people want to go to heaven, be delivered from punishment, and be saved, but they cannot do it on their own. Therefore, they ask Christ for help. Christ is the means and not the goal for them. In other words, Christ is the means of salvation through which they reach their goal. The person, Christ, is not their goal. Believing in Christ and being saved are only means, not the goals, for them. They do not understand what Christ wants to accomplish. This is the danger of the gospel among us. This is why there is the need to speak of the story of Mary. It is not enough to hear and believe in the gospel; we must smell the aroma of the ointment. Salvation is not for ourselves but for Christ. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

In a Sunday School, a man asked a group of children once: "Who among you would want to be Lazarus? Who would want to be the rich man?" Some children said that they wanted to be Lazarus because they would enjoy the blessing in the future. Some said that they wanted to be the rich man because they did not know what would happen in the future anyway. One child said that he wanted to be the rich man when he was alive and Lazarus when he died. Many Christians think this way. They want to enjoy blessing while they live on earth, and enjoy blessing when they die. They want to come out ahead in both worlds. This is the way many Christians want to take today. But those who are like Mary are a Lazarus when they are alive and Lazarus when they are dead. They draw near to God after they die in the same way that they drew near to Him when they were alive.

Just as they put the world aside when they die, they put the world aside while they are yet living. They are Lazarus when they die, and they are Lazarus when they are alive. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

We are not neglecting the preaching of the gospel. We know that we should pay attention to the preaching of the gospel. But the Lord Jesus said if there are thousands or tens of thousands of places where the gospel is preached, the story of Mary should be told also. A danger exists if one only preaches the gospel. This is why the story of Mary must be told. On the one hand, we have to preach the gospel, but on the other hand, we must offer up everything to the Lord. Paul said, "We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). This is the gospel. But it does not stop here. Following this, Paul said, "And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised" (v. 15). This was what Mary did. The Lord is the One who has died for us. The purpose of His death and resurrection for us is that we may live for Him. No Christian can just be saved, but not have to suffer tribulations. Paul said that we are not only appointed to believe in the Lord Jesus; we are also appointed to suffer for Him. We should know that we have been set apart to believe in the Lord and also set apart to suffer for Him. Many believe in the Lord Jesus only to the extent that they receive happiness from Him. They have not believed to the extent that they will suffer for His sake. Many people do not know what it is to believe in Christ. To believe in Christ is to believe in Him to the extent that we suffer for Him. But thank the Lord that this suffering is precious! Many have believed in the Lord Jesus only for the purpose of going to heaven; they have not believed to the extent that they go out of this world. They have believed only to the extent that they are accepted by God; they have not believed to the extent that they are rejected by men. But a perfected believer, one who belongs absolutely to Christ, is one who believes in the Lord to the extent that he is both accepted by God and rejected by men. This is why the story of Mary must follow the preaching of the gospel. We must speak of the story of Mary today. There are many who have believed in the gospel today, but there are not many who are like Mary. May there be not only those who believe in the gospel, but those who believe in the gospel as Mary did.

"A woman came to Him, having an alabaster flask of ointment of great value, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table" (Matt. 26:7). According to Mark, she broke her alabaster flask and anointed the Lord's head. After she did this, Judas took the lead to condemn it as a reckless waste of God's gifts. She had wasted three hundred denarii. He thought this sum of money could be used for the poor. The ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii. What kind of intention was this? What was the motive behind this? Mary poured the ointment on the Lord instead. What kind of intention was this? And what was the motive behind this?

## WHAT MARY DID

Let us consider Mary first. Her pouring of ointment on the Lord's head and body was for His burial. Mary thought: "I have seen my brother being raised from the dead, and He has stayed in our house many times. He comes frequently to Bethany. He is indeed my precious Savior. He has told His disciples four times that He will die (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2), but the disciples did not understand what He meant. But I know that His death is for me. After He dies, men will surely anoint Him with ointments, frankincense, and myrrh. But I do not want to wait until He dies. I will anoint Him with the ointment, the frankincense, and the myrrh before He dies. I will pour out everything on Him. What is the use of pouring out all these things on Him after He has died? It is better to pour them on Him while He is living!" An alabaster flask of ointment worth three hundred denarii was very expensive. Even now we cannot find ointment more expensive than this. Therefore, at that time, this must have been the most expensive ointment.

When did she do this? She did it while the Lord was reclining at the table. In other words, she did it secretly while the Lord was rejoicing and taking no notice of her. She did not tell the Lord ahead of time and did not let Him know what she was doing. She did it secretly to the Lord while nobody was watching. What does this mean? Many people want salvation, but they do not want the Savior. They treasure salvation, but do not treasure the Savior. Many people treasure Christianity, but they do not treasure Christ. Many treasure the work of

redemption, but do not treasure the Redeemer. Many people love the cross of Christ, but do not love the Christ of the cross. The first thing many people ask is what profit they will receive if they believe in the Lord. They do not ask what kind of love they will have for the Lord if they believe in Him. But Mary knew, and this is where the difference lies. She knew that the Lord died for us and resurrected for us, and that we should offer Him our love and everything. Although she did not come from a wealthy family, she exchanged everything she had for the ointment of pure nard, and poured it on the Lord. Mary poured out all she had on the Lord. Only she understood the Lord's death. On the first day of the week, several women went to the Lord's grave to anoint His body with ointment and myrrh. But they were too late! Only this woman made it; all the other women missed it. Only she understood the Lord's death, and only she had the offering and sacrifice.

## THE DISCIPLES' ATTITUDE

The disciples thought that Mary's act was a waste and a throwaway. They thought that it was better to give the three hundred denarii to the poor. The same two principles exist in the church today. There is one group of people who, like Mary, give everything to Christ. They consider Christ to be worthy of everything, and their love for Christ prompts them to give everything to Him. Another group of people are more pragmatic. On the one hand, there are Marys, who are governed by their hearts. On the other hand, there are other ones, who are governed by their reason. On the one side, we have the ones who follow their hearts. On the other side, we have the ones who follow ways and methods. Objectively speaking, what Mary did was a waste and a throwaway. But we have to realize that not many believers are attracted by love. Not many consider love as their life, destiny, and everything. For those who love Him, three hundred denarii are nothing. Even three thousand or three million denarii are nothing. The question is not how much something itself is worth, but how much the person to whom it is directed is worth. The issue is not the thing, but the person. Man treasures only the things he loves. The worth of the thing he offers to the Lord speaks of the worth of the Lord to him. When many people offer money to

the Lord, they carefully calculate over and over again. Actually, they are not calculating the amount they should offer; they are calculating the worth of the Lord. The amount you offer to the Lord speaks of the amount that He is worth to you. If you cannot give Him very much, it means that He is not worth very much to you. One alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard tells us of the worth of the Lord. This flask of ointment does not speak of Mary's consecration, but of God's worth and Christ's worth. A person's sacrifice to the Lord tells us not of his generosity, but of Christ's worth. A martyr is able to sacrifice his body because the Lord is worth more than his life, not because he is able to renounce everything. Every suffering and consecrated believer tells us the worth of Christ, and every person who is willing to offer up his time to the Lord tells us how much the Lord is to him. The only reason a Christian is willing to sacrifice everything is that Christ is worth everything.

Let me illustrate this further by considering the price of a piece of merchandise. The amount you are willing to pay for a piece of merchandise is the worth of that piece of merchandise to you. The price always matches the worth. The price one pays is the worth of the goods that one receives. If a watch is worth five dollars, you will not want to spend six dollars on it; you will pay only five dollars and no more. Therefore, the fact that you have spent five dollars on the watch means that the watch is worth five dollars. The five dollars you put out equals the five dollars the watch is worth. The price always matches the worth. The price of an article determines its worth. The price you are willing to pay for the Lord determines the Lord's worth to you.

The disciples thought that the three hundred denarii could be given to the poor; that amount could have helped many poor ones survive for a few months. To do that would be the pragmatic and practical approach. There are these two groups of people in the church today. One group sees the love of the Lord and considers it worthwhile to offer everything to the Lord and give Him everything. They are not concerned about right or wrong, gain or loss, success or failure; they care only for the Lord's pleasure. They are willing to make the most uneconomical move. Another group considers it more appropriate to put everything in the most profitable area. They invest in areas that are profitable

and generate results. "If you do this, you will save more souls, and if you do that, you can help more people. If you do such and such, your work will expand." Friends, this kind of pragmatism is actually the principle of Judas!

"Why this waste? For this could have been sold for much and given to the poor" (vv. 8-9). Judas was the first to say this, and the disciples followed and echoed his words. The record about Judas in the Gospel of John is not found in the other Gospels. Judas was a true economist. Whenever economy enters our heart, love leaves. If the relationship between Christ and us becomes a matter of economy, love is gone. The concern of many people today is, "What result will I get if I do this? Will I be of greater use if I will do that?" But the Lord's question is, "Was this done for My sake?" He is telling us one thing: "For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me." This is a very serious word. In other words, He is telling us that there will be much time for us to work, but the opportunity to love Him is only here while the Lord is living. Today is the only time for us to express our love to Him. In the millennium, there will be plenty of opportunity for us to work. Matthew 25 tells us that if a man is faithful in the small things, the Lord will entrust great things to him. The kingdom is the time when we will do great things. Many poor people are with us, and there are many works waiting for us. But where is our love for the Lord? I am not saying that we will not love the Lord in eternity anymore, but I am saying that the opportunity to demonstrate our love to Him is today. In that day, it will not be a thing of surprise for us to see the Lord and love Him. What is precious is for us to love Him today without seeing Him. We have not seen the Lord, yet we believe in Him and we love Him. How wonderful this is!

In the eyes of love, nothing that we do is too much if we are doing it for the Lord; nothing that we sacrifice or spend is a waste. In the eyes of the world, it was impractical, wasteful, and foolish for Mary to throw away three hundred denarii in an instant. Judas was more down-to-earth, practical, wise, and thoughtful about humanity. But the Lord would rather see the church filled with foolish Marys than see one wise Judas. Once and for all the Lord laid down the rule of judgment for the church. Should the principle of the church life be one of loving Christ or one of pragmatism?

There is another thing which we should consider. We should be careful not to exercise our soulish power or fleshly energy. We should restrict and control ourselves, not working according to our own wisdom or strength in order to expand or prosper our work. Many people are doing things which are seemingly for the Lord, but are actually not. It seems that their work is for the hastening of Christ's kingdom; actually it is not. It is a pity that many such works are done in the principle of selling the ointment to give to the poor. What use is it if we can give to fifty, five hundred, five thousand, or even fifty thousand poor, but the Lord's head remains without the ointment? Men today like to care for the poor (the sinners, the church, the work, etc.) and are negligent of the ointment on the Lord's head. How much of our work is done to please the Lord? How much of our work is done because of need? There is a lack of talented ones who are being wasted on the Lord. Thank the Lord that since the time of the Lord Jesus until now, there have been many who are willing to waste themselves. Paul was one. He reached prominence in Judaism at a very young age. He would surely have gone down in Jewish history as a bright star of Judaism. But he ended up being a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. Was that not a waste? He was taught by Gamaliel and well educated in philosophy. He could have studied more philosophy, and could very well have become one of the most famous philosophers. Yet he chose to become a disciple of a Galilean carpenter. Was that not a waste? We find many men like him throughout the history of the church. If we had put these talented, knowledgeable, eloquent, and thoughtful people into politics, literary work, commerce, philosophy, and science, they would surely have become outstanding people. But they did what the world considered as a waste. Thank the Lord that Christ is worthy of all their waste! These people are just flasks of ointment poured out on the Lord's head. The world says that these people have been wasted, and some in the church also consider them as wasted.

It is possible to be in the so-called churches today and be a person who is not "wasted." Many people have introduced pragmatism into the church. They calculate cost and talk about profit. Their thoughts are on the work and not on the Lord. Their concern is the need and not the Lord's heart. Their eyes are on the result, the number of souls saved, the number of people helped, and not on

strict obedience to the will of the Lord. The Lord has to open our eyes to see that pragmatism is something the Lord rejects. Thank the Lord that while we are living today, we do not have to be concerned with the poor or everything represented by the poor; all we have to be concerned about is the Lord's pleasure. Otherwise, it would be hard for those who are not wise and calculating.

The great danger of pragmatism is that it replaces the Lord's pleasure. It is a little better than the unclean things of the world, but it falls short of the Lord's desire. Ignorant ones can easily be led to believe that pragmatism is a philosophy that pleases the Lord.

The concern among the churches today is how great can a work become, how much work can be shown in a report, and whether or not there are substantial benefits. In the eyes of worldly economics, Judas was better than Mary. In their eyes, Judas's way would take care of the poor, help them survive for months, and bring profit to many. Judas was for pragmatism, and he was better than Mary. But the goal of salvation is not that we would go to heaven, but that we would be brought into a proper relationship with Christ. It does not concern our earthly relationships, but our relationship with Christ. It is possible for a man to save many souls, give much to the poor, and render help to many, yet be rebuked by the Lord as having lost the first love. A man can have work, labor, and good conduct yet, at the same time, lose out on one thing, which is love.

Suppose a wife is busy all day long for her husband and submissive to him, yet at the same time, she loves another man. Would you want to have such a wife? You would probably rather have a wife who is slower and sloppier at her work but who is fully for you. You will not be pleased if she works for you while her heart is for someone else. Similarly, God is not pleased with our giving money to thirty or fifty poor ones. He is not pleased with our great works and numerous services to the Lord. God only wants us to pour out our hearts to the Lord. We should realize these two great principles: one involves the highest joy of those who pour out everything, heart and soul, to the Lord; the other involves those who say that they are for the Lord, but whose hearts are for the work and their "usefulness." Today men want to be "useful"; they are afraid that they will lose their "usefulness." Thank the Lord that there are some on earth today who are

not "useful." Thank the Lord that some have wasted their "usefulness" so that Christ would gain something in them.

I have mentioned Miss M. E. Barber many times. To me, no one living on earth today is as much like Mary as she was. She indeed wasted herself. When she was carried to the grave at her burial, one brother spoke on the story of Mary and said that Miss Barber, like Mary, had done all that she could. I agree with that brother. She was indeed a Mary. I know of very few people in this world like her. While she was still alive, I asked her once, "What is the qualification to work?" She answered, "The qualification to work is to be willing to not work for the Lord." When a man is willing to be "shut behind doors," to be insignificant for the Lord's sake, he is worthy to work for the Lord.

"She has done a noble deed to Me" (Matt. 26:10). "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). In other words, Mary laid down all that she had. We need to calculate the cost and spend everything on Christ. In other words, we should waste everything on Him. If we have not wasted ourselves completely on Him, we have not done enough yet. Thank the Lord that many people could have been very useful if they had not wasted themselves on the Lord. They could have become a famous writer, scientist, or doctor. But they wasted themselves totally on Christ. God is calling men to waste themselves on Christ! Friends, have you done all that you can do? The Lord said that Mary had done what she could! Have you done what you can? Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, the waste is also proclaimed. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, many useful and great works of men will be stripped away for the Lord's sake, and the desire for result and fruit will be lost. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, everything is poured on Christ. Whatever is poured on Christ is not a waste, but will bring genuine fruit. Thank the Lord that the poor and works count little. The point is not how much the poor will benefit or how much society and the nation will benefit, but what the Lord will gain. Today in the church, men ask what the poor, the society, and the nation will gain. But we should ask what the Lord will also gain. May the gospel be preached here and the story of Mary also be preached here, and may more Marys be raised up here.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## A DEFEATED RIGHTEOUS MAN

## •Outline

- **•The Beginning Of Lot**
- **•Lot's Choice**
- **•God's Warning**
- **•Lot's End**

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This morning I want to tell the story of one person. The title of this story is "A Defeated Righteous Man." This title means that the person is defeated, but he is also a righteous man. There are victorious righteous people, and there are defeated righteous people. We must use this defeated righteous man as a warning in order to be victorious righteous persons. Who is this defeated righteous one? Let us read 2 Peter 2:6-8 in the Bible.

"And having reduced to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, condemned them to ruin, having set them as an example to those who intend to live an ungodly life, and rescued righteous Lot, who had been oppressed by the licentious manner of life of the lawless (for that righteous man, who settled down among them, in seeing and hearing tormented his righteous soul day after day with their lawless works)." Lot was such a person. His soul was a righteous soul, and he was a righteous man. His soul was tormented day after day upon seeing and hearing unlawful works. Since he was such a man, why do we say that he was a defeated righteous man?

We have to know who Lot was. Lot was neither a famous person nor an uncommon man. Lot is well-known because he had a famous uncle, Abraham. His uncle was a renowned man. He became well-known because of his uncle. Let us read in the book of Genesis to see what kind of person Lot was.

## THE BEGINNING OF LOT

Genesis 11:31 says, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." If we read Acts 7, we know that when Abraham was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, God appeared to him and called him out of his country and his kindred to go into a land which God would show him. He left the land of the Chaldeans for Canaan. He was not the only one who left Ur of the Chaldees; his father followed him. And Abraham's father was not the only one who left with him; his nephew Lot also followed him. Lot was just like a "preacher's boy" or part of a believer's family. Lot followed his uncle when he left Ur for Canaan because his uncle said that Ur of the Chaldees was a place of confusing morality that had been condemned by God and that they had to go to Canaan because God had called them to leave Ur.

According to the historians, Abraham's house was a house of idol-makers. This, most likely, was the profession of Abraham's father. Joshua 24 mentions that Abraham was brought out of the house of idol-worshippers. Since Lot heard his uncle say that he wanted to leave the world behind and no longer live carelessly, he followed his uncle and departed from Ur.

Our friends here today may not have personally heard God's call. Perhaps your grandfather, father, mother, wife, or uncle have heard God's call and brought you along. Lot himself did not hear God's call. Only his uncle heard it. This is why he left with his uncle. Perhaps your father, brother, sister, or wife believed first, but eventually you also believed. You are a Lot. If there is someone in your house who has believed in the Lord, and if you are not willing to follow, you are wrong. It is best to follow. It is excellent when some people follow their mother or father in believing, but unfortunately, many people themselves do not know God. Your grandfather believes, your uncle believes, but you do not know God. This is a pity.

Lot was good. Not only did he follow his uncle, but he was also a righteous person. Abraham was like an older believer. Lot was like a young believer. Since Lot and Abraham were relatives and had taken the same path, it should have

been excellent. The beginning of these two men was excellent, but eventually they separated. How were they separated? Let us look at the ensuing passage in the Bible.

## LOT'S CHOICE

Genesis 13:5-6 says, "And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together." It is easy to bear suffering and distress together. It is more difficult to be in comfort together. The two men left Ur together and went to Canaan. This was very good, and God blessed them. Their possessions multiplied. However, problems arise as soon as possessions multiply. If I have a place to live, you will not have the same place to live. If you have a place to live, I will not be able to have the same place. If your flocks and herds have grass to feed on, mine will have none. If my flocks and herds have grass, yours will have none. You may not say anything, and I may not say anything, but the servants will speak even if the masters do not.

Genesis 13:7 says, "And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle." There was a strife among their subordinates. One said, "My cattle must graze on the pasture here." The other said, "My sheep need to be fed here." They could not dwell together because their possessions were too great. Many people can leave Ur of the Chaldees together, but trouble begins to happen once they get to Canaan.

I would like to mention one thing in passing. Many places in the Bible symbolize the world: Ur of the Chaldees symbolizes the confusion of the world, Sodom and Gomorrah symbolize the pleasure of sin and the evil of the world, and Egypt symbolizes the fact that the world is under the authority of Satan. These three places symbolize the world, but each symbol has its own unique emphasis.

Lot was able to let go of Ur's chaos. However, he was reluctant to give up something when he reached Canaan. A Christian is the same. After believing in the Lord, he may be unwilling to abandon spiritual fame and position in the work. Formerly, he struggled and strove in the world; now he strives and struggles in

the church. Originally, he was struggling for gain in an idolatrous profession. Now he is struggling for gain in the church.

Genesis 13:8-9 says, "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." One reason Christians fall is that they cannot dwell together with other Christians. The moment you realize that you cannot live with other Christians, you will find that you can no longer communicate with them. Whenever you say that Christians are worse than your relatives, you will become afraid to see them. This is evidence that something has gone wrong with your spiritual life. Whenever you find that you cannot get along with other Christians, that is the time when you are being defeated.

All the blame was with Lot. Abraham was the head of the family. Lot was a young man. Lot gained his inheritance through his uncle. He should not have allowed his herdmen to strive with Abraham's herdmen. With Abraham there was no strife; with him, there was always the victory. Lot should have said, "My cattle can starve to death, but I cannot leave my uncle. There is only one family who believes in the Lord in the land of Canaan, how can I depart?" Yet Lot did not think this way. He thought that it was more important for his cattle to have grass to eat than for himself to be fed. He would rather have a breach in fellowship with his uncle than lose his cattle. He would rather renounce his spiritual achievement than allow his possessions to suffer loss. He would rather drop Abraham than one of his cattle. "Since today my uncle opened his mouth and asked me to choose, I should choose the best." So he made his choice.

Genesis 13:10 says, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar." The first thing that stepped in was material goods. Young people are very bold when they first believe in the Lord. Lot left when his uncle left. Later after tasting the flavor of the world, it seemed that the matter of believing in the Lord could be set aside and that fellowship with other Christians

need not be taken care of. He "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered." He did not care whether or not Abraham's cattle had grass to feed on. He cared only for his own cattle.

Brothers and sisters, I will not ask how many years you have believed in the Lord. I only want to tell you that today God has set two ways before you. God puts the world before you, and He also spreads the land of Canaan before you. God wants to see how you will choose.

Lot beheld all the plain of Jordan unto Zoar. It was like the garden of the Lord and the land of Egypt. On the one hand, it was like paradise; on the other hand, it was like Egypt. This is the world. Sodom and Gomorrah represent the sinful pleasure of the world. The worldly people seek pleasure in sin.

Genesis 13:11 says, "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other." In the world there are blessings, glory, and pleasure. Therefore, Lot chose all the plain of Jordan. Perhaps he thought, "This is somewhat like paradise!" A brother once sinned, and I asked him how he felt. He said that there was a bit of heaven's pleasure in it. After he believed in the Lord, he found out that he could not do this or that. Now that he committed a little sin, he found some pleasure in it. In Lot's eyes, Sodom and Gomorrah were like paradise. I am afraid that what the world shows us is a little like heaven.

However, Sodom and Gomorrah also look somewhat like Egypt. A Christian's conscience enables him to know that there is a distinction. It is like paradise, but it is also like Egypt. There is pleasure in it, but there is also pain. In Egypt the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians. They were afflicted and scourged by the Egyptians. They were not given straw, but they still had to produce bricks. Therefore, the Israelites wanted to leave Egypt. If you love the world, you may have some amount of pleasure and blessing, and you may feel that the world is like paradise, but your conscience will make you feel uneasy. On the one hand, many Christians feel happy when they sin. On the other hand, their conscience does not give them peace. Oh, it is like paradise in one aspect, and yet it is similar to Egypt in another aspect. On the one hand, there is the pleasure of paradise. On the other hand, there is the affliction of Egypt.

What is the preference of all the young brothers and sisters here today? Is it the world? Or is it pleasure? God does not force you to take a particular way. God wants you to make the choice yourself. Are you an Abraham choosing Canaan? Or are you a Lot preferring the world? Lot did not choose to live in the city; he only chose to be outside the city. All the plain of Jordan was a pleasure, but at the same time, it was a suffering. Where are you living day after day?

The geography of Canaan is as follows: on the east side is the river Euphrates. (This was the river Euphrates which Abraham crossed from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan.) On the west side is the Jordan River. Canaan lies in between the two rivers. What does the Bible say after Lot chose all the plain of Jordan? "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east" (13:11). "Journeyed east" was to move towards Sodom. This was the fall. Since he made this choice, he was able to move east gradually. No one succumbs to sin in one day. No one falls in one day. It is all a matter of losing a little today and a little tomorrow. After a while, one falls into sins. If you choose the plain, it is easy for you to shepherd the flock and look for water because there is no need to climb the mountains, and you can live comfortably. If you desire comfort and do not want hardship, your tent will slowly move eastward. If you love the sinful pleasure of the world, your feet will eventually walk toward the world. If you cannot hold back the first step, you will not be able to hold back the second step. Since your heart leans toward the world, you cannot keep your feet from walking toward the world. Since your eyes are fixed on the world, you cannot safeguard your feet from treading upon the world. If you have chosen the world, you will not be able to keep your feet from walking in the world.

Genesis 13:12 says, "Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain." Friends, brothers, and sisters, I do not know what choice you have made today. Abraham yielded the fat and beautiful land to Lot. He remained in the land of Canaan, the land to which God called him, the land that God could bless, and the place where he could receive spiritual edification. What about Lot? He dwelt in the cities of the plain of the Jordan River, the place that he chose. Are we like Abraham, who dwelt in Canaan, the land to which God called him? Or are we like Lot, who lived in the cities of the plain of the river Jordan, which he chose

by himself?

Genesis 13:12 says, “Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.” Lot thought to himself, “I am a righteous man. If I choose Sodom, I will surely fall and become apostate. However, it may be all right to choose a place outside Sodom. This is merely close to Sodom; it is not in Sodom. It is not good to be completely in Sodom, but perhaps it is all right to be near Sodom.” Oh, we may think that it is not good to choose the world, yet perhaps it is permissible to choose something or some place that borders the world. Many Christians are borderline Christians. The world says, “You do not look like one of us.” Canaan also says, “You do not look like one of us.” It is true that you are only settling close to the world, but you do not live in Canaan either. On which side are you? Once I was in a village, and I asked a soldier why some soldiers so easily change sides. He said that it was because the uniform was gray. The color gray is a mixture of black and white. It is neither white nor black. Many Christians are like this. They do not seem to be on this side or that side. They seem to be in Paradise, yet at the same time in Egypt. They are reluctant to give up God on this side, and they are unwilling to let go of the world on the other side.

Friends, on which side are you today? Are you a gray Christian, one who is neither white nor black? When you encounter people of the world, do they consider you degraded or a twelfth-century man, who is very different from others in the world? The sad thing is that some consider Christians to be very different, yet find that they are just like themselves! This is the saddest remark an outsider can make toward a Christian! Many are not willing to stand up to say that they belong to Christ. Since they are already Christians, they do not consider it to be of any importance to acknowledge it. They cannot let go of Paradise, but they also want Egypt. They go to church on Sunday mornings, and they read the Bible for five minutes every day, thinking that they are Christians. However, they do not have real Christian fellowship. They cannot really give up the cattle. Nevertheless, we must ask God to deliver us out of this way. Otherwise, it will be very dangerous.

You may think that it is all right that you have not entered Sodom, that you have not become apostate, and that you have not declared that you do not

believe in the Lord Jesus. However, your tent is gradually moving, and it will move all the way to Sodom. If you take the first step, it is inevitable that you will take the second step. If you have chosen to face Sodom, you will eventually enter the city of Sodom. If you have chosen worldly pleasure, you will inevitably end up in sin and evil. If you have chosen material goods, you will inevitably be defiled. You must say, "God, in what direction are my feet heading toward?" Originally, you were outside the cities of the plain, but your tent can move gradually. I do not know whether your feet have moved or not. I do not know if you have entered Sodom or not. Perhaps the footprints you have left behind will tell whether or not your feet have moved. At first, you can choose to leave other Christians because you value your cattle. But it is inevitable that your footsteps will move further along. Thank God that there are still many Christians today whose tents are in Canaan. May we see that we must repudiate the sin of the world as well as the pleasure of the world.

Genesis 13:13 says, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Did Lot know the condition of Sodom? Lot knew. The Sodomites were exceedingly sinful and wicked before the Lord. Yet step by step Lot moved into Sodom. When your feet move away from other Christians, your tent will also gradually move toward Sodom. What God hates, you will not hate. What God condemns, you will no longer condemn. Your feet will slowly move eastward. There is a saying in the north which goes, "Slow is not something to be afraid of, but standing still is." Standing still is something Satan fears. But being slow easily gives opportunity to Satan. This is how temptation comes in. If we go against our conscience a little today, we will go against it a little more tomorrow. If we cut down a little in reading the Bible today, we will cut down a little more tomorrow. If we pray a few minutes less today, we will pray a few minutes less tomorrow. If we testify a little less today, we will testify a little less tomorrow. By these reductions day after day, we eventually backslide. Satan does not make us cease from going to the meetings, reading the Bible, praying, and testifying all at once. He causes us to backslide gradually, bit by bit and moment by moment. He is extremely patient in dragging us along.

## GOD'S WARNING

Lot's tent was gradually pitched "toward Sodom." What danger did he run into? In Genesis 14:9-12 four kings went to war with five. "And the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed" (vv. 10-12). This war was between two forces: five kings were defeated by four kings. Lot and his goods were also captured. Lot was captured because he dwelt in Sodom. The last time we saw him, he was still outside the city; but now he was dwelling in the city. The last time someone saw you, you might have still looked like a Christian; but now you have become a citizen of Sodom. The more sins you commit, the closer you are to Sodom. After a while, you will feel that the country is not as good as the city. As time goes on, you will even feel that the plain is not as good as the city.

Lot's residing in Sodom was not without God's warning. When the five kings were defeated by the four kings, Lot was also captured. This was a warning God gave to Lot that Sodom was not the place to be. Today I will ask you most frankly; this is also my word to you. If someone is sick, meets with failures in his business, or has problems in his family, these all are probably warnings from God. The defeat of the five kings by the four kings was God's warning to Lot not to dwell in Sodom. Lot's tent was gradually pitched "toward Sodom." Later he even became a citizen of Sodom. The way Lot moved was a little today, a little tomorrow, a little this time, and a little more the next time. After a few moves, he eventually moved into the city. Therefore, God gave Lot a warning. What about us today? Perhaps some experience the death of their spouse or the death of their son, and perhaps some become sick or meet with business failures. God's warning might be in these happenings. If you are a Christian, yet drawing closer to the world day by day, God will warn you and give you no peace. God gives you His warning so that you will turn back quickly.

It is a pity that many Christians have no feelings; they cannot feel pain. Even though they realize that they are sick, that they have business failures, and that their families have problems, they do not know that these are God's scourging.

As a result, they will not turn back. However, if they do not turn back, greater things will happen to them. There was a brother, who though not yet backsliding, was gradually losing his heart. Another brother advised him one day that he should not go on in that manner anymore. He answered, “It does not matter. Mr. So-and-so was very zealous at first, then he gradually lost his heart. This year at the age of sixty, his oldest son who had just graduated from college died suddenly, and the old man has now become zealous again.” The one who advised him then said, “God will most certainly accomplish things according to your wish.” He said, “I certainly do not want this.” Friends, if you belong to God, and if your feet walk toward the sinful world, God will certainly discipline you. If you are sick, and if you experience family problems or business failure, you should inquire of God. If God says that these things have happened to you because you have forsaken Him, you should turn back. Many times if the love of God cannot draw us, He will scourge us with a whip. If God’s word cannot touch us, He will press us with adversity. If you belong to the Lord and have committed sin or become backslidden, God will most certainly discipline you. He will not let you go. (Fortunately, Lot was rescued by his uncle when he was captured.)

Lot first dwelt outside of the city and was only close to Sodom. A person may still act like a Christian; he may not have moved into the city, but he is touching Sodom, and the boundary line is still very clear. But what happened at the end? He finally moved into the city. I will illustrate by a story. There was a child whose mother gave him six candies and told him to save them and eat them the next day. The child put the candies in front of him. He wanted to eat them but dared not to. Yet he could not bear the thought of not eating them. What did he do? He put each candy on his lip and licked it with his tongue. In this way, he licked all six candies again and again. At first there were six candies. Later they became smaller one by one. After a while one was gone, and five remained. And then two were gone, and four remained. In the end all six were eaten up. This is the way many Christians fall into sins. They disobey their conscience once, twice, until gradually they seek happiness in the world. Brothers and sisters, please realize that one does not stop sinning after the first sin. Once a person commits one sin, an addiction is built up which will cause him to commit sin again next

time. Every time a person commits a sin, there are two results: first, it affords one the pleasure of sin; second, it builds up an addiction to commit more sin. Lot moved into the city gradually. Is it possible for you not to go into the city? At the beginning, we think that we will only commit that much sin and not go into the city. But there is no such thing. If you reach the entrance of Sodom, you will certainly go into the city. Either you do not sin or you sin. If you sin, you will not have the power to restrict yourself to that one sin and avoid committing more sins.

## LOT'S END

Genesis 19:1 says that Lot sat at the gate of Sodom. At that time the custom of all the countries in the east was not like today's court. These countries judged the civil affairs at the gate of the city. Their judges were those who were elected among the qualified ones in the city, and they served as the elders. As judges they sat at the gate of the city to judge the civil affairs. Lot sat at the gate of the city; he was promoted. He was not only a commoner of Sodom; he became a judge. Lot's position in the world had become higher and more advanced. The way to sin is like this; it only goes faster. At first Lot was only near Sodom. Later on, he dwelt in Sodom, and finally he became a judge in Sodom.

What was the result of Lot's doing such things? His wife died halfway, his daughters committed fornication, and his sons-in-law were burnt by the fire from heaven.

The book of 2 Peter says that Lot was a righteous man (2:7), but he forgot that he had taken residence in Sodom. He even shed tears for those who were evil, but he forgot to shed tears for himself. A person can shed tears for other Christians, but forget to shed tears for himself. Lot saw the great sins in the people of Sodom. He even wanted to help them. But he did not realize that he could not do it. Many Christians are the same way. They have become backslidden, yet they still urge others to believe in the Lord Jesus.

God wanted to destroy Sodom. But He listened to Abraham's prayer, and two angels went to rescue Lot. Genesis 19:12-14 says, "And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and

whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." Lot had no testimony in front of his sons-in-law. They thought that he mocked them. People may believe if you say that the street is on fire. But no one will believe if you say that there will be fire coming from the heaven. People may still believe if you say that the fire of the gas tank will burn a man. But no one will believe if you say that brimstone will burn a man.

Genesis 19:16 says, "And while he lingered..." These words show a vivid portrait. It seems that Lot wanted to speak to his cows and sheep: "O cows, for you I separated myself from Abraham; for you I chose the plain of Jordan. O sheep, you have been in my place for five years, can I desert you today?" It seems that he looked at his furniture, his treasures, his sheepfold, and his warehouse, and thought, "I thought that I could live in Sodom forever. I wanted to build a larger warehouse to store all my goods and belongings. And then I would speak to my soul and say, 'Soul, eat, drink, and be merry.' Am I going to leave all these behind? Am I going to walk away like this today? I cannot suffer losing so many wonderful things!"

Genesis 19:16-17 says, "The men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." These were the instructions to them after the angels led them out of the city. Today you are in the world, and you may not have much money. But you may be as reluctant to part company with the world as Lot. There was an old lady who only had fifteen dollars, and she counted them every day. We may laugh at her for her obsession with money. But when a person with a box full of property deeds inspects them and treasures them, God in the heavens laughs at him in the same way that we laugh at the old lady. In our eyes

fifteen dollars means nothing. But in God's eyes, a box full of title deeds also means nothing.

The Lord Jesus is coming soon. The destruction of Sodom is a type of the coming destruction of the world. If all your hopes, whether great or small, are built on this world, one day the fire from heaven will consume them all. One day God will destroy them all. When that day comes, you will not be able to escape even if you want to. There will be no way for you to escape. Whatever you cannot let go of today will be let go in that day. At the time of the rapture, God will only rapture men; He will not rapture any objects. God will only save men; He will not put out fire. Therefore, today we should gladly let things go.

Genesis 19:26 says, "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Lot's wife followed her husband's desire; she looked back. Even though there was nothing more to see, a glance back at the burning fire would still make her feel better. What she wanted to see indicated what her heart would not let go of. This looking back tells us many things and expresses many inward feelings. This look turned her into a pillar of salt, and she became a serious warning to us even until today! The Lord said, "But on the day in which Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be in the same way on the day in which the Son of Man is revealed...Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:29-30, 32). At the coming of the Lord, this world will also be judged, and everything on the earth will be burned. The ones who love the world will be left on earth. They will be like Lot's wife, who remained on earth to become a pillar of salt.

Friends, I am afraid that we have paid too much attention to vain things and have forgotten about the eternal things. We are very busy with social activities, with our children's education, and with our businesses. It is right to educate our children and take care of our business. But the eternal things need our attention too. Friends, particularly young friends, your way may still be long. If the Lord still delays, let us choose today the way which we should take. Let us pay attention today to what is valuable, what is coming from God, and what will last to eternity. Let us hope that our glory is not today, that we will learn to draw near to God, and that we will go on properly in the way ahead.

# MESSAGE FIVE

## CONFESSION

## ●Outline

- **●The Significance Of Confession**
- **●The Need For Confession**
- **●The Extent Of Confession**
- **●The Result Of Confession**
- **●Recompense**

## ●Scripture Reading: Lev. 6:1-5; Psa. 32:1-7; Prov. 28:13; Matt. 5:23-26, 3:7-8; Luke 3:10-14

Lev. 6:1-5 "Then Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, If anyone sins and acts unfaithfully against Jehovah and deceives his associate in regard to a deposit or a security, or by robbery, or has extorted from his associate, Or has found a lost item and lied about it, if he has sworn falsely in any one of all these things a man may do, and sins thereby; Then if he has sinned and is guilty, he shall restore that which he took by robbery, or the thing which he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost item which he found, Or anything about which he has sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in full, and shall add to it a fifth part of it. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs, on the day he is found guilty."

Psa. 32:1-7 "(Of David. A *Maschil) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; / Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom / Jehovah does not impute iniquity / And in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away / Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand / Was heavy upon me; / My life sap was dried up / As in the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, / And I did not cover my iniquity. / I said, I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah. / Then You forgave the

iniquity of my sin. Selah. Because of this let everyone who is faithful / Pray to You at a time when You may be found; / Surely when great waters overflow, / They will not reach him. You are my hiding place; / You preserve me from trouble; / You surround me with the ringing shouts of deliverance. Selah."

Prov. 28:13 "He who covers his transgressions will not prosper, / But whoever confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

Matt. 5:23-26 "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, Leave your gift there before the altar, and first go and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Be well disposed quickly toward your opponent at law, while you are with him on the way, lest the opponent deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, You shall by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans."

3:7-8 "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Offspring of vipers, who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce then fruit worthy of your repentance."

Luke 3:10-14 "And the crowds asked him, saying, What then shall we do? And he answered and said to them, He who has two tunics, let him share with the one who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise. And tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, Exact nothing more than what you have been ordered to. And some serving in the military also questioned him, saying, And we, what shall we do? And he said to them, Extort nothing from anyone by force, nor take anything by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSION

The subject of confession is an important matter after one's salvation. First, we must be clear that no Christian in this world can be saved through confession. Some have said that without confession, there is no salvation. This is a heresy. No one can be saved through confession. One does not enter the sitting room and

then pass through the main gate. Neither does one eat his meal before cooking his meal. Although many things are turned upside down in this world, salvation cannot be turned upside down. Some have said that the extent of man's forgiveness is the extent to which he has confessed his sins. This is wrong. This is to bury the glorious work of Christ in the dust. Those who propose this have also said that if one's eyes have sinned, he should nail them to the cross, and then the eyes will be free from sin. One person said to me once, "Someone is preaching the message of the cross." I asked him whose cross he was preaching. It is true that many are preaching the message of the cross, but whose cross are they preaching? Paul said, "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). It is not our cross, but the cross of the Lord Jesus. It is not our cross or crucifixion that will save us, but the cross of the Lord Jesus that saves us. If we nailed our mouth or eyes to a cross, it would only be our cross; it would not be the cross of the Lord Jesus. Only the cross of the Lord Jesus has borne our sins. If He had not died, we would not have been saved.

Therefore, our confession will not save us. I am not saying that we do not need to confess. But we must be careful not to put the sitting room in the middle of the street. We must distinguish between the first step and the second step. We have to see that we are saved first, and then we make confessions. Salvation comes first; confession comes later. Nothing can save us except the blood of the Lord Jesus. I am not ignoring confession, but I desire to see the Lord Jesus uplifted. We are not saved through confession; we are saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While confession has nothing to do with salvation, it has much to do with reward. Matthew 5:23-26 tells us that if our brother has something against us, the first thing we have to do is to be reconciled to him. We must do our best to be reconciled to him; otherwise, he will deliver us to the judge, and the judge will deliver us to the officer, and we will be thrown into prison. This shows us that when the Lord Jesus reigns in the millennium, this kind of Christian will suffer loss. Therefore, we must have this clear distinction before us. A Christian is saved through the Lord Jesus. But after he is saved, he will suffer loss when the

Lord comes to reign in the millennium if he has not confessed all his sins.

## THE NEED FOR CONFESSION

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Brothers and sisters, we have to realize that all of our former sins must be confessed thoroughly. If we have sinned against man, we have to confess to man. If we have sinned against God, we have to confess to God. If we do not do this, we will suffer loss.

Mr. Roberts was once asked by a brother concerning the secret to Christian growth. He answered by asking, "When was the last time you made a confession?" The brother did not understand what this meant. He wondered if confession had to be made daily, as often as taking a meal, and he admitted that he had not made a confession for a few years. Later he found out what Mr. Roberts meant. A Christian grows by making confessions. When a man confesses to God what he has sinned against God, and confesses to man what he has sinned against man, he grows spiritually.

Brothers and sisters, many people do not feel sorry after they have sinned. The reason they do not feel sorry is they have failed in the matter of confession. After a person believes in the Lord, he will run a good race if he confesses thoroughly all the sins he has committed against God and man. He will run faster than many other Christians who have too little feeling concerning sin!

Many people refrain from sins only because they do not want to "lose their face"; they do not sin because they do not want to lose their family's face or their own face. Some do not sin because they do not have the "capital" to sin. Others do not sin because they are afraid of the consequence of sin; they do not sin because they are afraid that they will have to suffer as a result of sin. How many of us do not sin because of the evil and filthiness of sin itself and because it is against God? I am surprised that so many people can sin and still sleep and eat well. Our God hates sin. We should not hate sin because we are afraid of losing our face, because we do not have the "capital" to sin, or because we are afraid of the consequence of sin. We should not sin because of God. If a Christian wants to have a hatred for sin, he must confess his sins. I can at least say that confession

helps us have a hatred for sin. When I sin, I always feel much suffering. But this feeling of suffering is good.

Are there any unresolved things between you and others? Rev. K. once wrote in his diary: "There is nothing unresolved between myself and others. I can die without the need for regret or redress, and there is nothing more that I need to do." Brothers and sisters, can we say that we have thoroughly confessed our sins? Is there anyone among us who has not dealt thoroughly with his sins? We are often afraid to give an account of ourselves. This fear speaks of a problem on our part. If there is a small hole in a pear, we know that there must be something wrong inside the pear. Sometimes we want to eat the pear, but do not want to open it up to see what is inside.

## THE EXTENT OF CONFESSION

The extent of confession should be the extent of the offenses. We cannot confess more than we have sinned, nor can we confess less than we have sinned. Suppose the extent of my sin goes only as far as offending God. Then the extent of my confession should be limited to God. If the extent of my sin is such that it offends both God and my brothers, the extent of my confession should correspondingly cover them both. If we confess to others or publicly confess what we have sinned only against God or against individuals, we will fall into the error of the Roman Catholic Church. Many revivalists charge people to confess their sins in public. This is wrong. This will only defile the minds of others. If we have sinned against one person, all we have to do is confess to that person. If we have sinned against five persons, all we have to do is confess to those five persons. However, if the extent of our sin is large, the extent of our confession cannot be small. If I sin against both God and my brother, it is not enough for me to just confess to God, without confessing to my brother also. The extent of confession should be the extent of our sin. It cannot be more, nor can it be less.

## THE RESULT OF CONFESSION

I must confess that although I am a preacher of the Word, I am also ashamed to confess. However, I can tell you some of my past experiences. I studied once in a church parochial school. On every examination, I usually scored a grade

between ninety and one hundred. My average grade in the school was about ninety-nine. But I could never do well in the class that taught the Bible. I was not interested in the subject. My grade-point average was always pulled down by this subject. In the third year, I still did not like this subject. (At that time I was not yet a believer.) The teacher would always tell everyone that a certain student did well in every subject except this one, and that it would be nice if the student did well in that particular subject as well. Therefore, I determined to study and prepare for the Bible course. That year we were on the book of Acts. I spent a few months studying it, and by the time the examination came, I decided to do well. I wrote down the crucial points of the book on my arms and covered them with my long-sleeved shirt. I gave the right answer on many questions, but still my score was only a little over seventy. (Prior to that I had received grades of only forty to fifty.) Later, I was saved, and I had no peace about this matter. I dared not confess it, for if I did, the principal and the teachers would think that I did the same thing with the other subjects. I was afraid that the school would expel me because the school rules stated that anyone caught cheating would be expelled. Moreover, I had already voiced my disagreement with the Anglican Church concerning certain truths, and the principal was not very happy with me. I was afraid that if I was expelled, I would be too ashamed to face my parents. I struggled for many days. In the end, I realized that I would have no peace if I did not confess. The conscience can go to sleep, but it will never die. As a result, I wrote a letter to the principal and made the confession. Later, the principal called me and told me that he forgave my offense on behalf of the school.

Brothers and sisters, our conscience often can go to sleep. But after it wakes up, it will continue to remind us. Every unconfessed sin is an unremoved scar. Your conscience can be suppressed, but it will not shut up and be silent forever. Only those who confess their sins will obtain mercy, and only those who confess their sins will be at peace. The taste of sin is the taste of hell. We are often like David, who said, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away/Through my groaning all day long./For day and night Your hand/Was heavy upon me;/My life sap was dried up/As in the drought of summer" (Psa. 32:3-4). However, after he confessed his sins, he said, "You surround me with the ringing shouts of

deliverance" (v. 7).

Previously, we have mentioned that if one does not make confessions, he will not have the proper feeling for sin. Now we must also say that if one does not make confessions, he will not have the proper feeling of joy. Some have wondered why some feel joyful after they are saved, but others do not have joy. Some do not have joy because they have not testified. Others do not have joy because they have not obeyed God in certain areas, or because they are not willing to give up some matters. Still others do not have joy because they are unwilling to confess their sins. The joy of confession is a great joy.

Once I was conducting a conference in Changchow, and the principal of a school wanted to bring some elementary school students to my meetings. I was somewhat reluctant to agree because I was afraid that they would disturb the meeting and distract others. But the principal was an experienced man. He said that there is power in the gospel, and that perhaps a few among them would be saved. Eventually they were allowed to come. Afterward, one teacher from that school came and told me that something had happened in their school. I asked what it was, and he said that a wave of confession had swept through the school. He told me that one child was only seven or eight years old. He and a few other children had once picked loquats from the loquat tree next to the principal's office without permission. Now he realized that this was a sin. But he was afraid of the principal and dared not confess his sin. When he refused to confess, he did not have the peace. He cried for two days, and in the end he confessed to the principal.

Confession is necessary. If a sin is not confessed, it will follow you all your life. Moses said that "your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). Sin does not sit still; it does not remain at a distance from us. Sin will follow us and find us out. The teacher I mentioned earlier told me similar stories. One child was eleven or twelve years old. Three or four years earlier, he had seen some of his friends buying candy at the entrance of the school. He did not have any money himself, but it occurred to him that a few pennies were lying on the desk of his teacher's bedroom. He went to see whether or not the teacher was there so he could take the money to buy some candy. He went and looked, and sure enough, the teacher

was not there. He took six pennies and bought himself some candy. Now he felt sorry for his sin. He wanted to repay what he took, but he did not have the money. So he went to his sister and asked for six pennies. His sister asked for the reason, but he would not tell her, pleading only that he needed it, and that he could not get by without it. His sister eventually gave him the money, but followed him to find out what he was doing. He took the money to the teacher and said, "Three or four years ago, I took six pennies from your room to buy candies. Now I would like to return this money to you." When I heard this story, I mentioned it in my message the very next day. After the meeting, a few in the audience who were judges came to me and said, "If things go according to what you have said, there will be no need for judges anymore. If man returns what he has stolen, there will be no need for courts anymore. Although we have not seen much merit in Christianity, the few things that you mentioned are enough to show us the distinction of Christianity."

Confession brings not only peace, but joy as well. Not only does it bring joy, but it wins back the ones whom one has offended. Sometimes our hard-hearted friends will acknowledge with tears that Jesus is their Savior when we confess with tears our sins and acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior. I have experienced this myself. If it were not for Christ's sake, and if there were no Christ, no one on earth would do such a thing.

Brothers and sisters, if there is some sin in you, you should confess it immediately. This is not an easy thing to do. Sometimes I struggled for a few weeks and even for a few months. At times I struggled for half a year. You may be better than I am, but I have to tell you that the year after I was saved, I confessed at least a hundred times to people. Have you offended anyone in anything?

Other than giving us peace and joy and winning people back to ourselves, confession can do another thing: it can be a testimony. Without confession, there is no testimony. If I do not confess my sins, my audience will wonder if a person such as I can give a message. We must confess our own sins, and we must condemn ourselves for our sins more than we condemn others. Only then will we have a good testimony. We must acknowledge that our sins are sins and that they are wrong before we can persuade others not to sin. We have to confess our

own sins before we can testify to others. If we do not confess our sins now, we will not be able to touch others, and we will not have a proper testimony.

## RECOMPENSE

Confession is one thing, and recompense is another thing. Is there anything that has ended up in your house? Is there anything that you have stolen? Is there anything that is not yours, but has become yours? Is there anything that you have secured by improper means? Is there anything that you have picked up from the street, or any debt that you have not repaid? Are you willing to clear up these things at the first available opportunity? If you are not willing to do this, God will not bless you. Many Christians are too negligent about these matters. According to Leviticus, not only should we pay back what we owe, but we should also add one-fifth to it (6:1-5). This means that we should not only repay, but we should also repay a little more. We must never allow others to suffer loss. As Christians, we should only allow ourselves to suffer loss from others. If we cannot make the recompense now, we still have to find a chance to do it later.

If the person who has suffered the loss is no longer present, you can hand the recompense over to his relatives. The ordinance in the Old Testament says that if a person's relatives are not there, one can give it to the priest. But if the person is still alive, the priest cannot accept the recompense. The same is true today. In Fukien there was a maid who had stolen about sixty dollars worth of goods from her master. Later she believed in the Lord and felt that this was a sin. She proceeded to save about seventy dollars for recompense. One day she took this money to a worker of the Lord and told him to accept it and use it for God's work. The brother asked if her master was still around, and she said that he was. The brother then said, "Why don't you return this money to him?" Then he told her solemnly, "God does not need a thief's money for His work." If I had been there, I would have said the same thing to her.

If a person has sinned against anyone in material possessions, he should find that same person and make the recompense. If that person is not around any longer, he should look for his relatives. If he does not have any relatives, the recompense can go to the church. Brothers and sisters, may God dig deeper in us.

Does Acts 19:19 not tell us that those who believed burned improper books worth fifty thousand pieces of silver? The book of James also tells us that we have to confess our sins to one another (5:16). You are not responsible for the sins that you do not remember. But you have to be responsible for the sins that you do remember. May no one wait until tomorrow to obey God's word.

## MESSAGE SIX

# TWO PRINCIPLES OF LIVING

# The Principle of Life

# Or The Principle of Right And Wrong

## •Outline

- **•Two Principles Of Christian Living**
- **•The Meaning Of Following The Principle Of Right And Wrong**
- **•Christianity Is Based On Life**
- **•The Standard Of Life Is Higher Than The Standard Of Good**
- **•Externalities Do Not Govern Decisions**
- **•"Hear Him"**
- **•The Divine Life Must Be Satisfied**
- **•There Should Be Fullness Of Life Within**
- **•Our Living And Actions Must Be According To The Leading Of Life**
- **•Prayer**

## •Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:7; Matt. 17:3, 8, 5b; 1 Cor. 4:3-4; Gen. 2:9b, 16-17

"For we walk by faith, not by appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7).

"Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Him" (Matt. 17:3).

"When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone" (v. 8).

"...Hear Him!" (v. 5b).

"But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by man's day; rather I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing

against myself; but I am not justified by this, but He who examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3-4).

"…The tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9b).

(The tree of the knowledge of good and evil can also be translated “the tree of the knowledge of right and wrong.”)

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (vv. 16-17).

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After God created man, He considered the problem of man's food. The act of giving life is the beginning of life, but food is for the maintenance of life. God created a living man and therefore needed to consider how man should live. Man should not just live; man also needs a living. God wanted man to depend on Him for his living in the same way that he was dependent upon food for his living. "For in Him we live and move and are" (Acts 17:28). Thus, God uses two trees to speak to us in a parable. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are a kind of parable. They show us that man has two different kinds of food and can live either by life or by the knowledge of good and evil, that is, the knowledge of right and wrong. Many people have read about the two trees in Genesis 2, but we would like to emphasize that the two trees were put there to show us that man, especially a Christian, can live on earth according to two different principles. Man can live according to the principle of right and wrong or according to the principle of life. Some Christians take the principle of right and wrong as the standard for their living, while other Christians take the principle of life as their standard for living.

Today we would like to spend some time before God to see these two principles for living. What does it mean when a person lives according to right and wrong? What does it mean when a person lives according to life? Many people only have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in their lives. Other

people have the tree of life in their lives. Some have both trees. The Word of God tells us, however, that he who eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil shall surely die, while he who eats of the tree of life shall live. God also shows us that whoever lives by the knowledge of good and evil will lose his position before God. If man wants to constantly live before God, then he must know what it means to eat the fruit of the tree of life.

## TWO PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

Here, I would like to add another principle for living: the principle of sin. You could say that everyone in the world can live according to at least three principles: they can live by sin, or they can live by right and wrong, or they can live by life.

What does this mean? It is very simple. Many people live on earth by following the lusts of their flesh. They are sons of wrath who are bound by the fashions of the world. They live and act according to the operation of the evil spirits in their hearts. Their principle for living is that they live by sin (Eph. 2:1-3). This morning I do not want to speak about this principle. I believe that many among us have already left the principle of sin. What we will consider this morning is apart from the principle of sin. These two trees represent two principles of living. After becoming Christians, some people live by the principle of right and wrong, while others live by the principle of life.

In speaking about this matter, I am making the assumption that we have already left the principle of sin and are walking before God. If we would consider a little, we would see that some people live according to the principle of right and wrong or good and evil. Please remember that the principle of right and wrong, the principle of good and evil, is not Christianity. Christianity is a matter of life, not of being according to a standard. Christianity speaks of life, not of good and evil. Christianity teaches life, not right and wrong. There are many young brothers and sisters here this morning. I would like to tell you that after you received the Lord Jesus and gained a new life, you gained something marvelous inwardly. You obtained another principle of living. But if you do not know about it, you will set the principle of life aside and begin to follow the

principle of right and wrong.

## THE MEANING OF FOLLOWING THE PRINCIPLE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

What is the principle of right and wrong? If our conduct is controlled by the principle of right and wrong, then we ask if something is right or wrong whenever we have to make a decision. Would it be good to do this, or would it be evil? When we ask whether it is good, we are, in effect, asking ourselves, "Am I right to do this or not?" Many people consider much whether something is good or evil. They consider whether they can or cannot do a certain thing. They ask, "Is this right or wrong?" As they carefully consider a certain matter, being Christians, they determine whether it is good and right to do that thing. By taking care to decide whether or not something is good and right, they consider themselves to be good Christians.

God's Word says, "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). At the most, this practice is only a discerning of good from evil. At best, it is merely choosing and rejecting—choosing good and rejecting evil. This is not Christianity. Christianity does not have an outward good and an outward evil. It does not have a definite standard in place. I may choose something good and reject something evil today, but this is not Christianity. It is the Old Testament, the law, worldly religions, human morality, and human ethics, but it is not Christianity.

## CHRISTIANITY IS BASED ON LIFE

What is Christianity? Christianity is life. Christianity is not a matter of asking whether something is right or wrong. Christianity is a matter of checking with the life inside us whenever we do something. What does the new life which God has given us tell us inwardly about this matter? It is very strange that many people have only seen an outward standard, the standard of good and evil. But God has not given us an outward standard. Christianity is not a new set of Ten Commandments. In Christianity we have not been brought to a new Sinai, nor has God given us a new set of rules and regulations with "Thou shalt" and "Thou

shalt not." Christianity does not require that we ask whether something is right or wrong, good or evil. On the contrary, whenever we do anything, there is a life within us which rises up to speak with us. When we feel right inwardly, when we feel the life inside of us moving, when we are strong within and sense the anointing, we know that we have life. Many times something is right and good in the eyes of man, but strangely the inner life has no response and grows cold and retreats.

Please remember, God's Word tells us that our Christian living is based on an inner life, not an outward standard of right and wrong. Many worldly people, who are not saved, live according to the best standard of living they can attain: the principle of right and wrong. If you or I also live by the principle of right or wrong, we are the same as worldly people. Christians are different from non-Christians because we do not live by an outward standard or law. Our subject is not human morality or concepts. We do not determine whether something is right or wrong by subjecting it to human criticism or opinion. Today we have only one question: What does our inner life say? If the life is strong and active within us, we can do this; if the life is cold and retreating within us, we should not. Our principle for living is inward instead of outward. This is the only real principle of living; the others are false.

People may say that many things are right to do, and I may feel that to do them is right, but what does the sense of the inner life tell us? The inner life does not agree. If we were to do them, we would not be rewarded, and if we were not to do them, there should be no shame, because they are outside of us. We can only see what is really right when the Spirit of God operates within us. If we feel that there is life inwardly, then that matter is right. If we do not feel the inward life, then the matter is wrong. Right and wrong are not decided by an outward standard but by the inner life.

## THE STANDARD OF LIFE IS HIGHER THAN THE STANDARD OF GOOD

Once this matter is resolved, we can see that we must not only avoid all that is evil but also all that is merely good. Christians can only do that which comes

out of life. We can see that there are evil things, good things, and things of life. We are not saying that Christians should only do things that are good and things that are of life. Rather, we are saying that Christians must not do good things or evil things. God said, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Note that "good and evil" are put together here as one way, while "life" is another way. Christians should not just refuse evil, they should even refuse good. There is a standard that is higher than the standard of good; it is the standard of life.

I have spoken about this matter with many young brothers, but I would like to repeat my story again today. When I first began to serve the Lord, I sought to avoid all that was evil and deliberately set myself to do what was good. According to the human point of view, I seemed to be making splendid progress in avoiding evil and doing good. There was a problem, however. Since I was pursuing right and wrong, I wanted to be clear about what was right and what was wrong in each matter before I did anything. At that time I had a co-worker who was two years older than I, and we were always disagreeing. The differences that arose between us did not concern our own personal affairs. Our disagreements were about public matters, and our disputes were public too. I used to say to myself: That is wrong; if he wants to do things that way, I will protest. But no matter how much I protested, he would never give way. His only excuse was that he was two years older than I. I could argue with any other reason, but I could not argue with the fact that he was two years older than I. I could not get around this argument, but inwardly I did not agree with him. I told this story to an elderly sister, who had a wealth of spiritual experience, and I asked her to arbitrate. Was he right or was I? She did not say he was right, nor did she say he was wrong. She simply stared at me and said, "You should do as he says." I was unhappy inwardly and thought, "If I am right, tell me so; if I am wrong, then say it. Why do you say that I should do as he says?" I asked her to give me a reason for her answer. She said, "In the Lord the younger should submit to the older." "But," I retorted, "in the Lord, if the younger is right and the older wrong, must the younger still submit?" At that time I was in secondary school and had learned nothing of discipline, so I gave free vent to my anger. She

still smiled and said, "You had better do as he says."

Once some people were going to be baptized, and there were three of us caring for the matter. I was the youngest, then the brother two years older than I, and finally there was a Brother Wu, who was seven years older than he. I thought, "You are two years older than I, so I have to submit to you in everything. He is even older; let us see whether or not you will submit." We got together to discuss this matter, but he refused to accept anything from Brother Wu. At every point he insisted on having his own way. Finally, he said, "Just leave things to me; I will do it alone." I thought, "What kind of logic is this? You insist that I always obey you because you are my senior, but you never need to obey your senior." Immediately I sought out this sister to ask her about this matter. I was upset that she did not pay attention to right or wrong. She stood up and asked, "Have you not seen what the life of Christ is? Over the past few months, you have continually come to say that you are right and this brother is wrong. Do you not know what the cross is? You are insisting on the rightness of the matter, but I insist upon the life of the cross." I had been insisting upon right and wrong. I had not seen the matter of life, nor the cross. So she asked me, "Do you think you are right in doing this? Do you think you are right to say these things? Do you think it is right for you to tell me these things? They are all right according to reason, but I would ask how you feel inwardly. What is your inner sense?" I could only confess that I had been right according to reason but wrong according to the inner life.

The standard of Christian living does not only deal with evil things but also with good and right things. Many matters are right according to human standards, but the divine standard pronounces them wrong because they lack the divine life. On the day to which I just referred, I saw this light for the first time. From then on I began to ask myself if the life I lived before God was according to the principle of life or the principle of what I considered right and wrong. I would check, "Am I doing this just because it is right?" The key to everything is this point: Others may say something is right. We also may say that it is right, but does the Lord's life rise up within us or does it recede when we begin to do something? When we begin to do something, do we sense the anointing or do we feel weighed down? As we are doing that thing, do we have

an increasing sense that we are on the right track, or is something telling us that we are off? Please remember that life does not make decisions according to outward standards of right and wrong. Matters should be decided according to the sense of God's life or the sense of death. Decisions should be made according to God's life as it rises up or recedes within us. No Christian should say that he can do something because it is good or right. We must ask the Lord within us. What is the inner feeling that the Lord gives? Do we feel joyful inwardly about this matter? Do we have spiritual happiness and peace? These are the matters that decide our spiritual path.

When I was visiting Honor Oak, there was another brother who was also a guest there. He had many criticisms of the place. He had been a pastor and was a good preacher, and he knew that Honor Oak had much to offer spiritually. Still, he disapproved of many things. Whenever we ran into each other, he would tell me how much better his place was than Honor Oak. During the two or three months we were together, his criticism exceeded that of everyone else. One day he went too far, so I asked him, "You say Honor Oak is bad, so would it not be best if you left? Why do you remain here?" He answered, pointing to his heart, "The reason lies here; it wants to stay. Every time I pack my things to leave, my peace of heart leaves. Once I even left for two weeks, but I had to write and ask to return." I said, "Brother, have you seen these two ways: the way of life and the way of what you consider to be right or wrong?" He said, "Some days I go to my room to pack my bags as many as three times. But each time I want to leave, there is an inward forbidding. Inwardly, I feel that they are doing things wrong, but I also feel that it would be wrong for me to go." God had shown him that if he could receive spiritual help there, he should stay there to meet God. We all can see that this is not a matter of what we conceive as right or wrong. God uses His life to control His children.

## EXTERNALITIES DO NOT GOVERN DECISIONS

The greatest error among God's children is that many people determine right and wrong by what they see. Many people determine right and wrong according to their backgrounds and based upon their years of experience.

Therefore, they do not know what is really right and what is really wrong. Please remember that Christian living is based upon the inward life. Many people only have externalities before God. Many people decide what is right or wrong according to outward things. Life, however, is a different matter. Those with life know what it is.

I hope we all would see this before God: No Christian can determine anything apart from life. Whatever increases the inner life is right, and whatever decreases the inner life is wrong. No one should determine whether a matter is right or wrong by some outward standard.

I recall going to a certain place where the brothers were working with real effect. God was truly using them. If you were to ask me whether or not their work was perfect, I would have to say that there was room for improvement. In great humility they asked me to point out anything I saw that could be corrected, so I pointed out this and that. They asked me several times, but they did not change anything. Was I annoyed? No! A foolish person would become annoyed, but one who knows God could not be upset. I could only indicate external matters that needed adjustment, but I could not see what God was doing within them. I had no way to tell God what He should do within them.

In another place I visited, the brothers were not preaching the gospel. They discussed the matter with me and asked if I thought that they should be doing so. I answered, "Doctrinally speaking, we certainly should preach the gospel." They said they realized this as well, but that surprisingly God did not give them the life to do so. Those who know God can only stand aside in silence, for our pathway is His life, not right and wrong. The difference between these two principles is immense. Brothers and sisters, the contrast here is too great. So many people only think whether it is right or wrong for them to do something. But today we should not act according to what is right and what is wrong. The one question we must ask today is whether the divine life within us rises or falls. This is what must determine the path we take. Everything is decided in our hearts.

## "HEAR HIM"

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses was present, representing the

outward, moral standard, and Elijah was present, representing the outward, human standard (Matt. 17:3). We all know that Moses stands for the law, and Elijah stands for the prophets. The standard of the law was present, and the standard of the prophets was present. In the Old Testament the law and the prophets were most qualified to speak, but God silenced them here. God told Peter, "This is My Son, the Beloved...Hear Him!" (v. 5). Today the standard for Christian living is no longer the law, nor is it the prophets. The standard for Christian living is now Christ Himself; it is the indwelling Christ within us. Therefore, it is not a question of whether we are right or wrong but of whether or not the divine life in us agrees with something. Often, to our surprise, we find that the life within us disapproves of what we approve. When this happens, we cannot insist on what we think is right.

## THE DIVINE LIFE MUST BE SATISFIED

I recall a story of two brothers, both Christians, who had a rice paddy. Rice paddies need to be irrigated. Their paddy was halfway up a hill; others were lower down. In the great heat of the day they drew water and filled their paddy. In the evening they went to sleep. But while they were sleeping, the farmer lower down the hill dug a hole in the irrigation channel surrounding the brothers' field and let all the water flow into his field. The next morning the brothers saw what had happened, but they said nothing. Again they filled the channels with water. The following day they saw that their field had been emptied again, but they still did not say anything. They were Christians and felt that they should endure in silence. This happened every day for a week. Some people suggested that they stand guard in their field at night to catch the thief and beat him. They did not say a word in response; they just endured because they were Christians.

According to the human concept, they should have been walking joyfully, happily, and victoriously because they were enduring in silence, even after drawing water daily and having it stolen so many times. But strangely enough, even though they drew water every day and remained silent while others stole it, they did not have peace in their hearts. They then went to see a brother with some experience in the Lord's work and said, "We do not understand why we

have no peace after enduring for seven or eight days. Christians should endure and allow others to steal from them, but we do not have peace in our hearts." This brother was very experienced. He said, "You have not done enough, nor have you endured enough. You should first fill the field of the person who has stolen your water. Then you can fill your own field. Go and try this, then see whether you will have peace within." They both agreed. The next day they got up earlier than usual and filled the field of the person who had stolen their water, before filling their own field. Strangely enough, they became more and more joyful as they filled that person's field. When they came to fill their own field, they had peace in their hearts. They were at peace with the thought of allowing that person to steal their water. After two or three days of doing this, the person who had stolen their water came to apologize, saying, "If this is Christianity, I want to hear about it."

This shows us that in the realm of right and wrong, enduring is right. What more can we ask one to do? These ones had spent an entire day drawing water, and not in ordinary weather, but in hot weather. They were not educated people; they were farmers. They had done the right and good thing. What else could one ask of them? Yet they had no peace inwardly. This illustrates the way of life. This is the way we take. The way of right and wrong is another way. Man says that right is good enough, but God says that only life is sufficient. We must do things to the point that joy and peace are produced inwardly. This is the difference between the way of life and the way of right and wrong. It seems as if right and wrong are sufficient and that nothing else is needed. But God is not satisfied with being right. He requires us to satisfy the divine life.

What does the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 teach us? It teaches us nothing less than that being right is not enough. We must do things in a way which satisfies the life God has given us. This is the content of Matthew 5—7, the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount does not say that everything is all right as long as things are done according to what is right. Man asks why he has to turn the other cheek when someone hits him. Is it not good enough if we do not say anything when someone strikes us? Is it not wonderful that we have not rebuked him and have shown great restraint? But God says that it is not even

enough to just lower our heads and leave when we are struck. This does not satisfy the inner life. We must turn our other cheek for that person to strike as well. This means that we have no hate in our hearts. We are not angry and can endure this treatment a second time. Life is humble. Life can turn the other cheek for another blow. This is the way of life.

Many people say that Matthew 5—7 is too difficult for them. I admit that it is. It is impossible for us to carry out Matthew 5—7. If we try, we will die because we cannot do it. However, we have another life within us. It tells us that we will not be happy if we do not do this. It does not matter how much we have been offended by a brother or sister. If we do not kneel down to pray for him or her, we will not have inward joy. It is good to endure in silence, but if we do not follow the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, we will not have inward joy. The Sermon on the Mount teaches that we must satisfy the life of God within us. In doing these things, the divine life is satisfied, released, at peace, and happy. This is the whole matter: Are we walking in the way of life or in the way of right and wrong? If we read God's Word clearly, we will see that it is wrong to decide matters by the principle of right and wrong or to live, act, and have our being according to our self-life.

## THERE SHOULD BE FULLNESS OF LIFE WITHIN

Sometimes we come across a brother who has acted very foolishly. According to what is proper, we should strongly exhort or rebuke him. We tell ourselves that he requires a serious, thorough dealing. We prepare ourselves to face the situation because we know he will be around for a few days. We go to his home and knock on the door, but then we ask ourselves whether we are right or wrong. He acted foolishly, so what can we do but exhort him? We have gone to his door and raised our hand to knock, but inwardly there is a problem. Our raised hand drops to our side. Even though we have convinced ourselves that we are right, this is not a matter of right or wrong. This is a matter of whether or not the life of God allows us. Many times when we go to exhort a brother, he will receive our exhortation with courtesy and promise to do what God says. Yet the more we preach to him, the more our inward being wilts. When we return home,

we have to admit that we have been wrong in exhorting the brother! Therefore, it is not a matter of good or bad but a matter of being full of life inwardly.

I will give you another example. I met a needy brother a few days ago. He was extremely poor and needed some help. I thought that I certainly should do something for him because there was no prospect of help coming to him from any direction. Just at that point I had no surplus, so it was a great sacrifice to come to his aid. I seemed to be exceeding the limits of my strength to help him. According to what is proper, I was right. I should have been happy as I gave him some money. Yet for some unknown reason, I wilted inwardly as I gave him the money which I had promised to give him. A voice within said, "You are just acting on charity. That was not an act of life; it was merely human chivalry and natural kindness. It was not done in life but in yourself." God did not want me to do this. I have suffered concerning that matter for two or three weeks. Even though I had given the brother money, I had to bow before God, confess my sin, and ask His forgiveness when I reached home.

## OUR LIVING AND ACTIONS MUST BE ACCORDING TO THE LEADING OF LIFE

Brothers and sisters, as we live before God, our actions must not be determined by good and evil, but by the life within. Whatever life wants us to do is worthwhile. Anything that we do without life, no matter how good it may be, will bring us nothing but inward condemnation. A Christian should not only repent before God for the sins he has committed; often, he must repent before God for the good things he has done. The principle of our living is not one that differentiates between good and evil. We must come before God to determine what is of life and what is of death. When we have life within and feel life rising up, we are doing the proper thing. When the life does not rise up and we cannot sense the anointing in our being, we should not care whether we are acting according to right or wrong. Instead, we must confess before God and ask His forgiveness.

Paul said that he judged nothing by himself, but that only God judged him (1 Cor. 4:3-4). Many people do not understand this passage in 1 Corinthians. This

sentence is very simple, but if we do not know life, it is very difficult. If we have an outward standard of good and evil, it is very easy to judge when we are wrong and right. Paul did not act according to an outward standard of right and wrong, so he could only say, "I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself; but I am not justified in this, but He who examines me is the Lord." The one who examines us before the judgment seat is the Lord. In addition, we have a life within us that leads us on. That is the reason 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "We walk by faith, not by appearance." We do not determine things by an outward, visible law. We live according to the leading which the Lord gives us inwardly.

We must learn the lesson before God that we should never act merely according to the standard of right and wrong. The standard of right and wrong is not bad; it is a good standard, but it is not good enough for a Christian. The Christian's standard surpasses right and wrong. The things which are wrong are wrong, but the things which are right are not always right. If we act according to God's life, He will show us that His demands are higher than those of human law. This being the case, it becomes very easy to live the Christian life. In every matter when we seek God's speaking within us, spontaneously there will be the shining of inward light. Please remember that our regeneration is a fact. It is also a fact that God is living in us through the Lord Jesus. The Lord is constantly expressing Himself within us. We hope that each of us would be able to say to God, "Grace me so that I live by the tree of life, not by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I want to constantly pay attention to life. I want to ask, `What is the sense of life?'" If we live by this principle, we will see a great change in our Christian life.

Many problems arise because we only have a standard of right and wrong. Many mistakes are made because we do not have the standard of life. If we have the standard of life, many problems will be resolved.

## PRAYER

O Lord, we stand before You beseeching You to speak again. Man is empty and cannot do anything. We can only ask for Your grace to open our eyes. Every

time we open our mouths or make decisions, cause us to come before You and ask if our decision is according to right and wrong or according to the inward leading of life. Lord, cause us to see the difference between what is spiritual and what is fleshly. Cause us to really see the difference between inward light and outward law. Lord, save us from the way of death. Lord, it is wrong for us to live by discerning right from wrong. May we see that discerning right from wrong is sin and death, because only those who live in death can do this. Those who live in life must be led by life. It must be the life that takes the lead. Lord, be among us so that we would see this clearly. We have said this many times, and we want to say it again: May Your Word not be spoken in vain. Cause us to know what life is and what law is. Bless these scattered utterances. Have mercy on us, and grace us. Lead us in the way before us. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Watchman Nee

## MESSAGE SEVEN

# FOUR THINGS A CHRISTIAN SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO

## •Outline

- **•The Lord's Commands**
- **•Paul's Pattern**
- **•Examples Of One-Sidedness**

## •Scripture Reading: Matt. 9:38; Mark 11:22; 2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 1:1, 14; 2 Cor. 12:1, 4, 7; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:10; Matt. 13:9, 52; Hosea 7:8; Matt. 5:48

Matt. 9:38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust out workers into His harvest."

Mark 11:22 "And Jesus answered and said to them, Have faith in God."

2 Cor. 5:7 "(For we walk by faith, not by appearance)"

Rom. 1:1 "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,"

14 "I am debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to foolish;"

2 Cor. 12:1 "To boast is necessary, though indeed not expedient; yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord."

4 "That he was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed for a man to speak."

7 "And because of the transcendence of the revelations, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up."

Gal. 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

2 Cor. 4:10 "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

Matt. 13:9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

52 "And He said to them, For this reason every scribe discipled to the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old."

Hosea 7:8 "Ephraim—among the peoples / He mixes himself; / Ephraim is a cake / Not turned."

Matt. 5:48 "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

* * * *

We hope to see by the help of God the kind of way God ordains for us to take. I have taken verses from various places in the Bible. Some may wonder what these verses are all about. In particular, I want to draw your attention to Hosea 7:8, which says that "Ephraim is a cake/Not turned." Brothers, in God's eyes, there are always two sides to whatever we do. A bird can only fly with two wings. Even a blade of grass has to have two sides before it can be complete. Likewise, a door has to have two sides. In this universe, everything is balanced. What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm; everything should be balanced between two sides.

Hosea 7:8 says, "Ephraim is a cake/Not turned." What is an unturned cake? Although many of us have not made cakes before, we all have eaten cakes. Even if we do not know how cakes are baked, we have at least seen others cooking bean curd or frying vegetables. If a person only cooks one side without turning it over, the result will surely be that one side is raw, and the other side is overcooked. One side will have too little heat, while the other side will have too much heat. Anyone who cooks vegetables or bean curd knows that the same amount of heat has to be applied to both sides. If one keeps cooking only one side, the result will be that one side is burnt and the other side is uncooked. Anything burnt cannot be considered proper food; it cannot feed others. Today I will not expound on

Ephraim becoming an unturned cake through mixing himself with the Gentiles. I will only draw attention to the phrase "a cake not turned." This is a principle from God for our living. If a person pays too much attention to anything, he becomes a cake not turned. One can, of course, cook one side by exposing it to fire. But if he does not turn it to the other side, the whole piece will not be well-cooked and will become useless. The most important thing for a Christian to do is to be balanced. We will pick out some examples to see how a Christian who over-emphasizes one aspect of things will become a cake not turned.

Many Christians are living a life of an unturned cake. Many emphasize personal spiritual living and neglect the corporate life. This is an unturned cake. Some pay much attention to the corporate life but forget about the individual life. Such people are also unturned cakes. Some pay too much attention to righteousness and have no grace at all. Such people are unturned cakes. It is right to be righteous. But paying attention to righteousness all the time without taking care of grace is being an unturned cake. Some people are nice; they are good to others. But they do not have any principle of righteousness. They do not want to deal with others. They pay too much attention to grace and no attention to righteousness. This also is an unturned cake. Some people pay most of their attention to the objective truths and forget the work of the Holy Spirit within man. These people are also unturned cakes. Some people pay too much attention to the subjective truths and do not pay much attention to the accomplishments of Christ on the cross. They also are unturned cakes. We can say much more about what an unturned cake is. But because of time, I will only mention these few cases.

No truth should be over-emphasized. There is always the need of balance, and there is always the need to pay attention to both sides. With the Bible, we should be aware of two things. The first is fact, and the second is principle. A fact requires us to believe in it, while a principle requires us to obey it. Many people pay attention only to the facts and not to the principles. These persons are unturned cakes, being burnt on one side. Other people only pay attention to the principles and speak much about obedience, but they do not pay attention to the accomplished facts of Christ. These people are also unturned cakes, being burnt

on the other side. Such an over-emphasis of one side will cause a Christian to have a distorted living and not bring him to perfection.

Today I will draw your attention to the matter of being a Christian in four aspects. We should not be an unturned cake. I cannot enumerate all the examples of unturned cakes. I can only mention a few of them. Now I will speak on being a four-sided Christian. On the one hand, we will consider the Lord's commands. On the other hand, we will consider Paul's pattern. The Gospels show us the Lord's commands, while Paul's Epistles show us his experience.

## THE LORD'S COMMANDS

First, the Lord commands His disciples to know. He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). Again He says, "For this reason every scribe discipled to the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old" (v. 52). This refers to knowledge. If a believer is not an unturned cake, he will surely advance in knowledge.

Second, one should have faith because the Lord says, "Have faith in God." This is the original meaning of Mark 11:22.

Third, the Lord says, "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:38). This refers to zeal. We should be zealous for the gospel.

Fourth, the Lord says, "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This refers to life and in particular to love. We may not be as perfect as the heavenly Father is in other aspects. But at least we should pursue to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is in love. The Lord once passed through Samaria, and the people there would not receive Him. When James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). The Lord turned and rebuked the two disciples, saying, "You do not know of what kind of spirit you are" (v. 55). Oh, we should know of what kind of spirit we are.

We have not divided these subjects randomly. If we read the Gospels carefully and group the Lord's commands together, they are of these four categories. The Lord turns our attention to either faith, zeal, knowledge, or life. It

is always one of these four things.

## PAUL'S PATTERN

The same is true with Paul. This is why he could say, "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

As far as knowledge is concerned, even God feared that Paul's knowledge would become too great. Therefore, He allowed the messenger of Satan to buffet him and press him down so that he might not be exceedingly lifted up. Paul was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words—words which were not allowed for a man to speak. It seemed as if God had shown him too much. Within him, there were still many things that he did not speak. There are still many questions which we would like to ask him today. He knew the mysteries, all kinds of mysteries. He mentioned "the transcendence of the revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7) that he received and that he was not inferior to the super-apostles in anything (v. 11).

Concerning faith, he said, "For we walk by faith, not by appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7). He said that he once fought with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32) and despaired even of living (2 Cor. 1:8). Yet through God who raises the dead (v. 9), he was able to find the good end. He could perform works of wonders and heal sickness. He was a prophet and not afraid of snake bites. When he was on a ship and everyone abandoned hope of being saved, even when no one had food for a long time and there seemed to be nothing that anyone could do, he was still able to calm everyone down. He could do this because of what he said: "I believe God that it shall be so, even in the way in which it has been spoken to me" (Acts 27:25). This was his life of faith.

Not only did he have knowledge and faith, but he was also excellent in life. He could say, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). He could truly say, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) and "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10).

At the same time, he was very zealous in preaching the gospel. He was truly zealous. He went from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, preaching the gospel of Christ everywhere he went. He said, “But now I no longer have place in these regions” (Rom. 15:23). Brothers, have you ever preached in a region until there was no longer any place to preach in that region? Paul said this as if he knew every face there. While he was on the road, he preached the gospel. While he was at sea, he preached the gospel. While he was in prison, he preached the gospel. Even while he was under bondage in Rome, his testimony became manifest among the whole Praetorian guard and to all the rest. This means that even his guards received the gospel. These guards were originally posted there to keep a watch on Paul. But they became locked up by the Christ whom Paul preached; they had become the prisoners of Christ.

My intention is not just to speak on the Lord’s commands, nor on Paul’s experience, but to draw your attention to one thing: a Christian ought to be a four-sided person. Every Christian must pay attention to these four things. Not only should we have zeal, but faith as well. Not only should we grow in knowledge, but in life as well. If any one of the four things are missing, there will be an imbalance. Please analyze the experiences of Paul when you read the New Testament again, and see if zeal, faith, knowledge, and life are the four characteristics of Paul. We are only speaking in a general way. This is why we say that there are only these four points. According to the Lord’s commands, we should not only be encouraged to have zeal and faith, but we should also grow in knowledge and life.

Today I will speak a little more about faith. Sadly, the church has become desolate and lost its eyes for the Lord. We have a perfect Lord, but there are so many different kinds of Christians. I am not talking about differences in terms of sins. Some have tempers, while others have pride. The devil can create a hundred different kinds of sins. The differences I am talking about are the differences in the good things. Brothers, when you contact others, do you not feel that there are many different kinds of virtues?

## EXAMPLES OF ONE-SIDEDNESS

Once I met a Western missionary preaching in Kweichow. He was very zealous for the Lord in China. Although he was a university graduate and a capable man, he was willing to give up everything in order to preach the gospel in inland China. During the Boxer Rebellion, he was preaching the gospel in China. He had many virtues and was very powerful in preaching. Yet his virtues were all one-sided in the matter of zeal; he was lacking in the other aspects.

I also met a missionary in Shanghai who was very good at memorizing the Scriptures. He could memorize the Scriptures verse by verse and expound them with much light. His knowledge was very good, but in the matter of faith in God, he was lacking. When he was sick, he was hopeless. When he caught a cold, he would have to find a doctor. As far as his knowledge was concerned, he could speak about faith. But he had no assurance of what faith actually was. At the same time, his life did not match his knowledge.

I knew another Western missionary who was as gentle as a lamb. Whenever you prayed with her, she would carry you away with her gentleness. She never lost her temper. Wherever she was, God's presence was there. She indeed had considerable growth in life, but she did not have much knowledge. She was also strong in faith, though faith was not her special characteristic. She also had zeal, but her zeal was not as strong as her growth in life.

Another Western missionary had great faith. She could believe even when she had nothing in her pocket. Every time I was with her, she always said that she was down to the last dollar in her pocket. Although she lived in the countryside for many years, she never experienced any financial difficulties. When she spoke on the victory of Christ, there was the real manifestation of the victory of Christ. But in other aspects, she was not as strong as her faith.

Does this mean that Christians can be divided into four categories: the zealous kind, the faithful kind, the knowledgeable kind, and the life kind? May we not have the intention of criticizing others, but may we gain some benefit from this study. We are not separating people into categories in an intentional way. We are merely saying that naturally there are these four groups. These are not differences in sins but differences in good things. When a man develops himself in a certain area and becomes more advanced in that area, those who come in

contact with him will feel that he is excellent in a certain, particular aspect. Some may be the zealous kind, while others may be the faith kind. Some may belong to the knowledge group, while others may belong to the life group. As long as one has special growth only in one area, his growth will be distorted. Either he has to continually advance in certain points or continually advance in some other points. It is difficult to find a four-sided Christian who is advancing on all four sides.

I admit that the holiness group of believers have certain virtues in certain areas. They pay a great deal of attention to life. Men like John Wesley were excellent in their growth in life; the beauty that was manifested in their life is unmatched. They knew God very well. But one does not find many among them with deep and profound knowledge. They were lacking in knowledge. They were good at faith and zeal, but they were still short in knowledge.

Among the so-called Brethren, you can find one interesting phenomenon. Their specialty is not faith. I do not mean to say that they have no faith. Their specialty is not life. I do not mean to say that they are poor in life. Even more their specialty is not zeal. They seem to be somewhat cool for gospel preaching. Yet they are particularly strong in knowledge, Bible teaching, and the light and revelation they have received from God. They are particularly gifted in the aspect of knowledge.

The founder of the China Inland Mission, Mr. Hudson Taylor, was a man of great faith. At the beginning when he started the China Inland Mission, he only had a few sterling pounds in his pocket. He deposited this money into the bank under the name of the China Inland Mission. This was the beginning of the China Inland Mission. Today they receive offerings about every minute. At the beginning, only a few went to the China inland to preach. Even while the money in his hands was only enough to support a few people, he prayed that God would send more men to China. First he asked God to send a few, then a few dozen, and finally a few hundred. He was very advanced in faith and zeal. He was also very good in life. But in knowledge, he was not very outstanding.

Mr. George Müller was also a person advanced in faith and life. But his specialty was not the light of the truth. He was very good in life and zeal. But his

specialty was his faith.

As for zeal, we can find many people who are very zealous in China and in other countries. For example, the first person to come to China, Mr. Robert Morrison, was very zealous. But he was stronger in zeal than in other areas.

I present all these cases to you to draw your attention to the fact that we should not be one-sided. This is not what God is after. If a person is good in knowledge, we receive help from him. He may not be that zealous, but we should not therefore consider that zeal is unimportant. A bad thing among believers today is that some do not want knowledge at all, while others do not pay attention to life at all. Those who emphasize life but not knowledge think that it is all right even if one does not know anything. Those who emphasize knowledge but not life can lose their temper as soon as they finish their preaching. While their temper is still with them and the redness still on their face, they can sit down and immediately start teaching again. Brothers, we should not pay attention only to others' shortcomings. But at the same time, we should not pay attention only to others' virtues. Someone may be good in knowledge but not good in life. Others may be good in faith but inadequate in zeal. Still others may be good in life but not preach the gospel to others. Some are good in faith, and you should follow their faith. Some are good in knowledge, and you should follow them in their knowledge. Some are good in life, and you should follow them in life. Some are good in zeal, and you should follow them in zeal. If you want to be a four-sided Christian, you should pursue all four things.

Faith enables us to receive God's power. Knowledge enables us to know the things of God. Life enables us to express God's love and light. Zeal enables us to bring God to men and give God's salvation to men. Whenever there is the opportunity, we should pass out gospel tracts, and we must testify to our colleagues, family members, and children. If we only emphasize one of these four aspects, we are an unturned cake.

Furthermore, we should be people who experience answers to our prayers. A believer once told me that prayers are for children and that grown-ups do not have to pray. This is a joke. Saying that one can advance from getting answers to prayer to not getting answers to prayers and advance from God answering

prayers to God not answering prayers is like “advancing” from a grown-up to a child! Those who say this think that they have advanced. They may have advanced in knowledge but certainly not in faith. If a Christian never has his prayers answered, we cannot say that he is an experienced person. Every Christian must experience some answers to prayers. Faith is always indispensable. In the church, there are not a few who have knowledge, zeal, and even life. But the greatest lack is those who have faith. It is easy to find growth in other aspects. But it is difficult to find growth in faith.

Furthermore, knowledge is also very important; it has its place. If a Christian does not know the basic truths of the Bible, if he is ignorant of the principles of God’s work, and if he does not understand the general outlines of the Bible, he will take in all kinds of doctrines. For example, in the matter of baptism, someone may tell him to be baptized with his face looking downward because the Lord lowered His head on the cross. He may think that this is very reasonable. But if he has biblical knowledge, he will see that the Lord lowered His head on the cross, not in the tomb. If all one cares for is scriptural quotations and does not ask for what purpose they are quoted, he may end up lowering his head even when he eats. Many believers have been listening to messages for one, two, or even five years. If anyone asked them about the difference between justification and salvation, they would say that the two things are more or less the same. They do not know what justification is and what salvation is. To them forgiveness and salvation are more or less the same. In fact, everything is more or less the same. Only paying attention to faith is to be cooked on one side; it is to be an unturned cake. Those without knowledge do not know how to go on and do not know how to lead others to go on because they are blind.

At the same time, we should pay attention to life. We should seek for God and overcome all sins. May God cause us to realize our sins, and may God put our besetting sins under our feet. How many of us can say that we know we have overcome all sins through Christ living in us? If a Christian does not grow, it is because he has not overcome his sins. We should daily deny ourselves and deal with ourselves. Not only do we have to deal with sins every day, but we also have to obey God. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to work within us day by day so

that His life can flow out of us.

I am presenting these four things before all of you. If we want to be a perfect Christian, we have to pursue these four things. We should not pay attention to just one of them, but we should have a balanced development in all four areas. We should not be an unturned cake. We should not only pursue love; we should also pursue knowledge. At the same time, we should pursue faith and zeal so that we can please God. May God bless us.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## BEING USEFUL TO THE LORD AND PAYING THE PRICE

### •Outline

- **•The Relationship Between God's Plan And Man**
- **•The Need Of God's Calling**
- **•God's Visitation**
- **•Paying A Price**
- **•The Scriptural Significance Of "Going Up To A Mountain"**
- **•The Price In The Gospels—Leaving All To Follow The Lord**
- **•The Price In Philippians—Giving Up All Things To Gain Christ**
- **•The Price In Revelation—Buying Three Things**

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### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S PLAN AND MAN

God is a God with a plan. All of God's work in the universe, from ages past to eternity future, is accomplished according to His plan. This plan must be accomplished through man and also in man. Hence, God wants to gain all His created and redeemed people for the accomplishment of His plan.

Do not think it is an accident that God uses us today. God's use of us is altogether based upon His predetermined plan. Everyone that God uses is within the realm of His plan. Because God's plan is carried out only in man, God has to use man to a very great extent. As long as someone is a citizen of a certain country, he is within the sphere of usefulness to that country and can be used by it. Likewise, we who belong to the kingdom of God are within its realm of usefulness.

### THE NEED OF GOD'S CALLING

Everyone who has been saved has the position and the potential to be used

by God. God confirms man's usefulness to Himself not only by creating and redeeming man but also by calling him. The reason God created and redeemed man is that He intends to use man. However, as far as man's feeling is concerned, creation and redemption are not enough to convince man that God intends to use him. Therefore, God must also call man to confirm to man His intention to use him. In other words, we may feel that although God has created and redeemed us, He may not necessarily use us. Only when we are clear about God's calling us can we say with assurance that God intends to use us. Therefore, to us God's calling is a confirmation of His intention to use us.

Now the question we must ask ourselves is, "Has God called us, and how do we know that He has called us?"

## GOD'S VISITATION

We may have the concept that understanding God's calling is a difficult matter. Actually, we only need to ask ourselves if from the day we were saved until now we have ever had the feeling of wanting to be used by the Lord or have ever heard within us a soft, gentle voice saying that the Lord wants to use us. If we have had such a feeling, then we can know that the Lord has called us. For us to have a heart that is willing to be used by the Lord is the result of a tremendous work of the Lord. This work is far greater than the Lord's work of creating us. The Lord's work of creating us was not as great as His work of putting within us a heart that is willing to be used by Him. His working in man in this way is His greatest way of visiting man. In other words, this work is His coming to man and His visiting with man. How did we get a heart that desires to be for the Lord's use? Previously we did not even care for Him, yet to our surprise we now have the desire to be for His use. This proves that this is the Lord's visitation and that the Lord's grace has come to us.

During the past thousands of years God has come to man and visited man numerous times. Unfortunately, not many in the church today have sensed His visitation. God is always coming to man, yet man often puts Him aside. We should not think that in order to have God's calling we must hear a voice like thunder from heaven or see a great light as Paul did on the way to Damascus

(Acts 9:3; 22:6). Actually, in principle, the gentle, small voice within us is no different from the calling that Paul received on the road to Damascus. We may use sunlight as an illustration. Although there is a difference between the intensity of the heat of the dim light seen at dawn and that of the bright rays seen at noon, the sun is one and the same. Likewise, while God sometimes calls man in extraordinary ways, most of the time He comes to man and visits him in an ordinary way. God's visitation of man is the confirmation of God's desire to use man and the beginning of His use of man.

## PAYING A PRICE

The Lord's visitation marks the beginning of God's use of man. Without the Lord's visitation, we have no way to be called. Thus, it is the Lord's responsibility to visit us. However, the Bible shows us that while the Lord has the responsibility of visiting, we also have a responsibility—the responsibility of paying a price (Matt. 8:19-22; 16:24-27; Luke 9:59-62). Moses and David in the Old Testament and Paul and Peter in the New Testament were those who paid a price through the Lord's visitation. When the Lord met Paul on the road to Damascus, He did not immediately give him power, revelation, or gifts. Rather, the Lord told him to enter into the city and let a little disciple called Ananias tell him in just a few sentences what he had to do (Acts 9:5b-6, 10-17). Because Paul was willing to pay this price, he was greatly used by the Lord (Phil. 3:7-8). On the one hand, the Lord always visits man, but on the other hand, man must always pay a price. Therefore, our being useful to the Lord begins with His visitation but also depends on our willingness to pay a price.

The price one has to pay after answering the Lord's call is limitless. No one can say that he has fully paid the price and that there is nothing more to pay. Not even the apostle Paul could say this. Instead, he was always forgetting the things which were behind and stretching forward to the things which were before, pursuing toward the goal, until one day he even gave up his life (vv. 12-14; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). When Paul wrote 2 Timothy chapter four, he had already paid almost all that he could have paid, yet he was still pressing on. All of us have been visited by the Lord, and the visitations we have received were the same. However, due to

the differences in the price that each of us has paid, our usefulness in the Lord's hands may differ from one to another. Because Paul paid a greater price than others, his usefulness was also greater than that of others. Some might say that the Lord has mercy on whom He wills (Rom. 9:18). However, this word was spoken in regard to Gentiles, such as Pharaoh who had not yet been visited by God (vv. 15-17). We who have been saved by grace have already received the Lord's visitation (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). Therefore, now the question is not whether we have received the Lord's visitation but whether we are willing to pay a price. Our usefulness in the Lord's hands altogether depends on the price we pay. If we pay a big price, our usefulness will be great; if we pay a small price, our usefulness will be limited.

Throughout the years the Lord's visitation has not been rare, yet the Lord is constantly groaning because the price we are willing to pay is too small. This is why the Lord's work today can only advance slowly and the Lord still cannot come back. The Bible shows us clearly that the Lord is waiting for man to pay a price and be used by Him by answering His call. In Isaiah 6:8 the Lord said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?" We may not have a deep enough understanding of this word. This word implies that the Lord has a great heart's desire in the universe and that He is waiting for man to answer His call. He intends to work in every age, yet there is a shortage of people who are willing to pay the price and answer His call. Whenever there is someone on earth who is willing to pay the price and answer the Lord's call, the Lord will surely use him. The extent of man's answer determines the extent of the Lord's use of man.

## THE SCRIPTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF "GOING UP TO A MOUNTAIN"

The first person in the Bible to "go up to a mountain" was Noah. He arrived at the mountains of Ararat by being in the ark and passing through the flood (Gen. 8:1-5). The emphasis of the judgment by the flood was not on judging sin but on judging the God-offending world. Noah's going up to a mountain symbolizes his being delivered from the judgment and escaping all the situations of rebellion against God. When he reached the mountain, all the situations of rebellion toward God were over. Therefore, in the Bible going up to a mountain

to be before God firstly indicates deliverance from rebellion. Although the whole world had fallen into a state of rebellion against God, those who went to the mountain with Noah came out of the rebellion. Secondly, it indicates ascension to the heavens through death and resurrection. Because Noah had been delivered from rebellion and had gone through the flood—a type of the experience of death and resurrection—he entered into a new age to represent God's authority on earth. The significance of Noah's going up to a mountain is the same as all those who would go up to a mountain after him. Every time God leads someone up to a mountain, His intention is that this person would be delivered from rebellion and would pass through death and resurrection to enter into a situation of representing God's authority on earth. This is a summary of the significance of man's experience of going up to a mountain.

In the Bible there is another aspect of the significance of going up to a mountain—one goes up to a mountain for revelation. In many such instances, from Abraham's going up to Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-2) to John's being on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9; 21:10), the emphasis given to these experiences in the Scriptures is the receiving of revelation. Abraham's going up to Mount Moriah was originally for consecration, but in the end it was for revelation. By going up to a mountain Abraham came to know God as Jehovah-jireh and to know God's work on earth, because God's promise to Abraham was concerning the work He would accomplish on earth. Following Abraham, Moses and Elijah also received revelation when they went up to a mountain (Exo. 19:20; 1 Kings 18:42). In the New Testament the Lord's bringing His disciples up to a mountain was also for revelation (Matt. 5:1). Finally, John's being brought up to a mountain when he was on the island of Patmos was especially for receiving revelation. In John's experience of going up to a mountain we see the ultimate significance of this matter—being delivered from rebellion, passing through death and resurrection, representing God's authority on earth, and receiving an exceedingly mysterious revelation.

The fact that one must go up to a mountain to receive revelation indicates that the receiving of revelation requires the paying of a price. In other words, to go up to a mountain is to pay a price. The Lord's teaching on the mountain in

Matthew 5—7 came after His teaching in the synagogues (4:23) and was also apart from His teaching in the synagogues. The teaching in the synagogues was common, general, and heard by a great number of people. However, after teaching in the synagogues, the Lord brought His disciples to the mountain. The teaching on the mountain was the teaching concerning the kingdom of the heavens; this teaching was high, specific, and heard only by a few who came to the Lord by following Him up the mountain. To go up to a mountain is to pay a price and come to the Lord by drawing near to Him. Throughout the generations very few have been able to understand the teaching in Matthew 5—7, because very few have been willing to pay a price.

If we want to receive revelation, we must determine to willingly pay a price, and we must also draw near to the Lord within. These are the basic requirements for us to have the experience of going up to a mountain and for us to receive revelation. It was by fulfilling such requirements—paying a price and drawing near to the Lord—that Abraham, Moses, and the Lord's disciples were able to receive revelation. It was especially so in the case of John on the island of Patmos; he received the revelation while he was paying a price and drawing near to the Lord on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). We all should learn this lesson.

## THE PRICE IN THE GOSPELS— LEAVING ALL TO FOLLOW THE LORD

The Gospels mention numerous times that the Lord called different ones. Strictly speaking, the Lord's calling is not mainly for people to be saved but for people to follow Him. For example, there are Scripture verses such as, "Come after Me" (Matt. 4:19), "Follow Me" (9:9), "Sell your possessions…and come, follow Me" (19:21), "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (8:22), and "No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). These verses show us again and again how great is the price that must be paid by those who desire to follow the Lord.

In the Gospels the Lord's unique requirement for those called by Him was that they forsake all their possessions (14:33). This was how the early disciples were called to follow the Lord. For example, Peter said, "We have left all and

followed You" (Matt. 19:27). All means "everything." If a person with five thousand dollars gives five thousand, and another one who has fifty thousand dollars gives fifty thousand, then both paid everything they had as the price. In the Lord's eyes, both of them have paid the same price. One day the Lord praised the widow who cast two lepta into the treasury, because she had cast in all that she had, even her whole living (Mark 12:42, 44). Therefore, for us to pay a price does not necessarily mean that we spend the most but that we cast in everything we have. One who casts in everything is one who pays a price. The Lord never counts how much we pay. Instead, what He counts is whether we have paid all.

The "all" required in the Gospels is all that we have, including our parents, wives, children, brothers, sisters, houses, businesses, academic degrees, positions, fame, preferences, ambitions, and lives. All of these items are the price that is required in the Gospels. Many of us today, however, have not completely severed our relationships with our relatives. This does not mean that we should outwardly cut off all human relationships. Rather, it means that we should cut off all emotional ties. In short, the Lord wants us to leave all that we have. This is the most severe demand He has of us.

Whenever we touch the Lord, He will demand something from us. This will always be the case. The Lord is never satisfied with the price we have already paid. Whenever He touches us, He will ask us for something. We experience the Lord's most evident presence when He is requiring something of us. On our side, the only time that we will not sense that He is demanding something of us is when we have lost our fellowship with Him. On the Lord's side, His demand upon us will cease only when the new heaven and new earth are established. Today is the time for the Lord to use man and to gain man to do His work. Hence, He is continually requiring something of us, and His requirements are becoming greater and greater. At first the Lord's requirements are small, but gradually His requirements become greater, deeper, and more severe. If we try to suppress the feeling that He is requiring something, we will suffer a great loss because our fellowship with Him will be interrupted. After a long period of time, the Lord will no longer have a way in us, and consequently, He will be forced to turn to someone else. However, if we consent to His demands, learn to obey, and are

willing to pay the price, our feeling will become more and more sensitive, even to such an extent that almost all day long we will have the feeling that the Lord is asking something of us.

If we do not go along with His demands and are not willing to pay a price, then there will be two results. First, on our side, we will be like the young man who went away sorrowing (Matt. 19:22). Second, on the Lord's side, the Lord will not be able to manifest our usefulness to Him. For this reason, we would rather be wrong trying to obey than disobey altogether, and we would rather obey too much than obey too little. If we answer the Lord's requirements, there will also be two results. First, we will be full of joy, and second, the Lord will be able to manifest our usefulness.

We must realize that the basic requirement to being used by the Lord is to consent to His demands. A person who consents to His demands can be used by the Lord even though he may not have a great deal of knowledge of the truth. He can still be used by the Lord even though he may not pray very frequently. The power we gain by paying a price to answer the Lord's demands is often greater than the power we receive through numerous prayers. The power we receive by paying a price to answer the Lord's demands is often greater than the power we receive through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. People pay attention to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, yet they do not see that on the day of Pentecost those who received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had paid a great price. They had left everything to be in the upper room in Jerusalem and had prayed steadfastly in one accord (Acts 1:13-14).

Many people would like to receive the power brought in through the outpouring of the Spirit, yet they are not willing to learn the lesson of paying a price. Hence, they carry out many works, yet their works cannot last and do not have a lasting effect. If a worker wants his work to remain and to last a long time, he must learn the lesson of paying a price. How much the work can remain depends on how much the worker has learned this lesson. The power for doing the Lord's work lies in one's learning this lesson, and in order to learn this lesson, one must pay a price. A person's usefulness before the Lord is based upon how much of a price he has paid before the Lord. We all admire how useful people

such as Paul and Peter were to the Lord, yet we neglect the fact that they paid a great price before the Lord. If we are not useful to the Lord today, the only reason is that we are not willing to pay a price, not willing to answer His demands, and not willing to forsake our reputation, our education, our position, our future, and our whole life. Hence, we do not sense the presence of the Lord, we rarely contact Him in fellowship, and naturally, we have little usefulness before Him.

## THE PRICE IN PHILIPPIANS—GIVING UP ALL THINGS TO GAIN CHRIST

The price in Philippians 3 is different from the price in the Gospels. The price in the Gospels refers to all that we have, whereas the price in Philippians 3 refers mainly to all the things that enable us to serve the Lord. For example, all things in Philippians 3 denotes our abilities in service (v. 8). We may have the ability to serve, to preach, to testify, and to visit the saints. We may also have eloquence and experience. All these things are included in the price required of us in Philippians 3. The revelation in Philippians 3 is that we should pursue the experience of Christ and the power of His resurrection (v. 10). Therefore, we need to pay the price by giving up all that we have—our theology, eloquence, doctrines, knowledge, and experience—in exchange for Christ, the experience of Christ, and the gaining of Christ. Paul forsook all things that he might gain Christ (v. 8). In other words, he forsook all his abilities in the service of God that he might gain Christ as his ability. We need to cast aside our ability, our eloquence, our doctrines, and our messages and let Christ be our ability, our eloquence, and our message. Only by paying a price in this way will we be able to gain Christ.

Let us use the matter of visiting the saints as an illustration. Since we have gone out frequently to visit the saints, gradually we have learned something concerning this matter. Therefore, we may think that we are experienced in this matter. However, if we do not give up our experience in the matter of visitations on account of Christ, we will not be able to experience Christ through the visitations. Because we want to retain our ability, Christ has no chance to come in. However, if we go to visit the saints by putting aside our experience, then we are no longer depending on our ability. Our ability to visit the saints, which was a

gain to us, we have counted as loss on account of Christ. Although we have the ability, we give it up and count it as refuse. In exchange we gain Christ and experience Christ.

The price in Philippians 3 is not a price experienced in a Christian's initial stage. The price experienced in a Christian's initial stage is the price in the Gospels. The price in Philippians comes after the price in the Gospels. One who has not paid the price in the Gospels cannot pay the price in Philippians 3. The price in the Gospels does not require any qualifications—it is the initial price, whereas the price in Philippians 3 requires certain qualifications. Only when a person has paid the price in the Gospels will he be able to serve in Acts, and only when a person is serving in Acts will he have the experience and qualification to pay the price in Philippians 3.

After paying the price in the Gospels, a person will have numerous experiences in the service of God. However, if he stops there, holding on to those experiences rather than giving them up, eventually he will not have any fresh experiences and will therefore be unable to have more experiences of Christ. Hence, Paul said that we should forget the things which are behind and stretch forward to the things which are before (Phil. 3:13). Regardless of how good our past experiences were, they are the things which are behind and have to be forgotten (cf. vv. 5-6). If we preached the word once and saved three thousand, we still have to forsake that experience and count it as refuse that we may gain the living Christ. Unless we are willing to forsake our past experiences, we will not be able to have a fresh experience of Christ, and without a fresh experience, we will not have new usefulness in service. There are some whose usefulness before the Lord is old—not fresh and living, because they are not willing to pay the price referred to in Philippians 3 and are therefore short of the experience of Christ and the power of His resurrection.

The price in Philippians 3 may be likened to Abraham's offering of Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22:1-2). Abraham had received Isaac as a promise from God, yet he still had to offer Isaac back anew. Likewise, we still need to offer to the Lord the lessons that we have learned before Him in the past. This is the price in Philippians 3, which is a higher price. The price in the Gospels is paid by a

follower of the Lord in the initial stage of his experience. The price in Philippians is paid by one who has already been serving the Lord to a certain extent and has a considerable amount of knowledge of the Lord, a considerable measure of spirituality, a considerable degree of obtainment, and a considerable amount of experience. At this time, the price revealed in Philippians 3 will require him to give up all these "considerables," that is, to give up all things. Although these things are good and are "Isaacs," they are all things of the past. Therefore, he has to forget them and pay them as the price so that he may have some new experiences. Only by this can he have a fresh and living usefulness in service.

## THE PRICE IN REVELATION—BUYING THREE THINGS

Another place in the Scriptures that mentions the paying of a price in a very clear way is Revelation 3:18. There it mentions buying three things: gold refined by fire, white garments, and eyesalve. These are all matters related to a price. Furthermore, it is the Lord who asks us to buy.

Gold signifies God's nature, God's element. In the church in Laodicea there was much clay but very little gold. In other words, in their midst there were too many things that were outside of God, and there was too little of the element of God. Therefore, the Lord counseled the believers to buy gold. With regard to white garments, the color white denotes purity, the absence of mixture, and garments refer to our walk and conduct. Hence, white garments signify a walk and conduct expressing the purity of God. Third, eyesalve is for anointing the eyes. When the eyes have an ailment and are unable to see, there is the need to buy eyesalve to cure the eyes and make them bright again. In normal situations, the inner nature of a Christian should be pure, and his outward living should be white and bright. All these items require us to buy, to pay a price. God's intention is to accomplish His eternal purpose through man. Thus, after the Lord calls us, we need to pay a price so that we may become useful to Him.

(This message can be seen in "How to Be Useful to the Lord" by Witness Lee)

# MESSAGE NINE

## GLEANINGS FROM ENOCH

## ●Outline

- ●Enoch's Environment
- ●Enoch's Rapture

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I will now speak something concerning Enoch. It will be like a kind of gleaning. I do not know when Enoch repented, and what he did before he was sixty-five years old. But we know that he began to walk with God at the age of sixty-five after he begot Methuselah. We know nothing about his life before sixty-five. But we know that after he begot Methuselah, he had a change. It might have been due to seeing a prophecy. He lived to three hundred sixty-five years of age. The remaining three hundred years he walked with God. The name of his son must have a deep significance. The name Methuselah means "at the time of his death, that thing will occur." After Enoch begot Methuselah, he surely would have sought earnestly before God about the name of his son. Surely God showed him the coming great tribulation. He was surely warned and became fearful.

It is interesting that Noah preached righteousness, while Enoch preached judgment. Noah preached the way of salvation because God revealed the ark to him. Enoch preached judgment because he received revelation through the name of his son. We can only preach the things that have produced an effect upon us. Through faith, Noah prepared an ark. Through faith, Enoch received the benefit of walking with God.

It is good if we know that sinners, the flesh, and the world will all be judged. Peter said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, burning with intense heat, will be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it will be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10). If

this is the end of the world, are we still going to love it? Will anyone deposit money into a bank when he knows that the bank is going to go bankrupt? If the bank is going to go bankrupt, no one will want to deposit his money into it. Since we know the end of the world already, and that it will be burned, we should not love it anymore. Enoch realized the meaning of the name "Methuselah"; he was watchful and was therefore raptured. Now we will consider a few things about Enoch.

## ENOCH'S ENVIRONMENT

Did Enoch walk with God because his environment was better than others? No. Let us first consider the environment in his home. Genesis 5:22 says, "And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters." Some have said that preachers can walk with God all day long. But how can those with many household responsibilities walk with God? But what does the Bible say about the first man who walked with God? He walked with God and begat sons and daughters. Some have asked how one can walk with God when he works in a factory, and only hears the sound of machinery all day long. But Enoch walked with God for three hundred years and begat sons and daughters. He was not free from household responsibilities. The life which we received is not expressed only in smooth environments; it can be expressed in every environment. We can walk with God not only in a smooth environment but in any environment. The complexity of family chores and a great number of children cannot stop a man who truly walks with God from doing what he is doing. A believer can walk with God not because his family burdens are little or his business responsibilities are light, but because he can be free from the entanglement of these things in contrast to the unbelievers. He can walk with God in such circumstances. It was possible for Enoch to walk with God under such circumstances.

Not only was Enoch faced with a condition in his family, but the environment of the age was also very dark. At the time of Enoch, Adam was still alive. In Genesis 4, we see that the tribe that came from Cain was still around. What was it like? "And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one

was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah" (v. 19). Lamech was the first one to break God's law of monogamy. From that time on, polygamy was practiced. The name Adah means "beautiful"; she was given to adornment. The trend was already becoming evil, and women were striving to be fashionable. "And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle" (v. 20). This is the first case of cattle farming for profit. "And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (v. 21). By then, men began to give themselves to music and entertainment. "And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (v. 22). The artificers in brass and iron made weapons. By then warfare had started. However, in the midst of such an age, Enoch walked with God.

Is it not today's picture that men indulge in their lusts, scheme for wealth, give themselves to music, and brandish weapons? God tells us that in such an age, Enoch walked with Him for three hundred years. What about us today? Are we walking with God? Mr. G. H. Pember from England is a man deep in the Lord. A few decades ago, he prophesied that men would pay more attention to music, higher knowledge, and the wielding of weapons, while there would be an unprecedented movement for women's rights. What about today? We know that his words have come true. Under such circumstances, we should walk with God.

## ENOCH'S RAPTURE

Hebrews 11:5: "By faith Enoch was translated so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had translated him. For before his translation he obtained the testimony that he had been well pleasing to God." How was Enoch raptured? He was raptured because of his faith. What did Enoch do to make himself well pleasing to God? He walked with God; before his rapture he obtained the testimony that he had been well pleasing to God. He was well pleasing to God because he walked with God, and he was translated because of his faith. Every one of us should walk to such an extent that we become well pleasing to God, and every one of us should believe in Him to the extent that we become raptured.

Every believer will be raptured. But the ones who will be raptured first are

surely the overcoming believers. There is no such thing as the whole church being raptured. Only those who are prepared and who wait for the Lord watchfully will be raptured. If you do not have faith, you will not be raptured. You must believe that you will be raptured, and then you will be raptured. If you do not believe that you will be raptured, you will not be raptured. You have to ask God to give you a faith in the rapture so that you can believe that you will be raptured!

It is amazing that Enoch alone had this faith. He had this faith because he walked with God. Faith is connected to the conscience. Once the conscience has a crack, faith will be damaged. Once the conscience has a hole, faith will leak out. Once faith leaks out, one will not be able to be raptured. Many believers cannot believe in the rapture because they have never walked with God. If we walk with God day by day, He will give us faith for the rapture. Many times when our spiritual condition is good, we are comforted at the thought of the Lord's coming. This is one side of the story. Does this mean that we are believing in ourselves? No, we are not, for there is still another side of the story.

The word in Hebrews 11:6 follows that of verse 5. Verse 6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." This verse speaks of two kinds of believing. The first is that we have to believe that God is, that is, to believe that God is indeed as He says He is. The second is that we have to believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. From this we see that there were two steps to Enoch's faith. First, he believed that God is who He says He is, and second, he sought God's presence diligently and believed that God would reward him. Enoch surely sought to be delivered from the coming tribulation. This is why God rewarded his seeking with the rapture.

Have we ever prayed for God to deliver us from the coming great tribulation? Luke 21:36 says, "But be watchful at every time, beseeching that you would prevail to escape all these things which are about to happen and stand before the Son of Man." Many people think that this passage tells us that God will deliver those who are watchful and beseeching at every time from the coming great

tribulation. But that is not what this passage says. This is a prayer—a prayer that beseeches in watchfulness at all times for God to deliver one out of the coming great tribulation. This also was Enoch's prayer. Those who pray this way will be raptured. Hence, for us to wait for the Lord's return, we must diligently beseech God to deliver us from the coming great tribulation. Day by day, we should believe that the rapture is near. We should have good conduct so that our conscience will not condemn us and so that we can single-heartedly wait for the rapture. We should believe in God and beseech Him this way. If we do this every day, we will surely be raptured. Now is the time for God to prepare the Enochs. How many of our prayers are answered? Do we believe that we will be raptured? We should at least have an answer to one of our prayers which is the prayer for deliverance from the coming great tribulation. If we have never prayed this prayer, we have to pray it now until God answers us.

Concerning the matter of walking with God, it is well if we have a good beginning, and it is good if we have a good continuation. But the most important thing is that we have a good ending. Many people begin by walking with God, but unfortunately, they are not able to enter into glory! Many people are afraid when they hear about the great tribulation and the judgment. But they do not have a good ending. The rapture is not a historical event that happens suddenly. Rather, we reach the state of being raptured day by day. The twinkling of an eye in 1 Corinthians 15 refers to the change of our body; it does not refer to the change of our life. Rapture is a walking together, not a flying together; we walk with the Lord into glory. One brother said that a Christian's experience in the Lord is sequential; first the death, then the resurrection, and then the rapture. One passes from one stage to another and enters into glory at the end. Many times, it is very difficult to obey in some matters. But the more we die, the more the Lord's life will fill us up, and the more we will advance towards the rapture. I say again: the rapture is not a historical event; it is a gradual rapture which consummates in glory.

Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. By the time he was raptured, he had become well-acquainted with God. One brother said that when many arrive in heaven, they will find God very unfamiliar, for they have never

walked with Him on earth. We must walk with God day by day and step by step until we are fully sanctified. The only unfinished part of sanctification should be with our body and not with our spirit. Our spirit must be ready today. May God be gracious to us so that we can walk with God like Enoch did. If Enoch could do it, so can we.

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# Twelve Baskets
# Volume 10



# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 10

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# MESSAGE ONE

## MAN'S ONLY SIN

**•Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:17, 3:12, 4:3, 25:30; Luke 15:18; John 3:18, 16:9; Acts 2:36-38; Rom. 1:21, 24, 26, 28; 3:10, 23**

Gen. 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

3:12 "And the man said, The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

4:3 "And in the course of time Cain brought an offering to Jehovah from the fruit of the ground."

25:30 "And Esau said to Jacob, Let me swallow down some of the red stew, that red stew there, for I am faint. Therefore his name was called Edom."

Luke 15:18 "I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."

John 3:18 "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God."

16:9 "Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me;"

Acts 2:36-38 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified. And when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Rom. 1:21 "Because though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or thank Him, but rather became vain in their reasonings, and their heart, lacking understanding, was darkened."

24 “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that they dishonor their bodies among themselves,”

26 “Therefore God gave them up to passions of dishonor; for their females exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature;”

28 “And even as they did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things which are not fitting,”

3:10 “Even as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one;”

23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

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This morning, by the grace of God, I would like to deliver a gospel message to you. My focus today is on the one unique sin in the Bible. It is very strange that man's view concerning sin is completely different from God's view. It is unfortunate that in preaching the gospel, some have presented the principle of sin in a wrong way. They say that man needs a Savior because he has sinned, and if man had not sinned, he would not have needed a Savior. But what kind of sin has man committed? Sin is a general term. You have your sin, and I have my sin. If we have not committed the same sin, why do we need the same Savior?

The Bible focuses on only one sin from the first to the last page. Whether or not man receives eternal life depends on how he deals with this one sin. Whether or not a man will perish depends on how he deals with this one sin. Man's position before God depends on the way he deals with this one sin. The biblical emphasis is not on thousands of sins. Even if thousands of sins are dealt with, if this one sin is not dealt with, a person is still a sinner. What is this one sin? This sin is the failure of man to have a proper relationship with God. Something has gone wrong between God and man, and there is a kind of disruption. Sin is not just lying, pride, or jealousy. Although lying is a sin, and being proud or jealous is also a sin, these can only be considered as miscellaneous sins. There is only one sin that the Bible cares for; this is the sin that leads to perdition. You may not have committed many sins, but as long as you have committed this one sin, you are qualified to go to hell.

We may not have committed fornication, and we may not have gambled. But

we all have committed the sin of failing to have a proper relationship with God. Something has gone wrong between us and God. Suppose that there is a man or woman who is very clean, but who has committed the sin of being wrong in his or her relationship with God. If there is anyone here who has not believed in the Lord, you may not have committed any other sin, but you are a sinner already. We have all committed the common sin of being wrong with God. As long as we have this sin, we are a sinner.

There are many names to sin. Enumerating all these names would take more than three days and three nights. You may not have committed any of these sins which would be enumerated during the three days and three nights. But you cannot deny one sin, the sin of having a breakdown in your relationship with God. If you do not have Christ today, you are a sinner. What is sin? It is being in a position of having no fellowship with God. What is sin? It is being in a position that is in opposition to God. Sin is not murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. Sin is to be wrong with God.

Let me give you an illustration to show you the critical nature of this sin. Suppose a man has brothers, sisters, and parents at home and also has colleagues at work. In addition, he has many relatives and friends. Perhaps he is married and has children. He may be a very good brother at home. He may be a very good husband and father. He may be blameless in the way he handles business and very faithful to his friends. He may be an excellent person among his relatives. He may be good at everything. He does not smoke, drink, lie, and is not jealous of others. He abides by all the moral laws; indeed, he is a gentleman and a good person. However, he has one shortcoming: he hates his parents. He can get along with everyone but his parents. He is civil to everyone but his parents. He is polite to everyone but his parents. He can forgive anyone, but he is mad at his parents whenever he sees them. By himself, he is morally good in every aspect; he is good to his brothers, friends, and relatives. He has not committed any of the sins that men ordinarily commit. But he has committed one great sin, which is being wrong in his relationship with his parents. He has not committed sins which are commonly committed, but the one unique sin he has committed is being wrong with his parents.

This is where the whole world stands today. If you ask many people whether or not they are a sinner, they will say that they have not sinned very much. In man's eyes they are gentlemen, and they are moral and courteous people. Their conscience seems to testify that they are good people. But I have to ask one thing: is there any problem between you and God? It may be true that you have no problem with men and no problem with your relatives. You may be moral and courteous. But I have to ask: is there something wrong between you and God? There is not only a relationship between you and your wife, children, friends, and relatives; there is also a relationship between you and God!

Man is a sinner for no other reason than not having a proper relationship with God. A man is a sinner not because he has murdered, committed arson, or been darkened in his conscience. He is a sinner because he is not right with God; he is standing in a position that opposes God. He is a sinner because there is no communication between him and God. You can excuse yourself by saying that you have not committed this and that sin, but there is one sin which you surely have committed. You can say that you have not committed a hundred and one sins, but you cannot excuse yourself from this one sin. This one sin makes us all sinners.

Friends, I am not asking how you are doing in your homes. You may be a good son at home. I am not asking if you get along well with your brothers. You may not have fought and gone to court with your brothers over your inheritance. I am not asking about your relationship with your colleagues. They may honor and respect you very much. I am not asking if you are a good citizen. You may be very faithful to your country, pay your tax faithfully, obey your government, and may have never engaged in any kind of activity that overturns the government. But I have to ask you one thing: can you say that there is no problem between you and God? What is your relationship with God? God is not asking about your relationship with your wife, brother, and colleagues. He is not asking if you have murdered anyone or if you have committed arson. He is asking about your relationship with Him. You may have handled many problems with the world properly, but if your relationship with God is not proper, there is still one problem that is unsolved, and you are still a sinner.

The Bible has clear teachings concerning this sin. How did sin enter the world? Sin entered the world not through murder nor through someone calling his wife his sister nor through someone usurping another's wife and sending the husband to be killed in the battlefield. Sin entered the world simply by the eating of a piece of fruit. Sin did not enter the first time through prostitution, gambling, pride, jealousy, murder, or arson. Sin entered the world through man eating one fruit that he should not have eaten.

God said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). I will not go into the reason the Lord said this. I will only point out the fact that man overturned God's word. God commanded that he not eat of the tree. This meant that he should not eat of it. Yet he ate what God had commanded him not to eat. The result was frustration for God and opposition against God. Once Adam ate of the fruit, he hid himself among the trees in the garden; he took up a position that was hidden from God. What is sin? Sin is having a wrong relationship with God; it is standing in an improper position in relation to God.

It was sin for Cain to murder Abel, but sin was already present before he murdered his brother. God did not reject Cain because he killed his brother. When Cain was offering the produce of the land, God was not pleased with him; He was already shaking His head. Cain was rejected because his relationship with God was wrong. He wanted to please God. He would be what we commonly call a religious man. He worked hard to offer the produce of the field to God in order to try to please God. But sin was already in the world, and he should have stood on the ground of the blood. When he did not stand on the ground of the blood, he could not please God. His position was wrong.

Many of us are familiar with the story of the prodigal son. What sin did the prodigal son commit? Some have said that the prodigal son wasted his father's possessions; he squandered and wasted all that he was given and became a prodigal son. But I have to tell you that the first day he took his father's possessions, while he was yet rich, he was already a prodigal son. He did not become a prodigal son after he became destitute. The minute he left his father, he

became a prodigal son. The day he left his father's house, he was a prodigal son. When he journeyed to a far land, he was a prodigal son. He did not become a prodigal son after he failed, spent all his money, and was feeding the pigs. As soon as he left his father, he was a prodigal son whether or not he still had money. He became a prodigal son due to one mistake and one mistake only: his departure from his father. Had he made a fortune and doubled his wealth from five thousand to ten thousand, his father could not have said to him: "Well done, you good and faithful son." Even if he had struck a fortune, he was still a prodigal son. The question is not whether the prodigal son was destitute, feeding the pigs, or hungry. The question is whether or not there was a problem between him and his father. As long as he was in a far country, he was a prodigal son. When the prodigal son came to himself, he did not resolve to be more diligent, save more money, or turn back from rags to become rich again. When he came to himself, what did he say? He said, "I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18). He did not go back for food because he was hungry. He did not go back for shoes because he was without shoes. He did not go back for clothing because he did not have anything to wear. He said, "I will rise up and go to my father."

Being saved is having a proper relationship with God. Having eternal life is having a proper relationship with God. John 17:3 says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ."

If there was no problem between the prodigal son and his father, he would not have left even if the father had driven him away. Those who leave their homes are prodigal sons; those who leave their fathers are prodigal sons. When the prodigal son returned, in the eyes of the father, the son who was dead, was now alive; the son who was lost, was now found.

We are not sinners because we have committed many different miscellaneous sins. We are sinners because we cannot face God. I am not saying that the many miscellaneous sins are not sins. I am saying that the unique sin is being wrong with God.

Paul shows us clearly in the first three chapters of Romans what the

qualifications of a sinner are. He shows us the kind of sin we need to commit before we can be called a sinner. In other words, he tells us the way to be accredited a sinner, or the way to have the title of a sinner conferred upon us. Romans 1 through 3 shows us that the one sin a sinner commits is being wrong with God. In chapter one, there are three references to the fact that God "gave them up." Let us consider these instances one by one.

Chapter one, verse 21 says, "Because though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or thank Him, but rather became vain in their reasonings, and their heart, lacking understanding, was darkened." "They" refers to men in general. Men know that God is God, but they do not want to call God God. They know God, but they do not glorify Him as God. All the other miscellaneous sins are not the underlying sin. All the miscellaneous sins come from one unique sin. Because men do not consider God to be God, their understanding is darkened. Once the understanding is darkened, all the other sins follow.

Verse 24 says, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that they dishonor their bodies among themselves." "Therefore" means that this is a continuation of the preceding verses. Because men changed God's glory into the likeness of idols, God gave them up. Consequently, they act in uncleanness according to the lusts of their hearts. Please remember that man's first sin was not his acting in uncleanness according to the lusts of his heart. The first sin was not his dishonoring his own body among other men. The first sin of man was his being wrong with God. Once man develops a problem with God, all the subsequent sins follow. Today we think that lying, pride, jealousy, fornication, murder, and arson are sins. Actually they are all symptoms of a sickness; they are not the sickness itself. Those who deal only with the symptoms are not good doctors. A good doctor is one who prescribes medicine according to the actual sickness. Man's unique sin is being wrong with God.

Verse 25 says, "Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator." This shows that man has become more and more wrong with God, and is further and further away from Him.

Verse 26 says, "Therefore God gave them up..." The word "therefore" again

shows that this verse is a continuation of what preceded it. This is the second mention of God giving them up. The sins have multiplied by now: "God gave them up to passions of dishonor." Man commits these sins because he has not worshipped the Creator. These sins are the fruits; they are not the root.

Verse 28 says, "And even as they did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things which are not fitting." This is the third mention of God giving them up. Following this, more sins are mentioned.

Verses 29 through 32 say, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, slanderers, hateful to God, insolent, arrogant, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, senseless, faithless, affectionless, merciless; who, though fully knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also have fellow delight in those who practice them." How did these sins come about? They came about because men "did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge." Man sins because he purposely refuses to know God. Man sins because there is a problem between him and God. Once the relationship between man and God is wrong, all other sins will follow.

Man's unique sin is being wrong with God. The only question today is whether or not there is a problem between you and God, and whether your relationship with God is proper. The first man sinned because he ate of the fruit. There was no murder, arson, lying, pride, fornication, or jealousy. None of these sins appeared there. There was only one sin at the beginning, which was his having a wrong relationship with God. God asked man, "Where are you?" Alas, man is no longer in his original position. His position is wrong; his relationship with God is wrong. Therefore, thousands and millions of sins are produced. Do not think that you are all right just because you have dealt with smaller sins.

If you ask a man if he is a sinner, he may answer that he has not committed many sins. But I would ask all these "sinless" sinners, "What is your relationship with God?" I am not asking about your relationship with your brother, wife, or children. I am not asking about your relationship with your friends and

colleagues. I am asking about your relationship with God the Father. From the beginning, Cain was not accepted by God because he was standing on the wrong ground. He did not lose God's favor after he killed his brother. Rather, he killed his brother because he had lost God's favor. Abel gained God's favor and did not kill his brother. Only those who are accepted by God have the ability to not commit subsequent sins.

There was another man who fought with his brother even before he was out of his mother's womb. He was truly a very wicked person. He deceived his father, uncle, and brothers-in-law. He did whatever it took to benefit himself. He was a morally evil person. Who was this person? He was Jacob. His brother Esau was a straight and honest man. Although Esau wanted to kill his brother in his anger, he let him go once he saw that his brother had humbled himself before him. Esau was a nice man, yet God was not pleased with him. Although Jacob was evil, he had a proper relationship with God. Although his methods were wrong, his goal was right. He wanted the covenant which God had established with Abraham and Isaac, and he cared for the birthright. God's establishment of a covenant with Abraham and Isaac meant that they had established a proper relationship with God, and Jacob wanted this. What about Esau? He appeared to be a gentleman and was willing to give in on everything. But he was cut off from God. He did not care for his relationship with God, and he belittled his place before God. Therefore, he lost the kingdom. Although Jacob was wicked, his relationship with God was proper.

I must confess one thing before all of you. There are many believers who are morally less honorable than unbelievers. But I can testify one thing for them, which I cannot testify for the unbelievers: their relationship with God is right. Friends, you may be courteous, and you may do things correctly; others may commend you. But I have to ask you one thing: what is your relationship with God? Perhaps other believers are not as moral as you, but they are better than you in one thing: their relationship with God is proper. Their conscience is bold before God, and they can come boldly before Him. This is very precious.

Who among us today is still a sinner? Please ask yourself if there is something wrong between you and God? Can you face God? What is your

relationship with Him? Will you perish? Perhaps you think that you are physically well— neither your heart nor lungs are sick—and will not perish. But you have to realize that this is only your appearance before men. You have to consider what you are before God. The Bible pays much attention to only one sin. All of us have to deal with this one sin. We have to ask: What is our relationship with God? Is there a problem between us and God?

The Scripture says, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Everyone is a sinner. Because men do not seek after God, they have turned aside and together they have become useless. The cause of sin is the failure to seek after God and understand Him. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23).

God has revealed Himself and come down to earth. He was incarnated on the earth, and He revealed Himself to the world through Jesus of Nazareth. God has lived on the earth and been manifested among us for the last two thousand years. He is preached among us. Today He is asking what kind of relationship we have with Jesus of Nazareth. In the past we did not know what kind of God our God was; He appeared to be mysterious. But thank the Lord that He has come to the world and is now living among us. He is not only God, but He is also a man. He was incarnated and crucified on the cross to redeem us. Today this Jesus of Nazareth is asking: What is your relationship with God? This man from Nazareth is still living on the earth today. We have to make a decision today. What is our attitude toward Him? Our attitude toward this man from Nazareth becomes our attitude toward God, because Jesus of Nazareth is the Word becoming flesh; He is God coming to the world in the form of the flesh. Therefore, the way men treat Him is the way they treat God.

Here is a precious thing for all of us! From now on, men will go to hell not for the many miscellaneous sins. For what reason then will men go to hell? In the future many will go to hell without knowing why. Men will go to hell not because they have lied, murdered, or committed arson. Whoever is in hell is there because they have committed only one sin, the sin of not believing in the Son of God. "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the

only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). A man is condemned not because he has murdered or committed arson. He is condemned for only one thing: not believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Not believing in the name of the Son of God is having an improper relationship with God. This is the Bible's logic: Unbelievers are condemned because they do not believe. This is the sin that God emphasizes.

How do you treat Christ today? What is your attitude toward Him? God cares for your attitude toward Christ, because He is the way that bridges the barrier between God and man. He is God as well as man. Today God in Christ is living among us. The way men treat Christ is the way they treat God. Once I shook hands with a friend. He said, "Let me take off my gloves first." I said, "There is no need. I am shaking your hand anyway; I am not shaking your glove." The same is true with Christ. He is God, and He has merely put on a human body. The hand is there; the only addition is a glove. Therefore, the way you treat Christ is the way you treat God. The Lord said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in Me" (14:9-10). He also said, "I and the Father are one" (10:30).

The Bible shows us that since the time the Lord was born, the Holy Spirit has been convicting men for only one sin, the sin of unbelief. "And when He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me" (16:8-9). The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin because they do not believe. Not believing is failing to have a proper relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit convicts men not for their murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. The Holy Spirit convicts men because they do not have a proper relationship with Christ.

Friends, I have to mention one thing. I am speaking especially to the believers. In the church today, there are many wrong teachings: They not only teach concerning the Savior in a wrong way, they teach redemption in a wrong way; not only do they teach salvation in a wrong way, they teach sin in a wrong way. Men have preached sin in a wrong way. This is not my teaching. Man has no authority to invent a teaching; he can only discover a teaching. There is only one

sin that man has committed for which he deserves to be in hell. This one sin is his failure to have a proper relationship with Christ. Most people prove man's sinfulness by pointing out the murder, arson, fornication, pride, lying, and jealousy, etc. Of course, we need to deal with these sins. Once we confess these sins before God, they are forgiven. But even if all these sins were forgiven, if we did not deal with God concerning the one unique sin, we could not be saved. Unfortunately, we do not pay attention to the one sin that the Holy Spirit emphasizes. The unique sin that the work of the Spirit is convicting us of is the very sin that is neglected by us. It is true that murder, arson, pride, jealousy, etc., are sins, but the root of sin is unbelief. The Bible tells us that the most important sin is unbelief. Therefore, when we preach the gospel, we should not merely exhort others to refrain from murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. Even if a man has not committed murder or arson, and is not proud or jealous, he cannot be saved from perdition and receive eternal life. There are many like him who will eventually go to hell. We must repeatedly ask whether or not there is a problem between you and Christ. If there is not a proper relationship between you and Christ, you are still a sinner.

Friends, I know what I am talking about. Satan wants to destroy the work of Christ by changing the focus of sin. Our focus is on the many miscellaneous sins; we do not pay attention to the root of sin. If a man only pays attention to miscellaneous sins without paying attention to the root of sin, he is overturning the work of Christ. His salvation is merely a mental salvation and moral improvement; it is not a change in life or the gaining of life. A wrong emphasis on sin will not save men. Sin is a wrong relationship between God and man. The prodigal son was prodigal because there was a problem between him and God. Once there is a problem between you and God, you have sinned. I hope none of us would be wrong with God.

Acts 2:36 through 38 says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified. And when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of

Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The first time the Holy Spirit worked at Pentecost, those who heard the words were pricked in their heart. What did they hear? They heard that "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified." This means that there was a problem between them and Christ; they did not have a proper relationship with Christ. There was a problem between them and God. Christ was appointed by God, yet they killed Him and came into conflict with God. When the people heard this, they were pricked in their heart. They were pricked in their heart not because they did not make peace with their brothers, or because they gambled, fought, murdered, or committed arson. They were pricked because their relationship with Christ was not proper.

They were pricked in their heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What should we do?" We should pay attention to Peter's answer: "Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ." Peter told them to first repent and then be baptized.

What is the meaning of repentance? Some have said, "Should we not repent?" It is true that we should repent, but we must ask, What is the reason for our repentance? Should we repent because we have murdered and do not want to murder anymore? Should we repent because we have committed arson and do not want to commit arson anymore? Should we repent because we have lied and do not want to lie anymore? Should we repent because we were proud and do not want to be proud anymore? Does repentance mean only repentance from these sins? No, repentance is to repent of our relationship with God. We should repent for only one thing: our relationship with God was wrong, and now we repent of it. This is why the apostle said, "Repentance unto God" (20:21).

Being baptized means coming out of everything; it means coming out of the world and coming out of Adam. How can we come out of the world and Adam? The only way is by death. Once we die, everything is over. Yesterday I read in the newspaper of a man who requested a change in his nationality. He has to be approved by the Department of the Interior before he can be exempt from taxes and before his name can be removed from the census. However, once a man is dead, he is free from these things. When a man has died, he will not be drafted

into the army, and he will not be taxed. When a census is taken, his name will not be included. Being baptized is overturning our former position; it is acknowledging that when Christ died, we were brought to the cross as well. Crucifixion is Christ's work, whereas baptism is a testimony of this work. Baptism is the final chapter of our history. Death is not the end; burial is the end. Man comes out of dust and must return to dust before he reaches his end. Burial terminates everything in Adam. It is the last page in a man's history, and it concludes the history of a man. At the end of a book, the words "The End" are often present. Baptism is "The End" of a man's history.

Friends, please remember that the Bible only emphasizes the sin of not believing in Christ. If you have not dealt with this sin, that is, if you have not received Christ as your Savior, you have failed. If a man will deal with this sin, it will be easy for him to deal with all the other miscellaneous sins. But if he does not deal with this sin, he will go to hell even if he deals with all the other miscellaneous sins. May God grant us a proper relationship with Christ, and may God lead us to properly deal with sin. We thank the Lord that His view concerning sin is different from the world's view. May we also have the same proper emphasis on sin.

## MESSAGE TWO

# GOD SEARCHING MEN

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 3:11-12; Luke 19:10

Rom. 3:11-12 "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks out God. All have turned aside; together they have become useless; there is none who does good; there is not so much as one."

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost."

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We thank and praise God. It is not we who first love God, but God who first loves us. According to Romans 3:11-12, no one seeks after God. According to Luke 19:10, the Son of Man came to seek and save those who were lost. We thank and praise God that He does not require us to bring to Him cows and sheep, like the people in the Old Testament age, in order to meet Him. Rather, He tabernacled among us through His Son so that we could draw near to Him.

Today in front of this table of grace, none of us dares say that we intended to be saved and seek after God. I have done some work among unbelievers. Among those whom I have met, I have never seen anyone who seeks after God. Mr. Paget Wilkes said that he had preached to tens of thousands of people in Japan, but that he had never met one who was really seeking God.

A slogan that said, "China returns to Christ," was translated into English as "China for Christ." This is something from hell. Only Christ is for China. There is no one in the world who is for Christ; only Christ is for man. This is grace, and this is the gospel. What about the idol worshippers? Are they not seeking after God? No. They worship only for their own self-interest. Some desire to be prosperous in their business or safe and secure with their family. They are only after blessings. Man seeks after what God has, not God Himself. God is after us,

the persons. Man seeks after God's grace, peace, and prosperity. God is not after what we have, but what we are. Today in the presence of God, we ought to utter our praise and thanksgiving. How good our God has been to us! The goodness that He has shown to us is beyond what we could ever think!

Second Corinthians 8:5 says, "And this, not as we had hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and to us through the will of God." Do you see this? God wants us, the persons. In God there is no covetousness. Does He want the money of wealthy men? No, God is after us. No one seeks after God. Man only wants God's blessing and peace. But God is after us. Even though man never seeks for God, He seeks us.

If God wants something from us, we have nothing to give to Him. God only wants us. If a man is saved, that is good enough. God wants man and saves man. Prior to our salvation, we lived in a world without a Savior, and we never gave any thought to eternal life or the future. Perhaps we heard of God, but we did not want Him. Perhaps we heard of God, but we still hated Him. But we thank and praise God; He has saved us! Today this bread and this cup tell us that God sent His Son to the world to seek us because He loved us. Then His Son gave up His life and shed His blood to save us!

We do not start out as prodigal sons. Rather, we start out as lost sheep. The shepherd first came to look for the sheep. There are three parables in Luke 15: a shepherd searching for his lost sheep, a woman seeking for a lost coin, and a father receiving a prodigal son. First, a Savior went out to seek for us, then the Holy Spirit shined on us. Finally, the Father received us. Thank and praise God; He sought out and saved us!

## MESSAGE THREE

# DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH

## ●Outline

- **●Mephibosheth Being Lame (2 Samuel 4:4)**
- **●David Showing Mephibosheth Kindness (2 Samuel 9:1-13)**
  - **▫Man's Repentance**
  - **▫The Two Feet under the Table**
- **●Mephibosheth To David (2 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30)**
- **●David Sparing Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 21:7)**

## ●Scripture Reading: 2 Sam. 4:4, 9:1-13, 16:1-4, 19:24-30, 21:7

2 Sam. 4:4 "Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who had crippled feet. He was five years old when the news came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel. And his nurse took him up and fled. And as she hurried to flee, he fell and was made lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

9:1-13 "And David said, Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show kindness to him for Jonathan's sake? Now there was a servant of the house of Saul, whose name was Ziba; and they called him to David. And the king said to him, Are you Ziba? And he said, I am your servant. And the king said, Is there yet anyone at all of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him? And Ziba said to the king, There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet. Then the king said to him, Where is he? And Ziba said to the king, He is just now in the house of Machir the son of Amiel in Lo-debar. And King David sent men and took him from the house of Machir the son of Amiel, from Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he said, Your servant is here. And David said to him, Do not be afraid, for I will surely show

kindness to you for the sake of Jonathan your father; and I will restore to you all the land of your father Saul, and you will eat food at my table continually. And he paid him homage and said, What is your servant that you should look upon a dead dog like me? And the king called Ziba, Saul's attendant, and said to him, All that belongs to Saul and to all his house I give to your master's son. And you shall work the land for him, you and your sons and your servants; and you shall bring in the produce that your master's son may have food to eat; and Mephibosheth, your master's son, will eat food continually at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do. And Mephibosheth, said David, shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem because he ate at the king's table continually. And he was crippled in both his feet."

16:1-4 "And when David was a little past the summit, Ziba, Mephibosheth's attendant, came to meet him with a pair of saddled asses and upon them two hundred loaves of bread and a hundred clusters of raisins and a hundred summer fruit and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, Why do you have these? And Ziba said, The asses are for the king's household to ride on, and the bread and the summer fruit are for the young men to eat, and the wine is for those who faint in the wilderness to drink. And the king said, And where is your master's son? And Ziba said to the king, He is now dwelling in Jerusalem, for he said, Today the house of Israel will restore to me the kingdom of my father. And the king said to Ziba, Now all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours. And Ziba said, I bow myself to you. May I find favor in your sight, O my lord the king."

19:24-30 "Then Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. Now he had neither taken care of his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he came back in peace. And when he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, Why did you not come with me, Mephibosheth? And he said, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said, I will saddle myself a donkey that I may ride on it and

go with the king. For your servant is lame. And Ziba slandered your servant before my lord the king. But my lord the king is like an angel of God; therefore do what is good in your sight. For all my father's house were but men worthy of death before my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right then do I have to cry out more to the king? And the king said to him, Why speak any more of your affairs? I say that you and Ziba shall divide the land. And Mephibosheth said to the king, Let him even take it all, since my lord the king has arrived at his house in peace."

21:7 "But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath of Jehovah that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul."

*  *  *  *

Today I want to look at a wonderful story from the Old Testament about a lame boy sitting at a king's table. In the Bible there are many wonderful stories: one tells us about a prostitute who was saved, one about a robber who was saved, one about a tax collector who was saved, and even one about a bad Pharisee who was saved. Today we will talk about a lame boy who was saved.

Most of the people sitting here have read the Bible. When we talk about friendship in the Bible, we often mention David and Jonathan. Some secular writers also use the story of David and Jonathan as an example of love between friends. But today I want to speak about how David graciously treated Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, and about Mephibosheth's gratitude to David.

## MEPHIBOSHETH BEING LAME (2 SAMUEL 4:4)

Second Samuel 4:4 says, "And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

Please pay special attention to the fact that Mephibosheth's grandfather, Saul, was David's enemy. Many times he persecuted David and wanted to put him to death. He was a great enemy of David. When Saul and Jonathan were killed,

Mephibosheth's nurse took him and fled quickly. She thought that since both his grandfather and father were dead, David might come to avenge and kill Mephibosheth if they did not flee fast. The boy fell on the ground and became lame because she was running too fast. Consider for a moment: does this not look like the picture of a sinner before God?

Man has misunderstood God! I say again: man has misunderstood our God! Because man has devious thoughts about God, he thinks that God also has devious thoughts about him. Because man hates God, he thinks that God also hates him. Man knows that he has sinned, and he thinks that God hates him. Mephibosheth thought, "My grandfather was David's enemy; therefore, David must hate me. I have no love for David; therefore, David must have no love for me." This is the way we also think. We think that God has no love for us because we have no love for God. We think that God cannot love us because we hate God. But God is not the same as we. Mephibosheth had no ground to receive grace, yet he received it. The same is true with regard to us and God.

## DAVID SHOWING MEPHIBOSHETH KINDNESS (2 SAMUEL 9:1-13)

"And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (v. 1). God is also asking, "Is there yet any that is left of Adam, that I may show him grace?" David showed Mephibosheth kindness for the sake of Jonathan; God graced the sinners because of His Son Jesus. People make a great mistake in thinking that God hates man. They think that man has to do a great deal of good before God's face will be turned to them. Yet they are not sure how much good should be done before God will stop His wrath, consider them, and be pleased with them. But Mephibosheth had no position at all before David. David did not know Mephibosheth. David only knew Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan. He was gracious to Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake. Mephibosheth did not have to do anything good before he could receive David's favor. Mephibosheth had no position at all before David. He received kindness not because of himself but because of another person. This is true for a sinner before God. Many people think, "I must do something good

before I can please God." But the Bible tells us that God loves us without a reason. We did not have any position before God, and we should not have obtained His grace. But we have our Jonathan, Jesus Christ. God has graced us because of Him. We are saved because we have the Lord Jesus before God. With the Lord, we can come before God.

The universities in the old times required two years of pre-university studies. Some medical schools required three years of preparation. But to obtain salvation, there is no need to enter any pre-university. Many people think that they have to prepare themselves before they can win back God's heart. But I can tell you that there is no need to do anything to please God. There is no place in the Bible that says that God wants to be reconciled to us. The Bible only says that we need to be reconciled to God. God is reconciled to us already! God gave His Son to us because He loved us. He did not love us only after He gave His Son to us. Someone said, "It is fortunate the Lord Jesus died so that God could love us." But there is no such thing. He gave His Son to us because He loved us.

"And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar" (vv. 3-4). Lodebar is a Hebrew word which means "a place without grass." The world today is a "Lodebar"; it can never fill up man's hunger or quench man's thirst. "Lodebar" can never satisfy our heart. Brothers and sisters, do you know that we are created for God and not for ourselves? All those who have not turned back to God will never be satisfied.

You may dream about how your future will be so beautiful and restful. But after a while, you will find that the promises of the world are all unusable currencies. Time after time, the world only brings you discouragement and disappointment. Time after time, the world puts you into a dream; everything is just a mirage and a dry place without grass. O brothers and sisters, a godless life is an unsatisfied life. A life outside of God can never be satisfying. Mephibosheth, who ran away from David, was living in a place without grass. A sinner far away from God is also living in a place without grass.

What did David do when he heard that Mephibosheth was living in a place without grass? Thank and praise the Lord! “Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar” (v. 5). Fetch in the original text is “bring.” Romans 3:11 says, “There is none who seeks out God.” Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost.” Some people think that because we are so evil we should surely seek after God. Since we are so fallen, surely we should seek after God. But this is not how things work! If God had to wait for us to seek Him before He saved us, we would probably never be saved because we would never seek after Him. If Mephibosheth had had to seek after David, he would not have had any boldness to seek after him because his grandfather was David’s enemy. He also did not have the ability to seek after David because he was lame. Mephibosheth did not seek after David, but David sent men to fetch Mephibosheth. We did not seek after God, but God sent His Son to seek us and bring us back to His presence.

On Mephibosheth’s side, he dared not seek the king because his grandfather was the king’s enemy. In addition, he was not able to seek the king because he was lame. We may think, “Perhaps someday I will become better, seek after God, and earnestly plead to Him to forgive my sins. Perhaps then I will be saved.” But it was not Mephibosheth who sought after David, but David who fetched Mephibosheth. The Bible says God wants you, calls you, and sends men to tell you that He wants you. Romans 10:6 and 7 say, “But the righteousness which is out of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?’ that is, to bring Christ down; or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.” These verses tell us that no man can go to heaven to ask the Lord to die for him and that no man can go to Hades to ask the Lord to resurrect from death. The following verses say, “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart...for with the heart there is believing unto righteousness, and with the mouth there is confession unto salvation” (vv. 8, 10). Mephibosheth did not need to make an effort. The king sent people to fetch him. If there is a man here who is not saved, it will not be because God does not save him, but because he rejects God’s grace.

What did David say to Mephibosheth after he fetched him? “Now when

Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!" (2 Sam. 9:6). Here is the most pleasant music! "Mephibosheth." David did not say anything more when he saw Mephibosheth. He did not say, "Mephibosheth you are here"; he did not say, "Saul's grandson Mephibosheth"; he did not say, "Jonathan's son Mephibosheth"; he did not say, "Who are you?" "Mephibosheth." Have you ever considered, when David said, "Mephibosheth," what kind of feeling was in his heart, and what was the tone of his voice? Underneath this word was a beating heart, a heart that expressed God's heart. "Mephibosheth" shows that God does not hate man, that He wants man, and that He loves man. Every time a man calls out another man's name but does not say anything more, a third person will not understand the meaning, but the one whose name is called can understand.

I have spoken about the story of Mary the Magdalene. She thought the Lord was a gardener. When she asked the gardener where Jesus was, the Lord did not answer, "I am not the gardener," or "I did not take His body away," or "You are a woman; how can you get the body?" The Lord only said, "Mary!" As soon as she heard this very familiar voice, she said, "Rabboni!" We know that when someone calls another by name only, there must be considerable meaning behind it. On that day David saw his enemy's grandson, and he only said, "Mephibosheth." This shows that David's heart was not only without hatred, but also full of compassion.

It is a pity that Mephibosheth did not know David's heart. When he went to David, his heart might have been beating fast, and he might have been thinking, "Today I am going to see the king of Judah; maybe he will kill me." When he saw David and heard him call, "Mephibosheth," he should have known that David had only compassion and no bad intention toward him. But with a heart full of fear, he said, "Behold thy servant." He might have thought, "Formerly I was a king's grandson; now I humble myself to be a servant. Perhaps by this I will gain David's favor, and he will not kill me." I must tell you that no one can please God by relying on himself becoming a servant.

Then David testified of God's heart. He said to Mephibosheth, "Fear not: for I

will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (v. 7). Brothers and sisters, everything is now ready. I do not know how many among us realize that God loves us. Perhaps someone has worked for many years and still does not know that God loves him. If we only knew that God loves us, our lives would be changed greatly.

In the nineteenth century, there was a famous literary writer who was an antagonist against Christianity. He was the chief editor of a very famous newspaper. One day he heard Mr. Moody's preaching, and he repented and believed in the Lord. Once he became saved, many people reported the story of his salvation in the newspapers of America. One day Mr. Chapman went into a town and stayed in the same hotel, in the room next to this man. Mr. Chapman knew him and asked if it were true that he was saved. He said, "I repented and believed in the Lord through hearing Mr. Moody's preaching. However, I knew about God's love when I was eighteen years old. When I was young I was a prodigal son. I left home at the age of twelve or thirteen for several years because I did not like being confined at home. At that time in my youth, I became very ill and ran out of money. I had to return home in disgrace.

My father treated me very well, but I regretted going home. My father was old; his hair was white, and he was sick. Yet every day he forced himself to work to get a little bread for us to eat. There was never enough for three people to eat because the income was so low. I felt that I had made a mistake by coming back. I could no longer eat the bread which my father earned through his hard work. After my strength had increased some, I told him that I still wanted to go out. In my whole life I never saw him so sorrowful as on that day. He said, 'You are not healed yet; why do you want to leave? If there is a piece of bread in this house, you will always have a share. If there is a piece of roof, you will always have a share. Why do you want to leave?' But I was determined to leave. Then he said, 'My son, let me tell you: in my whole life, I have never desired to be rich. But today I wish I had a fortune because of you; I wish I could have more money saved for you so that you would not have to wander outside. Perhaps someone will help us in the future. Why do you want to go out?' However, I had to go. I

could not bear to eat my father's hard-earned bread anymore. Eventually he said, 'My son, may God bless you! After today I will not see you again; but perhaps I will see you again in heaven!' He escorted me out of the house.

We walked for half a mile, during which neither he nor I said a word. We walked like this for one mile. He was tired and could not go forward anymore and had to bid farewell. Until that day I did not know how hard it is to leave home! He had not walked back more than two steps when he turned back and called me. With tears in his eyes, he took out a half-dollar from his pocket and gave it to me, saying, 'This is for you.' I knew what this half-dollar meant. I knew all that my father had on earth was that half-dollar. I knew what was in that half-dollar. That was the first time in my life that I realized my father loved me! The weather was rainy and cold as I saw my father going home, but my heart was very warm. I was singing, 'My father loves me!' From that day on I was not a prodigal son. I decided that the first thing that I would do was reduce my father's burden. If I earned a dollar, I would mail it to him because he loved me. From that day forward, I became another person. This does not mean that before that time my father did not love me. But at the time of my destitution, I realized that he loved me. One day I heard Mr. Moody preach the following words: 'Everyone talks about the father's prodigal son, but today I want to talk about the prodigal son's father.' When I heard that the Father was the same as my father, I believed and received the Lord Jesus as my Savior."

O brothers and sisters, I have known this God for at least eleven years. Although this is not very long, I know the kind of heart that He has. Do not suppose that you can do something to turn God's heart or please Him. He loves you and wants you to be saved. He does not need you to turn His heart. Many people say, "God does not tell me that He loves me." But please take a look at the cross, and you will know that He has already loved you. You should have received the punishment of the cross, but He made the Lord Jesus suffer it for you because He loves you.

What is love? Love is not words. The deepest kind of love cannot be expressed in words. The prodigal son was prepared to say to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called

your son; make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19). But when he was yet a great way off, his father had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. A father's heart shortens the distance of sin. When his father kissed him, he knew his father's heart. His father did not say, "I love you," but as soon as he kissed him, the prodigal son knew his father's heart. He could not say the words, "Make me like one of your hired servants." He could only say in his heart, "My father loves me." Please do not misunderstand God's heart. Please come to the cross. Jesus has already died for you; this should show you what is in God's heart already. When you see the blood of the Lord Jesus, you will know how much God loves you.

"Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table...As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons" (2 Sam. 9:9-11). How marvelous that there is not one condition, not one commandment; there are only promises. It does not say how much one should work. Everything was given. This is grace. If we understand God's heart, we cannot but believe in Him.

## Man's Repentance

Perhaps someone will ask, "Does a sinner not have to repent before he believes in God and is saved?" Let me tell you: do not reverse the order in the Bible. Many people think, "I must have one basic act of righteousness and one basic act of goodness before God can look favorably on me." That is law; it is not grace. Can you tell someone who feels cold to warm up a little before he comes to the fire? Or would you say, "You will be warm after coming to the fire?" One does not stop his sin and then come to believe; rather, one believes and then does not sin. Mephibosheth was afraid at first, but after being treated gracefully by David, he started to know himself, saying, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" (v. 8). Romans 2:4 says, "Or...not knowing that

God's kindness is leading you to repentance?" After knowing God's love, spontaneously one repents.

When Mephibosheth came, he wanted to go back to the land without grass; after tasting grace, he prostrated himself on the ground and repented. Mephibosheth was wrong, so he needed to repent. David was not wrong, so he did not need to repent. We need to repent, not God. Before Mephibosheth knew of David's love to him, David already loved him; after Mephibosheth knew of his love, David still loved him. God is the same toward us. After I knew God's love, I changed my thinking and concepts. Today, is there any sinner who would say, "Would not it be good if I could please God?" Let me tell you: God loves you just the way you are. Come to God just as you are. He wants you just the way you are.

## The Two Feet under the Table

Now someone may say, "That is right; we are saved by grace and not by works. God treats me in the same way that David treated Mephibosheth. But after I am saved, should not my behavior become better? Why do I still feel that I am sometimes high and sometimes low, at times good and at times bad?" In order to answer this question, please read 2 Samuel 9:13. "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet." We were saved by grace initially, and we are also kept in this salvation by grace. Many mistakenly have a concept that they were initially saved by grace but they are kept in this salvation by work. However, there is no such thing. We should realize that the condition for salvation is the condition for preservation. We are saved by Jesus, and we are kept by Jesus to the end. Although Mephibosheth dined with the king often, his two feet still remained lame. If one foot is lame, one can still jump. But if both feet are lame, it is not only inconvenient, but also ugly. We can dine at the king's table, and both feet can still be lame. The king would not allow a lame person to dine at his table on the first day and then drive him out after a few days because his feet were still lame. There is no such thing.

Our two feet are lame, but they are under the table. We should just eat what is on the table. Why do we put our two feet, which should be under the table,

onto the table? We should just pay attention to what is on the table. What God has spread out here is wonderful, rich, and sweet. We just need to eat. We should not look at ourselves. Instead, we should look at the riches God has given us. Every time we look at ourselves, we will not have peace. Our eyes are for looking outside not inside. Self-introspection is not our portion. If we keep our eyes upon the Lord, we will go from glory to glory and be transformed into His image. If we look at ourselves, we will be just like Mephibosheth with two feet lame. After we are saved, we receive a new life, and the Holy Spirit lives within us; we become entirely new. The self that comes from Adam never changes. How did a man as holy as St. Augustine feel when he was dying? He said, "Most of this world's seeds of sin are within my self." As long as we are still in this body, our two feet are still lame. We should not look at ourselves. We should only look at the riches and the grace that God has spread before us. When we do this, our hearts will be satisfied.

## MEPHIBOSHETH TO DAVID
## (2 SAMUEL 16:1-4; 19:24-30)

A few years later, Absalom, the son of David, rebelled, and David escaped to hide from his son Absalom. "And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth" (16:1-4). Is this true? Let us read chapter nineteen and find out.

After the conspiracy, David came back to Jerusalem, and Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul, also came down to meet the king. From the day the king

departed until he came again in peace, Mephibosheth did not do three things: he "had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes" (v. 24). Brothers and sisters, do you know what this means? This is what I spoke about this morning; this is a widow's heart! Mephibosheth might have said, "David, who treated me graciously, is not here anymore. Although they did not come to destroy me, my joy is gone. What is the use of decorating and beautifying myself? He is not here anymore. Who has the heart to decorate?" We know that we are not worthy of our salvation. The world rejected our Lord and nailed Him to the cross. On this earth we also have a widow's heart. The reason we can reject the world and not love it is because the person whom we love is not here anymore, not because the world is not lovable. The only thing He got from the world was a grave. This is why we cannot love the world. The world is a place which is contrary to us.

Mephibosheth's heart was a widow's heart. Since the king was not there, he lost his heart for everything. A very deep believer once said, "Wherever Jesus is, there is heaven. If Jesus is in hell, then hell is heaven too. If Jesus is not in heaven, then it is not heaven." At that time I thought that there could not be such a thing. But today I want to say that this is true. In the beginning all we thought about was the problem of sins, but now all we think about is the Lord Jesus. Formerly our thoughts were on being delivered from the punishment of hell, but now we think about the Lord Himself. Therefore, if the Lord is in heaven, heaven is lovely, but if the Lord is in hell, even hell will be lovely.

This world is nothing but a wilderness. What is a wilderness? It is desolation. This does not mean that the beauty, art, and natural scenery of the world are not good. But all these mean nothing to us anymore because He is not here. How can we love the world when it looks down on the Lord Jesus? I have said before that wherever our lover is, there is the land of joy. The house, clothes, food, and drink may be the same, but if our beloved is not there, all of these things will seem different. My hometown is Foochow. I have often thought about going back to it. However, it is not Foochow that I miss, but the brothers and sisters who are of the same mind there. They suffered difficulties and poverty together with me, and they also were opposed by other people. I could forget

Foochow easily if they were not there. The same is true with the world. We cannot find rest and happiness in this world. The only attitude we should have toward the world is that of a widow.

When Mephibosheth came to Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" (vv. 25-28). Here we see that he did not mention anything about the bread and wine. He only mentioned that he was deceived. His heart felt that it was sufficient that the king had returned peacefully; it really did not matter that much about being slandered.

If a person wants to express his heart, he does not necessarily have to use words. If someone has become a slave of the Lord's love, he will not be able to express his heart with words. The deeper the love, the more secretive it becomes. If you really love the Lord, you will still keep yourself pure when others are opposing Him. On the day we meet the Lord, we will not tell Him, "Lord, such have I given up for You on earth." On that day you will not say anything about yourself. You will say, "I regret that while living on earth, I did not love You more deeply and did not serve You more faithfully." At that time you will feel that even if you have a million words to offer to the Lord, it would still not be enough.

Mephibosheth did not say anything else, other than of his being deceived by his servant. There was only one thing in his heart: it is good enough that David my king has returned; being slandered does not mean that much. As long as I can sit at David's table, that is good enough. I do not need to say anything more about being slandered, nor do I need to vindicate myself. As long as the king has returned, that is enough.

"And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said unto the king,

Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house" (vv. 29-30). Every time when I read this word of Mephibosheth, I say, Amen! If the King can come back in peace, what does it matter if I gain or lose? If my Lord has gained something, even if I lose something, what does it matter? All that matters is whether He is safe or not; it does not matter if the things He gives still exist.

Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). One martyred saint said on the night before he was going to be executed, "God, if You do not come in and interfere, tomorrow I will go blindly just as I am, come heaven or hell." This was a hero of faith. The Lord will not wrong us. But even if He ill-treats us, we should delight in His ill-treatment. As long as He is pleased, and as long as it is according to His heart's desire, we will feel sweet even when we are ill-treated.

Of course, the way David handled Mephibosheth was wrong, but our Lord will not do so to us. By being wronged, Mephibosheth's heart was clearly revealed. "Let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." The Lord wants to save us to the extent that we care only for the Lord's gain or loss and not for our gain or loss. God's gain or loss is what matters. Our own gain or loss matters nothing. Once I needed to obey the Lord, yet I could not do it. Finally, I had to tell the Lord, "Do not give in, please allow me to give in." We ought to give in, not God. The One who once captured my heart has captured it forever. Since my heart had been captured by Him, all that I have is His. Brothers and sisters, what is our hope and expectation before the Lord? Are we still making plans for ourselves, or are we for Him? From now on may we regard all that we have as His and only care about His gain or loss. As long as He gains something, that is good enough.

## DAVID SPARING MEPHIBOSHETH (2 SAMUEL 21:7)

Second Samuel 21:7 says, "But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul." There was a famine in the days of David for three consecutive years because of Saul and his bloody house slaying

the Gibeonites. By the Gibeonites' request, in order to make the atonement, seven of Saul's descendants had to be delivered to them. This should have been the end of Mephibosheth because the first one who should have been delivered was Mephibosheth. But David cared for him and took seven men from the other tribes. Therefore, Mephibosheth was spared until the end of his life. This story tells us that every saved person will not perish. David took care of Mephibosheth from the beginning to the end. Will God wrong us? If David could protect Mephibosheth from beginning to end, will God not keep us to the end?

John 10:28-29 says, "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand." These two verses are very familiar to us. They show us clearly that we cannot be snatched out by anyone because of "My hand...[and] My Father's hand." The Lord Jesus' hand and the heavenly Father's hand have held us securely. Who can snatch us out of such hands? No one can. Someone might think, "It is right that none can snatch us out. But we can escape." If a Christian talks in this way, he does not know the gospel at all. If a father walks with his child's hand in his hand, what will he do when he sees danger or when he sees that the little hand is trying to escape? Will he let the hand go, or will he hold it tighter?

There was a black lady in the United States who, after she was saved, sang happily, "Once saved, forever saved." A half-believing Christian asked her, "This is what you sing. But can you guarantee that you will go to heaven?" She then recited John 10:28-29 to him. He said, "That is right. But you had better not be so sure. You should know that the bigger the hand, the larger the hole through which you can fall." She answered, "No, I will never be leaked out because I am God's little finger!" She knew the Bible. She spoke the truth, because the Lord is the Head, and we are His Body. We are joined to Him in life. If a Christian perishes, the Body of Christ will have a defect forever and will never be complete. May every Christian say to the Lord, "Hallelujah! Since I have been saved, I will be saved forever. Therefore, I will give my all to You."

# MESSAGE FOUR

## FORGIVENESS AND CONFESSION

## •Outline


- •Forgiveness Being Out Of God
- •God Being Able To Forgive Man's Sins
- •God Forever Forgiving Man's Sins
- •God's Forgiveness Leaving No Trace
- •God's Heart Of Forgiveness Being More Than Our Desire For Forgiveness
- •God Being Obligated To Forgive
- •God's Grace Of Forgiveness Leading Us To Repentance
- •The Condition For A Christian To Be Forgiven
- •Four Different Conditions Of The Heart In A Christian's Confession
  - A. Confession because of the Conscience's Condemnation
  - B. Confession because of the Condemnation of Others' Consciences
  - C. Confession through Fear of the Coming Judgment
  - D. Confession through Seeing the Filthiness of Sin Itself
- •How To Have A Proper Realization Of Sin
- •Confession Being First Toward God


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### FORGIVENESS BEING OUT OF GOD

Forgiveness is something according to God's heart. God loves man, and He loves to forgive man's sins. Therefore, from the time man sinned, God sought ways to redeem man from his sins.

In the Old Testament God used the blood of bulls and goats to redeem man from his sins. In the New Testament He appointed the Lord Jesus, who is the

Lamb of God, to be the sacrifice for sin. In offering up Himself, man is forever redeemed from his sins. On God's side, the blood shed on the cross by the Lord Jesus has completely solved the problem of man's sin. But on man's side, there is another condition—faith. Whoever believes that the blood of the Lord Jesus is shed for his sins is redeemed, and his sins are forgiven. Whoever does not believe will perish and his destiny will be hell. However, the work of redemption is complete, and it is of God. It was initiated by God, a work that God wanted to do. God has done this work; He has sacrificed His only begotten Beloved and paid such a price. Therefore, there is no problem to prevent God from forgiving man's sin to redeem man from his sins. O sinners, are you still fearful that your sins will not be taken care of? Are you still afraid that your sins will not be forgiven? God will forgive you; He is willing to forgive you, and He has paid a great price to forgive you.

## GOD BEING ABLE TO FORGIVE MAN'S SINS

As soon as a sinner believes that the blood of the Lord Jesus was shed on the cross for his sins, his sins are forgiven. If a believer is by chance overcome by sin, he only needs to repent sincerely and confess his sins before God (1 John 1:9). Such confession will bring about forgiveness. The worth of the Lord Jesus' blood is so great that all of man's sins can be forgiven and he can be cleansed from all unrighteousness. Therefore, there is a way to take care of sins, both in the sinners as well as in the believers.

## GOD FOREVER FORGIVING MAN'S SINS

Once the Lord Jesus told Peter to forgive others seventy times seven times. This means that one should continually and forever forgive. As long as a person turns and repents, his sins will be forgiven. Since the Lord taught Peter such a word of grace, is it possible that He would not practice it Himself? This is impossible; He will forgive a sorrowful and repentant sinner, and He will forgive him every time.

## GOD'S FORGIVENESS LEAVING NO TRACE

Many people think that committing a sin is like copying a wrong letter,

whereas being forgiven of sin is like the erasure of that wrong letter which still leaves an indelible mark on the page. They do not realize that this does not match the fact of God's forgiveness. The blood of the Lord Jesus cleanses man from his sins. What is the meaning of cleansing? It means to be washed to the extent that no trace of blemish or spot is left; it is as if the person had never sinned and is as holy as Christ. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now and let us reason together,/Says Jehovah./Though your sins are like scarlet,/They will be as white as snow;/Though they are as red as crimson,/They will be like wool." Snow and wool do not have a speck of red in them. Therefore, when God washes man of his sins, he becomes absolutely clean, and no trace of sin is left.

## GOD'S HEART OF FORGIVENESS BEING MORE THAN OUR DESIRE FOR FORGIVENESS

The actions of the prodigal son's father in Luke 15 show us the forgiving heart of our heavenly Father. While the prodigal son was on his way home, the father saw him and went out to meet him. The old man was not walking slowly but was running toward the son. The father was eager to see his son, and he considered walking to be too slow. As a result, he ran. God's "feet" of forgiveness toward a repentant sinner are also swift. He only wishes He could forgive man of his sins sooner. Did the prodigal son run to his father? No, he did not run. In the movement of the two persons, we see that the forgiving heart of the father was greater than the desire for forgiveness in the son. As we read on, the father's kiss and his embraces tell us that God is most pleased and happy with a sinner who turns back. The son was still remorseful about his past sins and felt that he had sinned against heaven and against his father, but as he was confessing to his father, the father could not contain himself out of his earnest love for the son. He could not wait and did not wait for the son to finish his words. (In Luke 15:18-19, there are five phrases of confession, but in verse 21 only four phrases were spoken; the last one was interrupted by the father.) The father ordered the servants to bring in the best robe and the ring and put them on the son. Oh, our heavenly Father's forgiving heart is greater than our desire for forgiveness. We do not have to weep for three days and three nights, confessing our sins over and

over again before we can be forgiven. Many times we confess our sins over and over; we weep again and again, thinking that we can only be forgiven if we buffet ourselves once again. Oh, we have misunderstood God's heart; we have caused His heart pain. We have to realize that He loves those whom He has purchased even more than we love ourselves. He is most eager to forgive us; He "runs" to forgive us. He does not wait for us to finish our confession before He has already forgiven us!

Many times in our homes the ones we love offend us. Do we not eagerly wait to forgive them? If they apologize a little from their heart and say a little word of apology, do we not forgive them right away? Wherever there is love, there is a forgiving heart. If this is true with earthly relationships, how much more is it true with the Father in heaven, who is full of love and mercy? Will He not eternally and completely forgive man of his sins?

## GOD BEING OBLIGATED TO FORGIVE

God sent the Lord Jesus to the world. He shed His blood for man's sins on the cross, and He dealt with man's sins. All these are an expression of God's love. The Lord Jesus has shed His blood; God Himself has testified for Him that whoever believes in Him will be forgiven of their sins. Those who confess their sins will be cleansed. As long as we believe (if we are a sinner) or confess (if we are a believer), God must forgive our sins. If He did not forgive, He would be unfaithful and unrighteous. But I will ask most reverently, "Can the holy God be unfaithful and unrighteous?" Therefore, the matter of forgiveness is securely guaranteed. We should rejoice in God; sin shall not lord it over us any longer. We can be delivered from sin and can be forgiven of our sins.

## GOD'S GRACE OF FORGIVENESS LEADING US TO REPENTANCE

There are two sides to God's truth. What I have said emphasizes the side of grace. It is true that as long as a man is preserved in the grace of God, he does not have to be concerned about the matter of forgiveness. But if a man thinks that God's grace can be wasted and that he can "continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1), he should pay attention to the following words. These

words are severe. The Word says, “Behold then the kindness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but on you, the kindness of God, if you continue in His kindness” (Rom. 11:22).

Some have said, “I can sin daily by hiding under the blood.” Others have said, “I sin in the daytime and confess to God at night, and I am forgiven. The next day I sin again and confess again at night, and I am forgiven again. Since the Lord taught Peter to forgive seventy times seven times, He can surely forgive me. Moreover, 1 John 1:9 says that God is faithful and righteous. He has to forgive my sins, the sins that I have confessed, through the vicarious death of the Lord on the cross.”

Senseless men! We have to realize that God’s grace is to lead us to repentance and not to encourage us to sin. If we think that the precious blood can be wasted this way, we have to realize that the blood has never cleansed us from the sins “confessed” in this way.

## THE CONDITION FOR A CHRISTIAN TO BE FORGIVEN

Now we want to answer one question based on the Scriptures. Please read 1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.”

This verse shows us one condition and two results. If one condition is met, there will surely be two results. What is this one condition? It is to “walk in the light as He is in the light.” If we walk in the light as Christians, we will not be in darkness and will not sin, but we will have works of light rather than works of darkness and sin. But what kind of light are we going to walk in? What, in other words, will this light be according to? In this verse it says that walking in light is “as He is in the light.” According to verse 5, “God is light,” and in this light there is no darkness at all. All other lights are mixed with darkness. When we walk in this way, we are walking in God’s light, and there will be the following two results. First, “we have fellowship with one another.” This is our mutual fellowship with all the brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we meet the condition we have mentioned, we can fellowship. If there is no fellowship, it must mean that the condition we have mentioned has been violated. Furthermore, there is a

second result, which is that “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.” This means that when we fulfill the condition of “walking in the light,” the blood will be effective in its work of cleansing us from our sins. Now we are clear: fellowship with one another and cleansing of the blood both come from the condition of walking in the light. If a Christian does not walk in the light, he will lose the benefit of fellowship and cleansing. Put another way, in order to have fellowship and to be cleansed from our sins, we have to walk in the light. Otherwise, we cannot fellowship, and there cannot be any cleansing even if we want these things.

The first result, the fellowship, is visible; it can be experienced on earth and is before men. The second result, the cleansing by the blood, is invisible; it is a fact in heaven and is before God. But just as the visible result on earth is a fact, the invisible result in heaven is also a fact. Just as the part before men is a fact, the part before God is also a fact. Therefore, if you are a believer who has sinned, you will not be able to fellowship naturally with other believers; you will try to avoid other brothers and sisters and will not want to see their faces. I must tell those who are walking in sin and darkness that the minute you lose your fellowship with other believers, the effectiveness of the cleansing of the blood will also be gone before God in heaven. Just as you lose the first result through not walking in the light, you will surely lose the second result. You may confess your sins with your mouth, but the blood will never cleanse you of your sin. This does not mean that the blood has lost its effectiveness in cleansing. Rather, it means that your condition of not walking in the light shows that you have not fulfilled the prerequisite for the blood to cleanse you of your sins. The prerequisite for cleansing is to be walking in the light. But since you continue to sin and walk in darkness, the blood cannot cleanse your sins. The blood can only cleanse the sins of those who walk in the light.

Therefore, brothers, do not deceive yourselves. If you have sinned and become fallen and have lost the visible fellowship, I am afraid that the blood in the invisible heaven has not cleansed you from your sins either. I must tell you most soberly that unless you thoroughly deal with your sins in sorrow and repentance, you will still have to give an account of your sins before the

judgment seat of Christ in the future. Therefore, if there is only the confession with the mouth, without the conduct of walking in the light and without a broken and contrite heart (Psa. 51:17), your sins will not be cleansed.

Now we want to give special emphasis to this one prerequisite, which is to walk in the light. This prerequisite has been particularly neglected by those who have wasted the blood. (Of course, in reality, the blood can never be wasted by anyone.) Little do they realize that this prerequisite is their only remedy. Therefore, we have to pay more attention to this matter. According to the Bible, whenever a believer has sinned and desires to receive forgiveness, there are at least three conditions that must be met: (1) with respect to the spirit—there must be a broken spirit (Psa. 51:17), (2) with respect to the mouth—one must confess his sin with his mouth (1 John 1:9), and (3) with respect to the walk—one must walk in the light (1 John 1:7). If anyone thinks that by hiding under the blood they can sin every day, or that they can sin in the daytime and have everything taken care of by confessing at night, I will tell them most solemnly that there is not such a thing. God cannot be mocked. Whenever you walk in the darkness, the blood cannot cleanse you from your sin. The blood cannot become your refuge; it cannot become your hiding place. If you want the blood to cleanse you from your sins, you must first walk in the light and not indulge in your sins any longer.

The true confession must be one that sorrows according to God. This kind of sorrow works a repentance that is without regret. This kind of repentance has seven expressions: (1) earnestness, (2) defense, (3) indignation, (4) fear, (5) longing, (6) zeal, and (7) punishment (2 Cor. 7:11). Only those who have these seven conditions are truly confessing persons. Otherwise, a person's confession with the mouth does not agree with his heart. His mouth may be confessing, but his heart will not hate sin. I say again that the blood will not have any effect on such persons.

Some commit sins again and again, and they are bound by sin because they know the forgiveness of sin only as a formula; they know the way or method to obtain the forgiveness of sin. They know 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness." They think that the Lord Jesus has already shed His blood for them, and that the blood can now cleanse them from their sins. At the same time, God is both faithful and righteous, and if they confess their sins, God will surely forgive them of all their sins and cleanse them from all unrighteousness. Since they have this "charm" to protect them, they do whatever they want and act loosely, because there is a way to be forgiven in any case. They think that as long as they confess, they can sin a little and everything will be all right, even while they are sinning. These people are in a dangerous place! I heard of one brother opening the letter of another brother. Later he told the second one, "I know that it is wrong to open up others' letters, but I know that you will forgive me. That is why I opened it." This is knowing the way of forgiveness and purposely sinning because of this knowledge. Those who do such things have fallen into Satan's trap. These people are hidden rocks in one's spiritual voyage; they are very dangerous. If someone only knows the method of forgiveness of 1 John 1:9, which is confession, but does not know the prerequisite of verse 7, which is walking in the light, I wish he would be in fear and trembling, so that he would not sin and offend God. Let me say again that the grace of God is to lead him to repentance; it is not to encourage him to sin.

## FOUR DIFFERENT CONDITIONS OF THE HEART IN A CHRISTIAN'S CONFESSION

Even when a person realizes that he has sinned and has confessed his sins to God or to man, the condition of the heart during his confession may be vastly different from one case to another! According to my own observation, there are at least four conditions:

### A. Confession because of the Conscience's Condemnation

After a man sins, his conscience is not at peace; it condemns him. After a man confesses his sins, his conscience is at peace and does not condemn him any longer. It is all right to confess one's sins as a result of the condemnation in the conscience. But if one confesses his sins merely for the sake of having peace in his conscience and to stop its condemnation, and if there is no deeper reason than this (the deeper reason being a realization of the evil of sin itself), such a

confession is only a bribing of the conscience. The conscience is the organ within that tells him his true condition. The reason the conscience condemns is that sin is evil. This is why it continues to speak to a person. However, a person may find the unceasing condemnation of the conscience a nuisance and try to find a way to stop its condemnation only, neglecting to hate the sin that the conscience hates. In such a case, a person is paying attention only to the condemnation of the conscience; he is not paying attention to the cause of the conscience's condemnation, which is sin. Therefore, he does not hate sin that much. Instead, he only feels the nuisance of the condemnation of his conscience. He does not deal with the root of the matter, which is sin, but only with the condemnation which is a result of the root of sin. In this way, he tries to bribe his conscience by means of confession. But this is not the way that God wants us to deal with our sins.

### B. Confession because of the Condemnation of Others' Consciences

Sometimes you have offended or sinned against others. On the one hand, you feel that you owe them something, and on the other hand, you are afraid that they will hate you in their hearts and remember your offense. In order to stop the conscience of the others from condemning you and to live peaceably with them, you look for an appropriate opportunity to confess to them. As long as you have their forgiveness, you think that you will be reconciled to them, that they will not hate you any longer, and that their conscience will not condemn you. If the others will not forgive you, there will be a problem between them and God, and they will be the ones who will suffer. (Matthew 6:15 says, "But if you do not forgive men their offenses, neither will your Father forgive your offenses.") This kind of thinking is similar to the first kind, for the attention is not on sin, but on others' conscience. It is true that we have to be reconciled to others. But if we only pay attention to this, without feeling the evil of sin itself, we do not have the kind of condition in our heart that God requires in our dealing with sin.

If one confesses his sin based on the two conditions we have mentioned, the result will surely be that he will sin easily and confess easily. If the heart does not feel that every sin against man is also a sin against God, if the blood does not

seem to be that important, and if he thinks that sins have only to do with man and one only need to deal with man, he will not see the evil of sin nor consider confession as a serious matter. At the same time, if a person does not have a genuine broken and contrite heart, he will not have any difficulty in confession. In short, he will consider sin as something very light and will easily commit sin. Sometimes, even before he makes confession for a sin, he commits the same sin again. May God be gracious so that we can see sin the way He sees it!

### C. Confession through Fear of the Coming Judgment

Some remember the word of 2 Corinthians 5:10, which says, "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." At the judgment seat, Christ will not only judge their works, but also their conduct. Everything that has not passed through the judgment of the Holy Spirit, through the conscience, and every sin that has not been cleansed away by the blood will be judged by the Lord. Therefore, their hearts are afraid. Since today's sins will have to be dealt with in the future, they consider it wiser if they deal with them today, so that they can be spared from future judgment. It is not bad to confess one's sin under such a condition; it is much better than the above two cases, because the above two cases only relate to man, whereas this, at least, relates to God. One confesses before God, through a fear of God. Such a person may have two kinds of confessions; one is before God, and the other is before men (if such sins are against men also). After he has made a clear confession, he will have a clear conscience before God and men. Although this kind of confession is quite good and proper, it is, nevertheless, not the highest condition God desires the heart to be in for confession.

### D. Confession through Seeing the Filthiness of Sin Itself

This is the condition that God wants our heart to be in for our confession. God has put His own life into us. When we have this life, we have the most holy nature, a nature that is as holy as God's. Sin is something very filthy before God; it is absolutely incompatible with the holy life of God. When God gives to us His holy life, He intends that we hate sin in the same way that He hates it. If a man

allows God's holy life to grow and if he realizes the filthiness of sin itself, he will say as Madame Guyon did: "I would rather go to hell than to sin." The life of God is within us for the purpose of expressing Christ. The more Christ's nature is expressed, the more we see the evil of sin, and the more we will stay away from it (Heb. 7:26). We will consider sin like leprosy, and the more we stay away from it, the better we will feel. All those who know sin in this way will not easily fall into sin. If a person confesses his sin under this kind of condition, he will surely be a godly and holy man, and he will live before God.

## HOW TO HAVE A PROPER REALIZATION OF SIN

How can we have such a proper realization of sin? This requires the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, a willingness to obey the light, and a willingness to repudiate the sins that are exposed by the light. The indwelling Holy Spirit operates in our spirit and exposes the true condition of sin before us; it gives understanding to our mind, the Spirit-renewed mind, and causes us to realize in a genuine way that sin is most filthy. At such times, our conscience will rise up to condemn sin as sin, and our new life, the life of Christ, will most naturally reject sin. This rejection is a most spontaneous function of God's nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Let me repeat this in a simple way. The Holy Spirit reveals the true condition of sin to us under the light of life. (Note: John 1:4 says, "The life was the light of men." The life of Christ is the light of man within him. This light is not visible from the outside. If a man pays attention to outward, visible lights, he is in danger of being deceived.) As a result, we obey the light and abhor the sins exposed by the light according to God's nature within this light. The more we obey the light, the brighter the light will shine within us, and the filthier sin will appear, and the more we will hate sin. When a man is under the bright sun, even specks of dust flying in the air, which men do not ordinarily see with their eyes, are exposed. A person who lives in God's light all the time will see things as sin that others do not even consider as sin. (For example, Madame Guyon repented for the good works that she had done, such as giving to the poor, and asked for the cleansing of the Lord's blood over these things because she saw, under God's light, that all her former good works were righteousnesses that originated from her self and

were not from God's life. As such, she needed the cleansing.) In this way, one's feeling toward sin will become sensitive, and the measure of holiness (on the practical side) will grow.

Indeed, just as the nature of an Adamic man (one who is not yet regenerated) is inclined toward sin (the so-called "cherished sins" are the sins that the old nature yearns to commit), the divine nature within a person who belongs to Christ feels a repulsion against sin. This repulsion for sin itself is a spontaneous expression of God's nature within man. Only this condition in our heart is from God and is pleasing to God.

If we analyze the four kinds of conditions, we will find that the first three kinds have the self as the center and are directly related to one's self-interest. Only the last kind is from God and has God as the center. We should be those who are standing with God only.

## CONFESSION BEING FIRST TOWARD GOD

Among Christians there is a grievous tendency concerning the confession of sins; men gradually shift their attention from dealing with God to dealing with men. Among some Christians, the blood is not even mentioned, and as long as men's consciences are at peace with others, they put God aside. This situation is terrible, and it causes men to lose their fear of God. I will say most solemnly that a confession that does not require the blood is definitely one that is from hell. We have to realize that when man sins, the first one he has offended is God, not man, and the One who is offended the most is God, not man. For example, if someone breaks an object in your house, the one who is offended is you, not the object. David said in Psalms 51:4, "Against You and You alone have I sinned,/And I have done what is evil in Your sight." He did not say that he had sinned against Uriah or Bathsheba. Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, in comparison, confessed his sins and returned his money; he settled everything on man's side, but he was still a son of perdition. This does not mean that we should not confess our sins to one another. It is right for us to confess to each one (James 5:16), but our dealing before God is more important than our dealings before men. We should never reverse the order and allow ourselves to put God and the blood aside. We should not neglect

making a clear confession before men, but it is more important to confess our sins thoroughly before God. May God be merciful to us!

## MESSAGE FIVE

# THE FOOD OF GOD'S PEOPLE

## ●Outline

- **●The Meat Of The Lamb**
- **●The Manna**
- **●The Water From The Rock**

## ●Scripture Reading: Exo. 12:8-9, 16:2-4, 14-16, 17:1-7; Num. 11:5-6

Exo. 12:8-9 "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread with bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire-its head with its legs and with its inward parts."

16:2-4 "And the whole assembly of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, If only we had died by the hand of Jehovah in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole congregation with hunger. Then Jehovah said to Moses, I will now rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My law."

14-16 "And when the layer of dew lifted, there upon the surface of the wilderness were fine round flakes, fine as the frost on the earth. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, What is it? For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, It is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat. This is what Jehovah has commanded, Gather of it, each one according to his eating; you shall take an omer a head, according to the number of your persons, each one for those who are in his tent."

17:1-7 “And all the assembly of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin by their stages according to the command of Jehovah and encamped in Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people contended with Moses and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said to them, Why are you contending with me? Why do you test Jehovah? So the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses and said, For what reason did you bring us up out of Egypt; to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? So Moses cried out to Jehovah, saying, What shall I do with this people? A little more, and they will stone me. And Jehovah said to Moses, Pass on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the River, and go. I will be standing before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it so that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel and because they tested Jehovah, saying, Is Jehovah among us or not?”

Num. 11:5-6 “We remember the fish which we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic; But now our appetite has gone; there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

*  *  *  *

Today we will speak on the food of God's people. In Exodus we see three kinds of food. The first is the meat of the lamb, described in chapter twelve. The second is the manna in chapter sixteen, and the third is the water that flowed out of the rock in chapter seventeen. All these are the food that God prepared for the Israelites. No item could be missing from this provision. If there had been only the meat of the lamb without the manna and the water, it would not have been sufficient. If there had been the manna without the water, it would not have been sufficient either. There first had to be the meat of the lamb and then the manna plus the water before the Israelites could be led out of Egypt, pass through the wilderness, and enter into Canaan.

## THE MEAT OF THE LAMB

Let us first consider the lamb. The Bible clearly tells us that the lamb refers to our Lord Jesus. The Israelites not only put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts; they had to eat the meat of the lamb. Not only did they trust in the lamb to bear their sins and deliver them from perdition, they had to receive it into them for their strength. For this reason, we must not only believe in the Lord; we must also receive Him into us. The Israelites not only trusted in the blood of the lamb for the passing over of the destroyer's sword, but they ate the meat for their strength so that they could leave Egypt in the morning. Some have believed in the Lord and received forgiveness of sins, but they do not have the strength to renounce the world. The reason for this is that they have not eaten the meat in their heart yet. The blood has been applied, but they do not have the strength to leave Egypt. Therefore, in order to take our journey and obey the Lord, we need the meat, not the blood.

Exodus 12:8 indicates that the meat of the lamb had to be eaten on the same night. Although this was a commandment, the experience of many people is exactly the opposite. When you ask someone if he has believed in the Lord and if his sins are forgiven, he may give you a very clear and eloquent answer about the Lord's salvation. But if you ask why he still loves the world so much, he will say that he does not have the strength to give it up. (The world does not have to be something big. The extent of the world which we love and hold onto may be very small; it may be only a few dollars, or a few persons.) He is this way because he did not eat the meat in the beginning. The Bible tells us that the meat had to be eaten the same night. This is the way to be delivered from the bondage of Egypt. Eating the meat means to receive the Lord Jesus into our heart to be our Savior so that we can experience freedom in our practical daily life. Comments that are similar to the following often can be heard: "Why does So-and-so have such a holy living since he believed in the Lord? Why has there been so much change in him? I have believed in the Lord Jesus also. Why do I still love the world so much and find it so difficult to give it up?" Here we see that in order for a believer to be delivered from the world, it is a matter of eating the meat, not of applying the blood. All believers have experienced the application of the blood. Any difference

between Christians is the result of whether or not they have eaten the meat.

We have covered the need to eat the meat, but how do we eat the meat? The second part of verse 8 speaks of eating the meat with two things. The first is bitter herbs. Bitter is not the name of an herb; it refers to the taste of the herb. Any herb, as long as it is bitter, can be used. The meaning of bitterness is hatred and displeasure in the heart. Spiritually speaking, it means to repent of past sins and mistakes. Repentance in the Bible carries only the sense of regret; it does not carry the sense of reform. It is better to understand it as a regret over past errors. The second thing we need is unleavened bread. First Corinthians tells us the meaning of the unleavened bread; it means the removal of sin. On the one hand, we have to regret our past sins. On the other hand, we have to repudiate our present sins. No one who has the strength can excuse himself from forsaking sin. No one can hold onto sin with one hand, and hold onto God with the other hand. Those who have Egypt in their heart cannot leave Egypt. Regretting past mistakes means to remove the past errors. If we do not remove the leaven, we cannot leave Egypt even if we eat the meat of the lamb. We have often said something wrong, and our heart feels condemned. At these times Satan says, "Help me a little! Just be wrong all the way to the end!" However, we should say that we would rather stand on God's side, and that we will not be Satan's companion. We would rather "lose our face" and tell those whom we have offended, "I have just said something wrong. Please do not take heart in that word." Some may say that it is meaningless to do this. But this is very important. I have done this kind of thing many times. For our past we need bitter herbs, and for our future we need unleavened bread. These qualify us to eat the meat. Many people do not grow spiritually because they are running around in circles like horses in a race. It seems that they have traveled a long way, but actually they remain in the same place because they are not willing to regret and remove their past sins. Whoever does not want to remove their past sins cannot go on, and whoever keeps their sins will never grow.

## THE MANNA

Is eating the meat of the lamb all that we have to do? No, this is not enough.

We may have left Egypt, but there is still a wilderness journey which we have to take. In the wilderness we still need to eat the daily food. The meat of the lamb is eaten only once. This means that we need to receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior only once. But after this, we still need daily food in order to have strength for our daily life. Every day we have to face works, confrontations, affairs, and warfare. We need strength to deal with all of them. What is this food? John tells us that this food is the Lord. I would like to ask you a very frank question: Since the time you received the Lord Jesus as your Savior, how much experience have you had of eating the manna? Since the day you received the Lord, have you discovered new sins that you need to deal with? This is the most important issue. A person cannot stop eating after one meal; he has to eat every day. The same is true with our spiritual food. We cannot stop eating after taking one meal of the lamb at the Passover. After that meal, we must take in daily food. We can never neglect this. If we do, we will die in the wilderness, and there will be no possibility of going further.

What is this daily manna? Is it the reading of the Bible? It appears to be, but it is not. Is it prayer? It appears to be, but it is not. Is it waiting on the Lord? No. These are only the means. The manna itself is the strength of Christ. We merely use these things as the means to take in the strength of Christ. Why do we study the Bible in the morning? Is it for understanding the Bible? If it is merely for the understanding of the Bible, I feel sorry. We rise up early in the morning to study the Bible so that we would receive the strength of Christ to sustain us to live our daily life. We should rise up early to spend a half hour or hour to pray in order to contact God and draw the life-power from Him to be our strength.

Let me relate a real story. I have a friend who is a co-worker. She is very afraid of water buffalos and dogs. But we co-workers encounter these two animals all the time when we preach in the villages. Every time this sister saw a strong, black water buffalo, she would run away. Once she was walking along a country lane and a few dogs were barking continuously from behind, while a herd of strong, black water buffalos were coming toward her from the front. She was so scared that she almost fainted. If she tried to run away from the dogs, the water buffalos would be in front of her, and if she tried to avoid the water

buffalos, the dogs would be in her way. The lane was narrow, and there was no way to turn. She was about to pass out under this double stress. At that instant, she prayed and said, "Lord, give me the life and the strength." As she took one step, she would repeat the prayer over and over again. Eventually she managed to pass all twelve water buffalos peacefully. This is what it means to appropriate His strength.

I have another friend who prays a wonderful prayer every morning: "God, I consecrate myself to You once again today." I asked him what he consecrated himself to God for, and he answered that he consecrated himself to God so that He would fill him up. This is indeed the best prayer for us every morning.

If we do not contact the Lord in the morning in this way, we cannot make it through our day. We study the Bible to gain Christ, and we pray to draw in strength. What does it mean to draw in strength? To draw in strength is like eating food; every time we take in food, the food becomes our strength. We draw in our spiritual strength in the same way. We have to taste Him day after day. Sometimes we are drawn by the taste of prayer. This is to eat of the manna. If we have a fresh touch with God every day in this way, He will take us on in our daily journey. The Bible tells us that no manna can be saved for the next day. Every day we have to touch God in a fresh way and receive fresh strength from Him. We have to develop such a habit of gathering the manna. Daily we need to receive a fresh message and fresh impact from God, and we need to have a fresh touch with Christ. Why do we have to read the Bible and pray every day? It is because this is a habit. We have to make drawing our strength and gathering manna a habit. It is useless for us to know the Bible without knowing Christ, so let us pursue after the precious experience!

We have read Numbers 11:5-6, which speaks of the murmuring of the Israelites. "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna before our eyes." One thing is certain: when we are tired of the manna, the food of Egypt will appear before our eyes. Leeks, onions, and garlic are strong in flavor. The Egyptian food has a strong flavor, and every food that has a strong flavor tends to stick in our memory; we

remember it very readily. It is interesting that the Israelites only remembered the good food of Egypt; they had forgotten the sufferings in Egypt, how their male babies were drowned in the river, how they labored and toiled to make bricks, and how they were beaten by the taskmasters. Many backslidden ones have forgotten the frustration of sin, the bondage of Satan, and the struggle they experienced when they were under these things. They only remember that they could do this and that before they believed in the Lord, and that their present life is too much of a bondage and suffering. You can say that they have a good memory, because they can remember so much. You can also say that they have a poor memory, because they have forgotten even their own salvation.

Many Christians cannot bear fruit because they have forgotten their initial salvation. Strictly speaking, it does not matter even if there are the leeks, onions, and garlic. These are merely strong in taste. What is indispensable is the manna. All those who are tired of contacting Christ have been distracted in their mind to Egypt; the smell of garlic is in their nose. Therefore, every Christian should maintain his daily portion of manna. Most Christians eat only once every three or five days, or only a little on the Lord's Day. This is not sufficient. We have to touch Christ every day. Only this kind of contact will afford us the strength.

## THE WATER FROM THE ROCK

Eating the meat of the lamb marks the beginning of our life, while eating the manna is for the sustenance of life and growth in life. Since this is the case, drinking the water must mean the enjoyment of life. Water signifies awakening, refreshment, and a kind of renewing power. Since water serves such a function, there is water in the wilderness as well as in Egypt. The meat of the lamb is for our life; it signifies the Christ who lives in us. The indwelling Christ requires the nourishment of the enthroned Christ before He has the strength to take the journey. But if we only have these two things, there is not much enjoyment, and a Christian will have a long face all day long. He will live in a miserable way and murmur like the Israelites, who complained that they only had this coriander-seed-like food; it was so plain that they were tired of it. Therefore, one cannot get by without the water of enjoyment.

How did this water come? Exodus 17:5 says that the first thing needed was the ancient rod. The Bible calls this the rod "wherewith thou smotest the river" (Exo. 17:5); it does not call it the rod of God. This served to remind the Israelites of the story of the smiting of the Egyptian river. The waters of Egypt became blood at the smiting of God's rod. Blood denotes death, and this signifies that all the enjoyment and pleasure of Egypt were under God's judgment. All of the entertainment in this world is blood. Many of these things were quite enjoyable to the Egyptians; they were as drinkable as water. But to us, they are blood; we cannot draw pleasure from them. We could do certain things in the past, but now they have all been turned to blood. This is why many people have said that being a Christian involves too much bondage. Does this mean that a Christian has no enjoyment at all? They have enjoyment, but the nature of Christian enjoyment is different from that of the Egyptians. This is why God reminded them of the ancient rod.

We have seen that we receive our life from Christ, and our life is sustained also by Christ. But where does the enjoyment come from? Some mothers derive enjoyment from their children. Our enjoyment, however, comes from the rock smitten by the rod. God told Moses to go up to Mount Horeb, which is one of the peaks of Mount Sinai, and He said, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink" (v. 6). Our water comes from the rock before God. First Corinthians 10 says that this rock is Christ (v. 4). The smiting of the rod signifies His death, and the outflow of water signifies the Holy Spirit. Our joy and enjoyment are found in the Holy Spirit. This joy is enough to compensate for all our loss. In this age of darkness, many times our feet are sore, our hands heavy, and we do not find any enjoyment at all. During these times, the joy from God will compensate for all of our loss. Isaiah referred to the Lord as the One who grew up out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2). What does this mean? Roots cannot grow in dry ground. This shows us that the One the Lord trusted in was God. The world could not supply Him with anything. The same is true with the world today. We thirst for water, but only find blood. Even if we drink, we cannot quench our thirst. However, Christ is the living water; He can quench our thirst

and satisfy us.

Today our God is standing on the mount. He is standing before the rock which has passed through death. Therefore, spiritual joy is not far from us, but right in front of us. Many years ago, during an earthquake in Italy, many people were moving things out of their houses and running for their lives with their young and their old. At that time, one woman stood at her door and roared with laughter. Although her house had collapsed and her possessions were buried, she was not concerned at all; she was laughing. When others asked why she was laughing so hard, she said, "All it takes is for my God to shake a little, and you can do nothing except run. How great is our God!" Indeed, often before our tears have dried, we are already filled with laughter and joy.

## MESSAGE SIX

# THE PRESENTING OF THE BODY

## •Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1

Romans 12:1 says, "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service."

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We can see from this verse that the apostle exhorts the believers to present their bodies. He could command, but he would rather exhort, because if the presenting of our bodies is not willingly done, it will never work. Even if it works, it will be useless. In this verse, the apostle did not ask the believers to present their spirits or their souls, but their bodies. What is the reason for this? Here we see the importance of the body. The presenting of the body is "well pleasing to God." Although God does not deal with man directly through his body, He takes up man's spirit as His dwelling place. He never despises man's body. Although the spirit is the most important part, the body also has its place. Although believers should allow the Spirit to take precedence over everything, this does not mean that we should ignore our bodies. After we have seen how much God cares for the intuition, fellowship, and conscience of the spirit, we may easily have a wrong concept that God does not care for the body, and that the body only does us harm. We may also think that as long as the life in our spirit is strengthened and filled with power, we can ignore the outward body. However, God does not view it this way. Although He cares very much for the life in our spirit, He realizes that the salvation of His Son must also reach the outermost part of our being, our body. The effect of salvation is incomplete if it does not reach our body.

Furthermore, the presenting of our bodies is the presenting of our entire

being, because the body mentioned in this verse represents the totality of our being. The believer's spirit belongs to God. There is no need to present this part anymore. But the believer's soul and body are still estranged from God's life. Therefore, they must be presented. Although here it mentions the body only, without mentioning the soul, in reality the soul is included as well, because our body now is closely interwoven with the soul. This is why the Bible calls the body "a soulish body" (1 Cor. 15:44). To present the body is to present everything that a person has in himself. God's purpose involves not only our inward man, but also our outward man. In fellowshipping with God, only the inward man is needed; the outward man is useless in this respect. But in other things, the importance of the outward man cannot be neglected. Otherwise, the Holy Spirit would not have made such a call here.

What is the real meaning of presenting our body? It is to work for the Lord and to live for Him. We must pay attention to the word body before we can understand the meaning in this verse. There is a great difference between the body and the spirit. The body is a matter of time and space, while the spirit is a not a matter of time and space. The body is outward and, therefore, is particularly related to the outward matters. The presenting of the body is naturally the presenting of time and space because the body is of time and space. It is the presenting of everything that is in contact with the natural realm. The presenting of the body means nothing less than working for the Lord and living for the Lord. Of the two, living for the Lord is more important. Many people think that living for the Lord is working for Him. But there is a great difference between the two. A man can work for the Lord without living for the Lord. But all those who live for the Lord are working for the Lord. The meaning of living for the Lord is to give no time to any seeking for oneself, but to give all of one's time to the Lord. This is the meaning of living for the Lord, not working for the Lord. The Holy Spirit is now calling the believers to present their bodies to live for the Lord.

Now we can consider the meaning of Romans 12:1. "Brothers" refers to the believers. "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies." The presenting of the body is based on God's compassions.

Because God has graced and loved us, we should present our bodies. This matches 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, which says, "For the love of Christ constrains us...that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised." What is the purpose of presenting the body? It is to be "a living sacrifice." All sacrifices are dead. But God wants our bodies to be a living sacrifice. All the bodies of the sacrifices in the Old Testament were presented to the altar dead. But God wants our bodies to be presented as a living sacrifice to Him. This means that we live in death. We are to be presented as a dead sacrifice for as long as we live. This kind of sacrifice is "holy, well pleasing to God." Through the compassions of God, this becomes a "reasonable service." Brothers, since God has gained the ground within us, He requires that we also present to Him everything outward. Since He lives in our spirit, He is waiting also for us to present our bodies to Him. Since we have life by Him, let us also live for Him. Since our spirit has been renewed, He desires that our bodies would also be fully committed to His hands so that our renewed spirit will have the cooperation of a body in full agreement.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## THE POWER OF CHOOSING

## •Outline

**I. The Lord's Youth (Luke 2:41-51)**

**II. Being Baptized By John The Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17)**

**III. During The Temptation (Matthew 4:1-10)**

**IV. The Lord Rebuking Peter (Matthew 16:21-23)**

**V. During The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-31)**

**VI. Entering Jerusalem (John 12:12-28)**

**VII. In Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46)**

## •Scripture Reading: Isa. 7:14-15

Isa. 7:1-2, 10-15 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey until he knows how to refuse evil and choose good."

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We are here today for one thing only, which is to learn more concerning the Lord Jesus. All of us know how perfect the Lord was when He was on this earth. In reading the four Gospels, we can see how good and perfect the outward living of the Lord was. Yet from the four Gospels, we cannot tell why the Lord had such a superb outward living. Why was He so perfect, and why was He such a Son of Man? Isaiah 7:15 gives us the reason He had such a living. Why was He able to refuse the evil and choose the good? How did He know to reject the world and choose God's will? How did He know to reject glory from men and choose glory from God? We can find out the answer to these questions from Isaiah 7. Verse 14 says, "Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and she will call his

name Immanuel." We know that this refers to the Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, many people have dropped verse 15. We should know that not only does verse 14 refer to the Lord, but that verse 15 also refers to Him. Verse 15 tells us that He ate butter and honey all his life. Because He ate butter and honey all His life, He was able to choose the good things and refuse the bad things. This is why He could obey God, seek for His glory, and win His heart.

What is the significance of butter and honey? Among all the tasteful foods, butter is the richest of them all. Moreover, nothing in the world is sweeter than honey. Butter is the richest food, while honey is the sweetest food. The Lord Jesus ate the richest and sweetest food throughout His life. This is why He could reject the evil and choose the good.

The Bible tells us what the richest thing is. It is God's grace. The Bible also tells us what the sweetest thing is. It is God's love. All the time, God placed before Christ the rich grace and gave Him to taste the sweet love. This is why He could obey God and choose His will. This is why He could reject the evil and choose the good. Today we will consider a little how the Lord ate butter and honey, and how He rejected the evil and chose the good.

## I. THE LORD'S YOUTH (LUKE 2:41-51)

At the age of twelve, our Lord went with His parents to Jerusalem to keep the feast. After the feast His parents returned, but He remained in Jerusalem without their knowing about it. Later His parents returned to Jerusalem to look for Him. After three days they found Him in the temple. His mother said, "Child, why have You treated us like this? Behold, Your father and I, being greatly distressed, have been seeking You." The Lord did not answer saying, "Do you not know that I should do My Father's will?" Instead, He answered, saying, "Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father?" The Lord had eaten the butter and the honey. At the age of twelve, the Lord knew the Father already. He had the heavenly butter and honey. He had received the richest and the sweetest and was living in God's will. If it were us, we might have said, "Go back to Nazareth to care for your carpentry and your housework. I will not go. Let me

stay in the temple." Our Lord did not behave this way. He spoke, and He testified; yet He went back with them. After they returned to Nazareth, He was subject to them. The reason He could choose the difficult thing was that God had given Him the richest and sweetest taste.

Mary was a very good woman. At the same time she was a very small woman. The better a person is in the world, the smaller his head is. Often, the best persons have the smallest heads; they are the most muddled ones. In reading the four Gospels, we see that Mary bothered the Lord all the time. When the wine ran out, she told Him, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). While He was preaching to many people, she would come to speak with Him (Matt. 12:46). Yet the Bible says that "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." This was the Lord's choice. It was something that others would find hard to do. He could have rejected them and stayed in the temple. But He chose to return with them and to live with a simple-minded and ignorant Mary. The reason for this is that He had eaten butter and honey and was able to choose what was otherwise unbearable to men.

## II. BEING BAPTIZED BY JOHN THE BAPTIST (MATTHEW 3:13-17)

When John saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Later he said, "He who is coming after me is stronger than I." How much stronger? He said, "Whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." The Lord Jesus was so great! Yet He came to be baptized by John. If we had come and were so great, with such seniority, being preeminent from eternity and being King of the heavenly kingdom, we would have shown ourselves off. Although we may not say anything with our mouth, subconsciously we would show ourselves off as being better than others. We are born proud, and we love to show that we are greater than everyone else in front of everyone. Yet the Lord came to the Jordan and was baptized by John.

Is it an easy thing to be baptized by others? There was an old sister in Foochow who was a very nice person. She realized that she needed to be baptized, but she wanted to choose the person who would baptize her. Some

brothers were well-respected in her eyes, while others were not well-respected in her eyes. She had made up her mind not to be baptized by a certain brother and designated another person to baptize her. All those who are a little better off than others in this world try to select some well-respected ones to baptize them.

Our Lord was very peculiar. He was extremely extraordinary. Even John the Baptist marveled and tried to stop Him, saying, "It is I who have need of being baptized by You, and You come to me?" What did the Lord say? He said, "Permit it for now, for it is fitting for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." He was willing to go to the Jordan, to the death water. He chose humiliation and death. He fulfilled all righteousness. Righteousness was actually fulfilled on the cross, but it was first expressed in the death water. He chose the good and rejected the evil.

Consider how much trouble there was for the Lord to be baptized by John the Baptist. The Lord would lose all His "loftiness" before the world, the sinners, the tax collectors, and the prostitutes, for they were all baptized by John as well. When the Lord began to preach, He said the same thing that John did: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent" (Mark 1:15). The audience was the same group of people as those who had heard John. A tax collector among them might say, "Was He not baptized together with us on that day? Why, He is teaching us today!" Another sinner might repeat, "Was He not baptized together with us on that day? And now He is teaching us today!" This would surely have been embarrassing and unsightly. Later, trouble did occur. When the Lord and His disciples went to live in Judea and baptized men there, some came to John saying, "He who was with you across the Jordan, of whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him" (John 3:26). They despised Him. The Lord had put Himself in a most difficult position. Yet He chose this. The reason is that behind Him there was power; He had tasted of the rich grace and the sweet love. He had eaten the butter and the honey. He had tasted the richest and sweetest. This is why He was able to humble Himself to the lowest.

If we can ever humble ourselves, and if we are ever willing to humble ourselves, it is because we have the butter, the richest grace, and the honey, the

sweetest love. This is why we can humble ourselves before men. This is why we are willing to humble ourselves. The world cannot do this, but we can because we have the richest grace and the sweetest love.

## III. DURING THE TEMPTATION (MATTHEW 4:1-10)

When the Lord came out of the water after His baptism, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. Later He was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for forty days and nights. In the end, Satan himself appeared to Him and tempted Him saying, "If You are the Son of God, speak that these stones may become loaves of bread" (Matt. 4:3). When the stomach is hungry, it is not a sin to eat. But the Lord rejected the offer. The main goal of Satan's temptation was for the Lord to do one thing according to His own will. He wanted the Lord to resort to His own way to satisfy His hunger. But the Lord said, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (v. 4). He was willing to suffer hunger, and He was able to suffer hunger. I am presenting one thing before all of you today: if we want to live like the Lord, we must daily receive in a hidden way the butter and honey from heaven. The Lord was able to turn the stones into loaves. But He did not do it because He already had the butter and honey.

Perhaps a little joy, a little glory, or a little comfort is already lying at your fingertips. Once you say something, you will have it. Or you may not need to say anything at all and you will have it. It may be within your power of reach, and you may be able to get it without exerting any effort of your own. What will you do? The Lord would not turn the stones into loaves. But we would much rather do it. We would not only turn the stones into loaves, we would wish we could turn all the stones into loaves. We wish we could do our best to serve ourselves. The reason we do this is that we have not tasted of the heavenly butter and honey. If we have the butter and honey, we would be willing to give up everything that is ours and everything that lies at our fingertips. There is only one kind of person in this world who will consecrate himself to God; it is one who knows His love. There is only one kind of person in this world who is

qualified to sacrifice his own joy; it is one who knows God's grace.

The Lord was not tempted in only one thing. Satan said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down." How marvelous it would be to fly down from heaven. Will not men recognize such as the Messiah? He could have received His glory with simpler ways. But He would not do this. Satan told the Lord, "All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me." Is it not good to receive all the kingdoms of the world and their glory when all one has to do is to secretly worship him a little? The kingdoms of the world are good. But our Lord was able to give them up and decline them because behind Him there was a power. He knew God as no one else did. He was filled with the Holy Spirit as no one was. He tasted of the riches of grace and the sweetness of love as no one else did. This is why He could do it. This is why He was able to give these things up.

## IV. THE LORD REBUKING PETER (MATTHEW 16:21-23)

Peter had heard two to three times from the Lord that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed. And on the third day He would be raised. Peter felt bad about this; he pitied the Lord and said to Him, "God be merciful to You." We may think that the Lord would have comforted Peter a little and would have told Peter, "It is good that you love Me. But I have to go to Jerusalem. I have to die." Instead, the Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." Here the Lord made a clear choice—He chose death.

If there is anyone in this world who has ever chosen the cross and the narrow way, this person must have first tasted the riches of God's grace and the sweetness of His love. Recently, News Magazine published the martyrdom of Miss Han and Miss Nien, two Western lady missionaries in Fukien. These two British women were working in Fukien and were kidnapped by bandits. First Miss Nien's fingers were cut off by the bandits. A month ago both were killed. How could they suffer this? Both of them were old and were deep in the Lord. Before she died, Miss Han wrote a poem called "The Martyrs," in which one of the

lines says, “The faces of the martyrs are the faces of angels! The hearts of the martyrs are the hearts of lions.” The faces of the angels are beautiful, and the hearts of the lions are bold. How amazing it is that a martyr could write such a song of martyrdom! Before she died, she wrote to one of her friends, “God’s grace is sufficient for me. The circumstance tells us that we are in danger and in difficulties. But I have never in my life been as close to God as I am now.”

There was one missionary of the China Inland Mission who was kidnapped. Later he was released and some friends asked him of his experience. He said that since his regeneration, he had never experienced a day when he was as full of peace and joy as the night he heard the bullets ringing around him and the ways of escape were cut off from him.

There must be a reason and power behind the actions of martyrs. Do not think that God gives weak ones like us a poor wage and asks us to bear great burdens. Our God has given us butter and honey. By these we can sacrifice and suffer martyrdom. This is not a pretense; it is not a matter of words only. I know this as a fact, and many people know this also. The reason anyone can give something up, deny himself, or choose the difficult things is that, behind him, there is a great power. The reason the Lord Jesus was able to reject the evil and choose the good was that there was a power behind Him.

## V. DURING THE TRANSFIGURATION (LUKE 9:28-31)

On the mount of transfiguration, the Lord manifested to God and men the highest expression of Himself as a man. The Bible never says that we will be perfect in this life. The Bible only says that God will keep us in a blameless state in this life. It never says that we will be without mistake or without blemish. But our Lord was without blemish in this life. I have spoken once about the Lord on the mount of transfiguration. Many expositors agree that the Lord could have ascended to heaven from there; God would have to receive Him if He had. Mark 4:28-29 says, “The earth bears fruit by itself: first a blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest has come.” The Lord was ripe already, and God had to

receive Him. While He was talking to Moses and Elijah, the conversation was concerning the matter of His death, that is, what was about to take place in Jerusalem. After He descended from the mount, His heart was set towards Jerusalem. His face was towards Jerusalem. He chose death. Here we see the Lord making another choice.

The reason our Lord was able to choose not to ascend to heaven from the mount of transfiguration and choose the pathway to Jerusalem was that He had tasted of the heavenly butter and honey. The reason the Lord could decline ascending to the Father from the mount and the reason He could descend instead to the cross was that He had tasted of God's grace and His love. Without God's grace and His love, He could not have suffered this way. Some children suffer for their parents, but they do so unwillingly. Some parents suffer for their children, but they do so with murmuring. Some students submit to their teachers, but it is not a voluntary action. Only Christ, who had eaten the butter and the honey and tasted the richest and the sweetest, was able to choose the difficult things, that is, the good things, willingly.

## VI. ENTERING JERUSALEM (JOHN 12:12-28)

Two events were most glorious in the Lord's life: the mount of transfiguration and the entrance into Jerusalem. When He entered Jerusalem, many people welcomed Him with palm branches, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" This was what the Jews said. Moreover, He had many friends. Lazarus had just resurrected, and some were preparing a feast for Him. A few Gentile Greeks came to Philip and asked to see Him. They all wanted to see Jesus. Even the Lord's enemies, the Pharisees, said among themselves, "You see that you are not doing anything worthwhile; behold, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19). At this time, the Lord could have gained anything He wanted. But when Andrew went with Philip to see the Lord, what did He say? He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Here was another choice. He could have received

His glory and become king at that time. But He only chose one way. What He said here deeply touches my heart. “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

“Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?” (v. 27). This word shows that the Lord’s heart agreed with His mouth. “Father, save Me out of this hour. But for this reason I have come to this hour.” The Lord could have asked the Father to save Him out of that hour, but He knew that for this reason He had come to that hour. The Lord was again rejecting the evil and choosing the good. Formerly, when we read this portion, we did not know how He could have made such a choice. But the Bible tells us that it is because He had tasted butter and honey. He had tasted the riches of grace and the sweetness of love. This is why He could choose the good and reject the evil.

## VII. IN GETHSEMANE (MATTHEW 26:36-46)

Finally, in the garden of Gethsemane, the Lord made the greatest choice! There He could have said, “I will not die.” He did say, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (v. 39). But immediately following, He said, “Yet not as I will, but as You will.” Although He saw the bitterness of the cup, He dared not choose His own will. He was not afraid to die, but He was fearful of the burden of sin. He was not afraid of the cup, but His holy nature was fearful of bearing sin. Before He put the cup and God’s will together, He was still able to say, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” But immediately following, He said, “Yet not as I will, but as You will.” Hence, in the garden of Gethsemane, we see that He single-heartedly chose God’s will and single-heartedly rejected everything that was not God’s will. Finally, what did He say to Peter? He said, “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). I can tell you that without Gethsemane, there would have been no cross. Without the obedience of Gethsemane, there would not have been the death on the cross. Obedience came before the cross. Our Lord humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and died the death of a cross (Phil. 2:8). Many people have not taken care of the consecration at Gethsemane properly. This is why they run away when they face

the cross. They do not have the power behind them. Our Lord had the butter and the honey. This is why He was able to choose the good and reject the evil.

Brothers and sisters, obedience requires power! If God has not first satisfied your heart, you will never succeed no matter how hard you outwardly try. We have to learn to contact God daily and receive the heavenly butter and honey, so that we can choose the good and reject the evil on earth. I say this to you because I have a deep feeling that the Lord is coming soon, and the kingdom is before us. From now on, temptations will increase, dangers will increase, and seductions will increase. Formerly we rejected the sins. Now we have to reject the joys. Formerly we suffered God's stripping. Now we have to willingly obey. Formerly we bore the yoke grudgingly. Now we choose the cross willingly. More and more we are seeing that, unless we know to choose the good and reject the evil, all kinds of things will come upon us. Satan will grant us more favor. The world will become kinder to us and give us many things. The circumstances will turn more to our way, and unless we reject them in a definite way, we will not be able to overcome them. How can we overcome the world? If the Lord had not chosen death Himself, it would be possible for us to not die and love our life. But let us pay attention to one thing: we have the ability to choose what is placed before us because we have the heavenly butter and honey. We have to receive daily the butter and honey from heaven, so that we will know what to choose and what to reject. We should not allow our circumstances to make the choices for us.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

### •Scripture Reading: Rom. 6:11-14

Rom. 6:11-14 “So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus. Do not let sin therefore reign in your mortal body so that you obey the body’s lusts; Neither present your members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God. For sin will not lord it over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.”

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Today I will speak about the principles of Christian living. The entire New Testament shows us that there are only two principles of Christian living; everything else is merely fruit that issues from these two principles. Patience, meekness, truthfulness, temperance, and whatever else are not the principles of Christian living. There are only two principles of Christian living: one is faith; the other is obedience. All good fruit issues from these two principles. In our fellowship with the Lord, we need faith and obedience every day.

In the New Testament, many verses speak about faith and obedience. I will only mention Romans 6:11 and 13. Verse 11 says "reckon." This is faith. Verse 13 says "present." This is obedience. Verse 11 speaks of faith in reference to what Christ has accomplished. Verse 13 speaks of presenting our members to God, which will preserve the ground we gain through faith. If we can balance the principles of faith and obedience, all spiritual experiences will open before us, and we will be able to enter into these experiences freely.

What are faith and obedience? All the objective truths are in Christ and have been accomplished. All the subjective truths are in the Holy Spirit and will be accomplished by Him. I do not know if all of you understand the difference

between redemption and salvation. Redemption was accomplished more than nineteen hundred years ago, while salvation was accomplished on the day you believed in the Lord. Therefore, redemption is objective; it has been accomplished in Christ. Salvation is subjective; it is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us. The order of these two matters cannot be reversed. The Lord Jesus did not accomplish salvation nineteen hundred years ago, neither did the Spirit within me accomplish redemption today. One was accomplished long ago; the other is waiting to be accomplished.

Suppose I have not yet believed in the Lord. When you preach the gospel to me, you can only say that redemption has been accomplished; you cannot say that salvation has been accomplished, because I have not yet been saved. Salvation is accomplished only after I have believed in the Lord, but redemption was accomplished long before I believed in the Lord. All the redemptive work is past. All the objective works are in the past; they are absolute and eternal. All subjective works are accomplished in the present and in the future. One has been accomplished; the other is waiting to be accomplished. On the one hand, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension are accomplished. On the other hand, the death which the Holy Spirit puts within you is accomplished only when you believe. The resurrection of Christ took place more than nineteen hundred years ago, but it is manifested in you on the day you believe. Everything objective is in the past; it is absolute, complete, and nothing can be added. Everything subjective is accomplished in the present and in the future. Receiving something objective and receiving something subjective require two completely different principles. Since the objective has been accomplished, we should just believe. Since the subjective is accomplished now and in the future, we need to obey. If we pay attention only to one side, we will go astray by either becoming theoretical or ascetic. The objective death, resurrection, and ascension require our believing. However, it is not enough just to believe. Day by day we also need to obey. Crucifixion with Christ requires obedience; the power of resurrection requires obedience; and the place of ascension requires obedience.

Brothers and sisters, we need an outward Savior and an inward Savior. We need the Word incarnated in the flesh and the Word manifested in the Holy Spirit.

We need the Christ of Golgotha and the Christ in the Spirit. The Savior who is without demands our faith, whereas the Holy Spirit who is within demands our obedience. Now I would like to speak about some experiences in order for us to understand faith and obedience.

What does believing mean? This is something that we cannot give up even for a single day. Objective truths need our believing. A man should not say that he needs to die, resurrect, and ascend. Rather, he should say that he has died, resurrected, and ascended. What is faith? Faith means that you have known, seen, and acknowledged. A man cannot believe in what he has not seen. Whether it is death, resurrection, or ascension, there must first be the revelation of the Holy Spirit before there can be the faith. A doctrine is a presentation of the facts, while a truth is the reality behind what is presented. Many times, many doctrines are not truths to us. When something is really there, it will not only be a doctrine, but a truth. The death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf is not only a doctrine, but also a truth. Theology is about doctrines. In other words, doctrines are theology. The objective truth requires that we believe. We must know that it is real. In Greek, truth means reality. The death of the Lord is a truth, which means that the death of the Lord is a reality. The resurrection of the Lord is a truth, which means that the resurrection of the Lord is a reality. The ascension of the Lord is a truth, which means that the ascension of the Lord is a reality. This is what we call the truth.

How do we know that these truths are real? Every time we receive a truth, it is not due to what was said by the preacher. The only One in the whole world who can bring men into the truth is the Holy Spirit. Preachers can only speak doctrines to men, but there must be the revelation of the Holy Spirit before men can have faith. Brothers and sisters, have we seen this? I am not speaking about our death, resurrection, and ascension with Christ. I am only speaking about the Lord's death on our behalf. In the past we did not know sin, neither did we know God or Christ. Perhaps one day when we heard someone speak about the death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, there was one word that touched our heart. As a result we said, "Oh, that is what this is!" Suddenly we "saw" sin, we "saw" God, we "saw" Christ, and we "saw" salvation. We saw that our sins were forgiven, and

we had the boldness to say that our sins were forgiven. Someone might have asked us how we knew our sins were forgiven. Despite their question, we were very clear about it because we had seen.

What is the revelation of the Holy Spirit? It is the Holy Spirit removing the veil and showing you what lies behind a preacher's speaking. You may have seen what is meant by forgiveness and regeneration. This seeing is most precious. When you saw that Christ Jesus died in such a way, you believed. You may go to the countryside and see an old friend and preach to him. He may nod his head, but soon forget what you preached. He lacks one necessary thing; he has not obtained the revelation. Those who are blind cannot believe. Those who have no revelation cannot have faith. You must pray that God will make him see his sin and see the Savior. You may have preached three or five doctrines to him. But when he sees, there is no need to preach to him anymore. Just as he needs to see Christ's death, he also needs to see resurrection, ascension, and all the other truths.

Brothers, you may go to the countryside to preach the gospel to fifty people and tell them how man sinned, how the Lord died for man, and how faith brings in salvation. All fifty people may nod their heads. However, does this mean that all fifty are saved? Although they nod their heads, they walk away with no realization that lying and pride are sins. They have heard about sin but have not seen sin. They have heard about the Savior but have not seen the Savior. Thus, there is no possibility for them to believe. Every time we preach the gospel to someone, we must ask God to open their eyes so that they will weep at seeing their sin and receive the Lord when they see Him. After some time a theological professor may come and tell them that their sins are not really sins and that the Lord's death was merely an act of self-sacrifice. However, they will not be moved if they have seen something. They believe because they have seen something.

Death is an objective truth. It demands our believing. All the other objective truths also demand our believing. We have paid considerable attention to preaching the Lord's death. Nevertheless, it has not been effective. Something is wrong in the matter of faith, and this means something is wrong with the revelation. Once I preached about the truth of our crucifixion with the Lord. A

brother said that it was good and that he would be victorious from then on because he now knew the way to victory. I said that after a few days it would not work because he had not yet seen. You may ask someone how they were saved, and they may say that they heard the teaching. However, this kind of salvation will not last for more than a few days. Mere understanding in the mind is not faith. When you read the Bible or hear in the meeting that you have died, resurrected, and ascended, you should not say, "I have examined myself and have not found any resurrection or ascension." Neither should you say lightly, "I have died, resurrected, and ascended." Instead, you should ask the Lord, "Make me see that I have died, resurrected, and ascended." If you pray in this way, the Lord will usher you into the objective truth, that is, into Himself. You will see that in Christ, you are dead, resurrected, and ascended. Since He has died, you also have died; since He has resurrected, you also have resurrected; and since He has ascended, you also have ascended. In this way you will say, "Lord, I thank You. In You I have died, resurrected, and ascended." You will say this because of faith. This faith is based on the facts behind the words.

Mr. Hudson Taylor was at one time continuously experiencing failure and weakness. Once he wrote to his sister about how his heart was very troubled because he felt that he was lacking sanctification, life, and power within. He thought that if he could only abide in Christ, everything would be fine. His sister prayed for him. For a few months he prayed, struggled, fasted, made resolutions, read the Bible, and used more time for quiet meditation. However, nothing was effective. He wished he could abide in Christ forever, but it seemed that after dwelling in Him for a short while, he came out again. He said, "If I only knew I could abide in Christ, then everything would be well; but I could not." From his diary we read the following story: one day he was praying again. He thought that if he could abide in Christ and could draw His juice and receive His nourishment and supply, he would have the power to overcome sin. He prayed again and read the Bible again. Then he came to John 15:5, which says, "I am the vine; you are the branches." He said, "I am the most foolish man in the whole world. I have been praying to be a branch; I wanted to abide in Christ. However, the Lord has said that I already am a branch and abiding in Him." O brothers, if we realize this,

we will say, "Hallelujah!" We do not need to enter anything, because we are already in. We do not need to strive to be a branch, nor do we become a branch only after we have overcome sin. We are already a branch, and we are abiding in Him. The purpose of John 15:5 is to tell us that we are abiding in Him and that we should not leave this abiding. We are a branch. All the juice, nourishment, and love are ours. Mr. Taylor said that since he saw this, he became a new Hudson Taylor. This was a great turning point in his life.

Believing is not changing God's word into reality. It is believing that God's word is reality. During last year's special conference, I mentioned that the grace of God comprises three things: the promise, the fact, and the covenant. The promise is something which will be accomplished. The fact is something which has been accomplished. All the objective truths have been accomplished and are real. We only need to say to God, "Your Word says I have died, resurrected, and ascended. Therefore, I also say that I have died, resurrected, and ascended." Indeed, this is the way we can stand firm. God has spoken, and it is so.

Mr. Webpeblo was a famous speaker in the Keswick Conventions. The turning point of his life was due to one incident. Once he chose 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you," to be the topic of his message. After he had prepared the outline, he knelt down to pray, "I respectfully present the draft of this message before You. O God! I pray for Your blessings." After the prayer he realized that he could not use this message. "I was going to preach to the people that the grace of God is sufficient for us. But if anyone would ask me whether the grace of God is sufficient for me, I would definitely have to say no because I still have my temper and pride. If the grace of God is not sufficient for me, how can I say to people that it is sufficient for them? I cannot say that." It was Saturday, there was no time to prepare for anything else, and he did not have the choice not to preach. Confronted with this difficult situation, he knelt down and prayed again, "O God! Today let Your grace be sufficient for me. May this become my own experience. I have been proud, jealous, lustful, and filled with unclean thoughts. Make me overcome all these if Your grace is truly sufficient for me." He prayed the whole afternoon, but it seemed the more he prayed, the further God was away from him. Later he became tired and walked from his desk to the side

of the fireplace for a rest. There on the wall by the fireplace hung a verse saying, "My grace IS sufficient for you." Immediately he became clear that the grace of God is not "going to be sufficient for me," nor "awaiting to be sufficient for me," but rather it "is sufficient for me." He did not need to ask God to give him sufficient grace; God's grace was sufficient for him. He jumped to his feet and said, "The grace of God is sufficient for me. Why do I have to pray?" This is faith, and this is also a revelation. He said, "Thank God, for many years I always anticipated sufficient grace from God. On that day God revealed to me that His grace is sufficient. I came to a great turning point in my life." The next day he was exceptionally powerful. Later in the Keswick Convention, he gave many messages and helped many people. Someone asked him how he became the way he was. He answered that he had seen the sufficiency.

There are many people who pray for death with Christ, but God says that in Christ we are dead. There are many who pray for resurrection and ascension, but God says that in Christ we are resurrected and ascended. There are many who pray to overcome the world, but the Word of God says that the victory which has overcome the world is our faith (1 John 5:4). Everything is in Christ. We must see this in order to believe. Suppose there is a brother or a sister here who has seen the objective truth. They may not have seen many things, but as long as they see one verse and truly believe in it, they can walk in the path before them. Many people make blind requests to God. Have you heard of sinners asking the Lord to die for them? Once when I was preaching the gospel, I heard someone pray in this way: "O Lord! I am a sinner. I ask that You die on my behalf." This prayer is wrong. There are many people who pray for the Lord to die for them or that they would die together with the Lord. This is utterly a joke. The mind is really useless. We must believe in God's Word more than our circumstances, feelings, trials, sins, lusts, and unclean thoughts. If we can do this, we definitely will be different. It is not enough that we listen. We must have the faith. May we see that God has accomplished everything in Christ.

However, we have to know that merely believing like this is not enough. The one thing that has to follow is obedience. On the one hand, we must believe. On the other hand, we must obey. Our self-will must be subdued, and we must

present every member to God. Brothers and sisters, after we have a living faith, day by day we have to learn to obey God. Whenever God touches us on a certain point, and instead we want God to go along with us, we are not obeying God. Whenever our will is not subdued, we are unable to believe God. A sinner who does not repent cannot believe. Likewise, a believer who willfully does not obey cannot believe.

Some have many things stored in their houses. Some are hesitant to consecrate their children. Some do not have a right attitude towards their husbands. Some do not exercise proper stewardship of their money. Have you consecrated yourself to God? Are you willing to go wherever God sends you? If God wants you to do the most trivial job, are you willing to do it? Brothers and sisters, believing alone cannot keep you walking on the path ahead. Perhaps God wants you to obey immediately after you have believed, or He may wait a little while before He asks you to obey. With some people the Lord wants them to obey Him first, and then He gives them the faith. With other people God first gives them the faith, and then He demands obedience. With still others God gives them faith and at the same time demands their obedience.

I do not know what the Lord requires from each one of us. But I know that there is a great lack if we only have one of these two aspects. Anyone who has not presented his body to God and thinks that believing alone is sufficient is like an unturned cake. May we see that we must obey God. We must pass this step in a specific way. This is a hurdle. In order to be God's stewards, we must have a specific starting point. There must be a point at which we say to God, "From today on, I offer myself to You." There must be a specific dealing this way. There must be a time when we say to God, "From now on I offer You my time, my mind, my money, my family, and my all." God touches everyone in a specific way. With some, God touches them on one point; with others, God touches them on another point. Many times God's demand appears to be harsh and severe. But whatever God demands of us, we must obey. God wants us to prove that we will obey Him. Nothing is more precious to Him than Isaac. It is not enough just to say verbally, "I offer Isaac as a sacrifice." We must present Isaac as an offering in reality. If we do this, we will see the lamb God has prepared. God is not satisfied until we have

fully obeyed. We must experience specific dealings with the Lord.

We have an American friend who was once in China. His faith is truly great. The way the Lord led him to advance spiritually was as follows: He had a master's degree, but he continued working in the university toward a doctorate of philosophy. He was a pastor and studying philosophy at the same time. He felt something wrong with his spiritual life, and he prayed to God, "I have a great deal of unbelief on many occasions. I cannot overcome some sins, and I do not have the power in the work." For two weeks he specifically prayed for God to fill him with the Holy Spirit. He wanted to acquire the victorious life and power spoken of in the Bible. God told him then, "Do you really want this? If you really do, two months from now you should not take the examination for the doctorate of philosophy. I have no use for a doctorate of philosophy." He felt that this was rather difficult. His doctorate of philosophy was something he definitely wanted. It would indeed be a pity if he did not go for the examination. He knelt down to pray and bargain with the Lord. He asked why He would not let him be a doctor of philosophy and a pastor as well. But God never bargains with man. Once God has made a demand, that is the demand. What God has said and commanded cannot be changed. During those two months, he was in considerable turmoil. When the last Saturday came, he was in a real battle. Should he choose the doctorate of philosophy, or should he choose the filling of the Holy Spirit? Is it better to have a doctorate of philosophy, or have a victorious life? If others can earn a doctorate of philosophy and at the same time be used by God, why could he not do the same? He continuously struggled and bargained with the Lord to no avail. A doctorate of philosophy was desirable; the filling of the Holy Spirit was also desirable. However, God would not yield. If he wanted a doctorate of philosophy, he could not live a spiritual life. If he wanted a spiritual life, he could not have his doctorate of philosophy. In the end, he said in tears, "I obey. Although I have studied philosophy for over two years, and for the past thirty some years since my childhood, I have looked forward to a doctorate in philosophy, I have to give up this pursuit for the sake of obeying God." He wrote a letter to notify the school that he was not going to take the examination on Monday. Thus, he forsook his doctorate of philosophy degree forever. The next

day he did not have a message on the pulpit because he was very tired from the previous night. So he simply related to the congregation the story of his obedience to the Lord. On that day, three-fourths of the people in the congregation shed tears and were revived. He himself was also very empowered. He said that had he foreseen this result, he would have obeyed God's leading much sooner.

No one used by the Lord can ever avoid this kind of crisis. If we wish to avoid this kind of crisis, we cannot expect to experience progress in the spiritual life. We must believe and also obey. Not only do we need to obey once, but we must obey continuously. Otherwise, we will come short and be unbalanced. Obedience without faith is powerless. Faith without obedience is idealistic. It is very painful to be obedient without faith. Please remember the scriptural principles for our living: believing and obeying. We cannot believe without obeying or obey without believing. To believe and yet not obey is false belief. To obey and yet not believe is asceticism. Today in the Lord's church, men either err in faith or in obedience. Every failure is the result of a shortage in one of the two or in both. There is either faith without obedience or obedience without faith, or there is neither faith nor obedience.

If we are willing to believe and obey, we will experience a long-lasting spring and an eternal sunshine. The path of the righteous is like the dawning light growing brighter and brighter until the high noon. May God bless us and make us perfect men before Him, that is, may we be men who will believe and obey.

## MESSAGE NINE

# THE FOUR MINISTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

## ●Outline

**I. James**

**II. Peter**

**III. Paul**

**IV. John**

**●Beginning And Ending**

## ●Scripture Reading: Acts 9:20-28; Matt. 4:18-22; Eph. 1:22-23, 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:3-5; 1 John 2:12-13; John 21:18, 21; Acts 28:23; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 7

Acts 9:20-28 "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, that this One is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is this not the one who ravaged those who call upon this name in Jerusalem and came here for this, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul was all the more empowered, and he confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus by proving that this One is the Christ. And as a considerable number of days were being fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to do away with him; But their plot was made known to Saul. And they also watched the gates closely, both day and night, so that they might do away with him. But his disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples; yet all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and he related to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them, going in and going out in Jerusalem,

speaking boldly in the name of the Lord."

Matt. 4:18-22 "And while He was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And He said to them, Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And immediately leaving the nets, they followed Him. And going on from there, He saw another two brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And immediately leaving the boat and their father, they followed Him."

Eph. 1:22-23 "And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all."

2:22 "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit."

1 Pet. 2:3-5 "If you have tasted that the Lord is good. Coming to Him, a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious, You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 John 2:12-13 "I write to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you because of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, young children, because you know the Father."

John 21:18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."

21 "...Peter therefore, seeing him, said to Jesus, Lord, and what about this man?"

Acts 28:23 "And once they had appointed a day for him, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he expounded these matters, solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of

Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening."

2 Tim. 1:15 "This you know, that all who are in Asia turned away from me, of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes."

2 Pet. 2:1 "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

1 John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

2 John 7 "For many deceivers went out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."

* * * *

This morning I want to talk about four different ministers in the New Testament. The word minister, according to the Greek, refers not only to the deacons but also to the serving ones. All who work for God and the gospel are ministers. So when we say four ministers, we mean four different workers. In the passages that we have just read, there are four different subjects, which are the four main subjects of the New Testament. The ones who preached these four subjects are the four ministers.

There is a special thing in the New Testament: there were three disciples from among the twelve, who were with the Lord all the time. What are the names of these three disciples? I think all of you know their names; they are James, Peter, and John. They were with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration; they went with the Lord to the house of Jairus; and at the end, they were with the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. Why did the Lord choose only these three from among the twelve disciples? Why did the Lord put them in a more noticeable position? The main reason was that God wanted to establish His works in the New Testament along three different lines.

But was it enough to have only three lines? No, it was still not enough! In Acts the Lord brought in another minister besides these three. Who was this

man? Was it Matthias? No, even though Matthias was chosen as an apostle by casting lots, he was not the minister. Who was chosen? Our beloved brother Paul was chosen. He was one specially chosen by the Lord. Although many people worked for the Lord in the New Testament, only these four occupy a unique position. There were none besides these four. According to the Bible, the order of these four is as follows: (1) James, (2) Peter, (3) Paul, and (4) John. This is the proper order of the Bible and is recognized by all believers. Today we cannot exhaust the deeper significance of these four lines, but we can consider a little about them. We cannot see everything thoroughly and clearly; but as long as we see a little, some help will be rendered in our walk on earth.

## I. JAMES

James is the most unnoticed one among the four. He never wrote an epistle. The book of James in the Bible was not written by him, but by the Lord's brother. Peter and John were both zealous men. We can see many accounts of their work, but James did not do anything special. He was a very hidden person. How could he be listed among these four? Why did the Lord choose him as one of the four to represent one special line? James did not manifest the gifts of preaching, healing, and works of wonders, etc. Although these gifts are good, James' outstanding trait was not in any of these things. What do we see in him? He did one thing that was great and extraordinary; he was the first martyr among the apostles! The most extraordinary and crucial line among these four is the line of suffering. No matter how different were the works of Peter, Paul, and John, there was one line common to them all, the line of suffering and rejection. Suffering is something that is basic to every Christian.

Today many people like to read Paul's excellent Epistles; they like to hear about Peter's zealous works and John's wonderful visions. Yet they toss James aside and subconsciously forget about him. They do not realize that every work should be based on James. Peter won three thousand people to the Lord in one day, and Paul established churches everywhere. Yet without James's suffering, the Lord could not be satisfied. When the Lord came to this world, He took the standing of one who was rejected. If we do not suffer with Him, we cannot satisfy

His heart no matter what wonderful things we do.

Why did the Lord make James so hidden? He only wanted to highlight one special point of James. Suppose we have many chairs, several lamps, and numerous desks here. We are accustomed to seeing them and do not feel anything special about them. But if the items are moved away one day and the place is cleaned so that only one small desk remains, every brother would immediately notice the small desk. If a crowd is here, you would not notice anything, but once all the people are gone and only one person is left, he will draw considerable attention. This is what the Lord did. He hid every gift of James and only highlighted his suffering. In the Bible Peter said to arm ourselves with a mind to suffer (1 Pet. 4:1). Only suffering overcomes everything and accomplishes God's eternal purpose. Brothers, let me say an honest word. Those who do not want to suffer with the Lord can never expect to be exalted with Him. Only those who suffer are worthy of being exalted. If you want to be highly exalted, you have to follow James's footsteps.

There is more truth concerning James which can render us much help. However, because of time, I cannot go further. Now let us take a look at Peter.

## II. PETER

Before we speak about what Peter represents, let us consider the difference between Peter, Paul, and John. Even though we may speak a little here and a little there, and even though it may not be very organized, nevertheless, what we say is very crucial. We do not intend to speak eloquently, but intelligibly.

Peter's work was totally different from Paul's. We only need to look at the Gospels of Mark and Luke and at Acts, and we will find an obvious difference. Mark received his Gospel from Peter, and Luke wrote down his story from Paul. Look again at Peter's testimony at Pentecost and Paul's testimony; each one has its own emphasis, and they are not the same. John's work also stands apart. The Lord's gift to John was different from the gifts to Paul and to Peter. What was Peter's testimony? If we look at Matthew 16 and Acts 2, we know that what he did concerned only one thing—the kingdom of God. His line was characterized by the kingdom of God. What about Paul? I think everyone who has read Paul's

Epistles can see that Paul was concerned only about God's house. In other words, he was concerned with God's church. All the testimony and work of Paul, throughout his lifetime, were on this one thing. When we consider John, we can see that his testimony was completely different. He never talked about the things regarding the church. Although Peter did not talk about the church extensively, he mentioned the overseers a little. But he did not mention anything about church organization. Neither did John say a word about church organization. John only spoke about fathers, young men, and little children. What is this? This is the testimony of God's family.

There are three clear lines before us: (1) Peter, on God's kingdom, (2) Paul, on God's house, and (3) John, on God's family. If you understand these three lines clearly, God will give you more light. This does not mean that Peter did not mention anything that John mentioned. He briefly mentioned God's house. But his main emphasis was on God's kingdom. At the same time, Paul also mentioned something about God's family, and John mentioned something about God's kingdom. But as far as their focus, Paul focused on God's church and John focused on God's family. These three lines are not absolutely distinctive, yet each one has its own specialty. Because the scope of today's topic includes the whole New Testament, I cannot speak in detail. I can only touch the subjects briefly.

Peter was the initiator. The first one in the church of Christ to open his mouth was Peter. The last one who spoke was John. Revelation, which was written by John, is the last book among the sixty-six books of the Bible. What about Paul? He was between Peter and John; he was a predecessor and a successor. There is God's kingdom and God's family; in between there is God's house. This is what God established in the Bible. It is a pity that today many people are still ignorant about the kingdom of God and the family of God. They are equally ignorant about the church of God. They only know about man's organization and denominations. If you ask people about the difference between God's kingdom, God's house, and God's family, they think that these are more or less the same. They think that once a person joins the church, he enters God's family which also means that he enters God's kingdom. They do not realize that there is a big difference between these three things. That is why God needs a

Peter, a Paul, and a John to express His kingdom, house, and family.

When the Lord gave the keys of the kingdom of the heavens to Peter, it meant that Peter was the one to open the doors, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. We will talk about this later. But now we want to point out that since the keys of the kingdom of the heavens were put into Peter's hand, he must have been the first to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. The keys were in his hand and he kept them. If the key to our hall in Wen-teh Lane is in my hand, no matter how early you come, you will have to stand outside the iron door. Before you enter, you will have to wait until I open the door with the key and enter. Without the key, you cannot enter first. In the same way, the first to enter the realm of the heavenly kingdom was Peter. This is very clear.

In Matthew 16, the Lord spoke a marvelous thing to Peter. What did He say? He said, "And upon this rock I will build My church...I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" (vv. 18-19). Brothers and sisters, do you realize what is different about verse 19? Oh! The greatest door handle is here. The Lord gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of the heavens. Peter could control the timing for the opening of the door of the kingdom of the heavens. He bore the responsibility of the kingdom of the heavens. But what about the church? The Lord said, "And upon this rock I will build My church." The Lord will build the church Himself; no one else can touch the church. This is the most distinctive difference between the kingdom of the heavens and the church. What is the kingdom of the heavens? It is God's spiritual domain on earth. God's kingdom is the manifestation of God's sovereignty and His administration. God's house represents God's nature in its glory, love, and righteousness. God's family expresses God's love and His relationship with us. All these stand complete in themselves. They are not the same. Many people lump everything into the church. They think this belongs to the church and that also belongs to the church. They drag everything into the church, as if the church is a warehouse in which they can store everything. This proves that they do not understand the truth of the Bible.

Peter only bore the testimony of the kingdom of the heavens, which was to open the door and let people in. We need to pay attention to John 3:5. What did

the Lord say there? He said, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” If we had written this verse, we would have written it, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the family of God.” But no, it says the kingdom of God. Whoever enters into the kingdom of God must be born again. Only those who are born again can enter into the kingdom of God. The keys that Peter used at Pentecost were repentance and baptism. As a result, three thousand people entered into the kingdom of God. This was the beginning of God’s kingdom. Many people say that the church started at Pentecost. This is correct, but they forget that the kingdom of God also started at Pentecost. What Peter said later in the Epistles about salvation and reward refers to the future kingdom. There was no contradiction between the future kingdom and the entrance into the kingdom of God at Pentecost.

Was the work of Pentecost enough? No! God had to send Peter to the house of Cornelius. At Pentecost Peter exercised the keys and ushered many Jews into the kingdom. God also wanted him to open the door for Gentiles to enter into the kingdom of God. This fulfilled the Lord’s word in Matthew 8:11, which says that there would be many people from the east and from the west, who would recline at table in the kingdom of the heavens. Before Peter exercised the keys to open the door for Gentiles to be saved, God prepared Paul. Dispensationally speaking, Peter’s work ended at the house of Cornelius. After this, although Peter still bore many testimonies, his work was dispensationally over. Consider how wonderful this is! In Acts 10, Peter went to the house of Cornelius, but Paul repented in Acts 9.

Originally, Paul was a zealous persecutor of the Lord. But on his way to Damascus, the Lord shined a light around him and he received grace. However, his eyes were not yet opened. The Lord sent Ananias, telling him that Paul was the vessel He had chosen. This word expressed the Lord’s heart. The kingdom of God was large, and Peter had brought in many people. However, there was still the need for a manager and designer. Therefore, the Lord raised up Paul and made him a vessel. Ananias put it very well when he said, “Saul, brother.” This meant that every hatred was removed. Consequently, Paul was able to testify for the Lord and be useful for the work. Later, his work extended from inside the city

to outside the city; the scope of his work expanded. How did he get down from the wall? He was let down by the disciples. Although he could have climbed down by himself, he did not. He was willing to have the disciples let him down. This was brotherly fellowship, help, and approval. Paul did not go out alone; he was backed up by others' participation. So many works can be more effectual if they are backed up by others' prayer and help. When Paul originally went to Jerusalem, the disciples were somewhat fearful. Later Paul was able to go in and out among them; there was full fellowship between them with no obstacles. In this way, he was able to continue Peter's work.

Now let us come back to Peter. When the Lord called him to the house of Cornelius, he did not want to go at first. Then the Lord gave him the vision of a great sheet descending from heaven. Inside there were animals, reptiles, and birds, but no fish. Why were there no fish? We see animals, reptiles, birds, and fish all the time. Why were only three things mentioned, the animals, the reptiles, and the birds, and the fish were omitted? According to the type in the story of Noah's ark, fish were never saved. The creatures saved through the ark did not include fish. This is why fish were not included in the things God gave to Peter.

What is the meaning of the great sheet with animals, reptiles, and birds? Let us consider this. The great sheet represents Peter's whole work. The extent of Peter's work was not like a vessel which can only contain a certain amount. It was not like a ship which has its limits. It was like a piece of cloth, a great sheet. What is cloth? Cloth does not have a fixed shape. It has not yet been formed into any shape; it is only a piece of fabric. Who came to make this fabric into something with a shape? Paul came. He specialized in the work of tidying up. We may liken Peter to a person who buys cloth and Paul to a tailor or dressmaker. We should be clear about this. Throughout his life, Peter's work was like a piece of cloth; it was not limited and it did not have any form or boundary.

Let us consider the three things in the great sheet. Birds are the most active animals. Sometimes they fly around, sometimes they rest upon branches or rooftops, and sometimes they take a few steps on the ground. They are the most free and not restricted at all. They are the wildest of all animals. What about animals? They are ferocious and vicious. What about reptiles? They refer to

filthiness. In God's eyes, Gentiles are merely animals, reptiles, and birds. But now God has wrapped up the wild, vicious, and filthy ones in a great sheet. He has put us in a new environment. He no longer considers us as animals, reptiles, and birds. In the Bible there is only the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens; there is no such thing as the gospel of the church. We do not hear the gospel and then enter into the church. Rather, we hear the gospel and enter into God's kingdom, which is a new sphere and a new realm. Once you were under Satan's hand; now you are under God's hand. What does it mean to be saved? It means that God puts you in a new position. Today many people make the matter of the church too encompassing. They think that they have everything once they enter into the church, but they forget the matter of entering into the kingdom of God. Being saved does not mean entering into only the church; it also means entering into the kingdom of God to become His children, not by power, but by authority (John 1:12). Everyone can enter because it is not according to what a person does, but according to the authority that God has given to him. All of Peter's work was to bring something from the outside to the inside. In other words, Peter's work was to bring people into the kingdom of God. The meaning of entering into the kingdom of God is to be subject under God's sovereignty. Peter's specialty was to draw people and bring in group after group. When he drew one person in, another citizen was added to God's kingdom. However, he could do nothing to help those who were in the kingdom and needed direction. Paul picked up this responsibility. Paul's work was to help settle down those whom Peter drew in. Can you find the words "born again" in Paul's Epistles? No, he spoke about justification; he never spoke about being born again. What about Peter? He talked about regeneration. He also mentioned "inheritance." Paul only mentioned "inheritance" a little. John did not mention anything about it because his focus was on God's family. The simplest explanation of God's kingdom is that it is the sphere of God's rule.

Acts mentions many things concerning God's kingdom. Even Paul mentioned God's kingdom because at that time many people were saved and had entered into God's kingdom. It would be much better if we were clear about this on the day we were saved. The reason we are in such a degraded condition now

is that we have made ourselves the center. The Lord only considers us as a helper. God truly wants to give us blessings. But more importantly, He wants us to enter His kingdom and be under His ruling. O brothers and sisters, salvation is not for our enjoyment; it is for God to deal with us according to His sovereign authority. Originally you lived a carefree and foolish life; now God wants you to be subject to Him. After a person is saved, he cannot live a loose life any longer. Instead, he must be restricted. Salvation is taking up the Holy Spirit as your yoke. When you want to be saved, He puts this yoke upon you. Once you have the yoke, you are a saved person. From a human point of view, when God saves a person, everything that he receives is not all good because God wants to bring him under His sovereignty. This was Peter's work. No matter what you are—animal, reptile, or bird—he took everyone into the kingdom of God.

## III. PAUL

Paul continued Peter's work. This is why he said he was a master builder to build up the house. We all know that many teachings, doctrines, and expressions of God's purpose are found in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. The main subject of Ephesians is God's house. Things had been brought into the house from the outside; now there was the need to put them in order and decorate the house. All of Paul's work was for the purpose of decoration. For example, the book of Romans deals with justification, victory, and obedience. These are not ways to enter into God's kingdom. They are just the carvings, the modifications made on the model. Paul's concluding word is an exhortation to offer oneself and turn fully to God. In the books to the Corinthians, Paul went on to tell us what we should do after we have become subject to God and have entered into God's kingdom. He began to tell us about things related to the meetings, the Lord's table, marriage, communication, receiving, fellowship, and many other procedural matters. He was holding his scissors and was ready to cut some cloth to shape it into some unique form according to specific guidelines. Everything in the house has to be placed in the proper place. What does this mean? This means that the house must be arranged to the point where it will express God's nature.

Whether a man is clean or dirty can be shown by the way he manages his

house. A person's house is a representation of his character. No other place can expose a person more thoroughly and clearly than his own house. Suppose the books on your shelves are in chaos, and fruit peelings, seeds, and garbage are all over the floor. Suppose the beds are not made in the morning but are piled up like lumps of dough, and the desk is covered with a thick layer of dust. If one of your friends comes in to look at your room, he will clearly see what kind of person you are. You are not exposed when you go to another person's home; but in your own house everything expresses your entire being and naturally exposes your true self. Because your house is the place where you rest and the place in which you abide, you are exposed clearly and thoroughly there.

Peter's testimony makes you a person of God's kingdom; it brings you under the authority of God's mighty hand. Peter did not care about the details. There was no need for him to take care of those things that were not within the scope of his work. Paul was the one who followed Peter and took care of this work. Look how detailed Paul was in his work. He mentioned how a husband and a wife should love each other, how a master and servant should treat each other, how brothers should love each other, and so forth. All these matters are in regard to the things a person ought to do in God's house; they show us what is acceptable to God. Not only did he deal with the earthly things, but he also dealt with the things concerning spiritual fellowship, such as meetings, baptism, gifts, the Lord's table, ministry, and all the arrangements within the church. He was indeed a designer and decorator.

Ephesians 2:22 says, "You also are being built together into a dwelling place of God." We see clearly from this verse that the church is the house of God. Each believer is a part of this house, being knit together to become a house. Every person is like a piece of brick, wood, or tile; everyone should manifest the nature of God before he can be built up to become God's house. God put this before us to show us that, as pieces of wood in God's house, we should fulfill our duty and express God's nature.

After we have Peter's foundation and Paul's building, is this enough? Are the things of God completed simply by the two lines represented by these two men? No! Another one, John, comes in.

## IV. JOHN

John spoke about our relationship with God. These are things that concern the family of God. His testimony was full of life, and he never spoke about anything outward. Can you find anything in his letters that speaks about the way to be an elder, the way to pay taxes, or the way a woman should cover her head? Regarding individual behavior, the only thing he said was that we should love one another; he said nothing else. Simply stated, John's testimony was fully in the Holy of Holies, full of spiritual reality. He never touched outward matters. He kept speaking about the things which are true, the deepest things. This is why the word life appears frequently in his Epistles and in Revelation. His specialty was to recover matters after they failed. This is because at the time John wrote his Epistles, apostasies abounded. Many false prophets and false Christs had arisen. Men had overthrown God's kingdom and taken God's house as their own. They held onto only superficial forms and had no reality. Therefore, John came to speak about the inward thing, life. Men can overthrow God's kingdom or God's house, but life can never be overthrown; it will always be there. Once a person has this reality, it is enough. John's testimony is for the latter days and leads men to their innermost being to see what kind of God we have.

I will briefly analyze these three lines. Peter spoke about a new realm, Paul spoke about new laws, and John spoke about a new relationship, which is the relationship between father and sons. How many times did he mention fathers, young men, and little children in his Epistles? All these are members in a family and are related to each other. Paul spoke about the laws in the new position, how to be subject to God and express God's nature. John simply talked about fathers, young men, and little children. What is this? This is the growth in God's family. The whole New Testament can be divided into these three lines. To find the line of the kingdom, we only have to read Matthew, 1 and 2 Peter, Mark, and a part of Hebrews. To find the line of the church, Paul's Epistles are the most complete. At the same time, John's Epistles are all on God's family. I must clarify, however, that this classification is not absolute. I am simply pointing out the areas that each one stressed.

## BEGINNING AND ENDING

Let us consider how these three lines begin and end. What was Peter doing when God called him? He was casting a net into the sea with his brother Andrew. What about John? He was mending a net on a ship. It is quite marvelous that God had properly arranged their works when they were called. Peter was casting a net when he was called; later he did the work of casting a net. His work was to charge forward to the front of the battlefield. He started the work with the Jews. He was also the first to preach to the Gentiles. He cast a net and caught many Jews. He cast another net and caught many Gentiles. But later the net (in man's view) was broken, and the kingdom was forsaken by the people. Fish were leaking out. Therefore, God called John to mend the net and recover it back to the original new condition.

Let us see what God appointed for Paul when he was called. When Paul was about to persecute the believers, God shined a light on him on his way to Damascus. Paul's first words were, "What shall I do?" (Acts 22:10). His work always involved "what to do." He was not like Peter, who in one day led three thousand or five thousand people to believe in God. He saved only a few or, at the most, a few dozen because his purpose was not to draw people in but to perfect people. The subject of his work was how-to: how to do things right, how to build a house, how to arrange its contents, how to trim the cloth. These were his works. His occupation was tent-making. A tent is a place for a man to dwell. Spiritually speaking, Paul was also a tent-maker. Unlike Peter, who only had a piece of cloth, Paul's cloth became a tent.

But what was men's attitude toward the works of these three persons? It was not good at all! It was very bad! We all will sigh. At the end of their days, men rejected their testimony. Second Peter shows us this matter clearly. In chapter two, the false prophets came. They came especially to do a counterfeit work. Therefore, Peter described them as dogs and sows; they made things worse and caused God's kingdom to be concealed. In chapter three, the mockers came. They despised what Peter preached, treating it as a loathsome and shameful thing! The testimony of the kingdom was completely rejected. Do you know why Peter wrote his second Epistle? It was written because the first

Epistle had been rejected and thrown away. This is why he had to write his second Epistle. He described in his second Epistle the final condition of his lifetime testimony. It exposed and proclaimed all of men's rejection. The situation was bad in Peter's time. How much worse has it become in the twentieth century! There is hardly anyone who does not oppose the testimony of the kingdom when they hear about it. There is hardly anyone who does not say that we are foolish. No wonder so many people promote the so-called ideal kingdom; no wonder the counterfeit truth is everywhere. Oh, they were there in Peter's days! It is not surprising or uncommon that they are here today.

Not only did Peter's testimony end this way; Paul's testimony ended the same way. The last Epistle written by him was 2 Timothy. Three to five years after writing it, he died. We can see from this Epistle the condition that existed at the end of his life. He said, "All who are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). It was too difficult to manifest the Lord; there were too many restrictions, and it was indeed unbearable. Brothers and sisters, at the time of Paul's and Peter's death, the church was fully degraded in its outward form. It had fallen into the condition described in Revelation 2 and 3. How much worse is the situation today! The Epistle to the Philippians was written by Paul when he was old. What did he say? He said that everyone was after their own things (Phil. 2:21). Men put Paul's testimony aside. They considered their own things to be too important. As a result, they gave up the Lord. If a person takes care of himself, he cannot take care of the Lord. Since he does not have enough time to take care of his own business, he has even less time to take care of the Lord's business. There is nothing else he can do except to ignore the Lord's business! Paul's testimony was rejected and forsaken. Therefore, his last words were to exhort the saints to be watchful and be constantly aware of the intrusion of heresies. Paul's testimony ended this way.

It seems that the testimonies had completely failed in their outward appearance. So the Lord needed to use John. The Lord needed him to take care of the inner works. Consider the Gospel of John. It is not like Matthew's which emphasized doctrines, or like Luke's which stressed morality, or like Mark's which recorded history. John only wrote about the relationship between God and

us, a relationship between father and sons. He did not begin his Gospel with Adam or Abraham but with Jesus Christ from the beginning, from the very first beginning. He began this way because outward appearances had failed and neither Adam nor Abraham could turn the situation back. What was needed was that which was from the beginning. Who can shake the beginning? No one can. The beginning can never be shaken. Whatever comes from God can never be shaken. The Gospel of John is on the Word from the beginning, which was expressed in order to lead us back to the condition of the beginning. What was there in the beginning? There was life, light, and love. None of these things can be shaken. Rather, they are the inward realities. John never talked about outward things such as husbands and wives, masters and servants, meetings, and so forth. He never mentioned these things. What he mentioned was just the things on God's side which are absolutely inward. If we do not see this difference, we will not see anything. We still need to beseech God earnestly until we see the difference.

O brothers and sisters, because all things have failed and the church has outwardly fallen into desolation and division, may God grant us grace so that we can turn back to John. Otherwise, everything will be in vain. This does not mean that the works of Peter and Paul are not needed, but at the present time, the urgent need is not for outward things. We must first have the inward reality; then we can have the outward things. We should realize and understand that the net has been broken. The fish can no longer be kept in the net. Therefore, God wanted John to mend this net. He did not patch on something new or invented. Instead, it was there from the beginning. This is why he said, "What I give to you is what you have known already." It was not something they did not know, but something that they knew and had forgotten.

What is it to mend? Mending is not replacing the broken net with a new one, but restoring the broken one to its original condition. In other words, mending is covering the hole with a piece of the original material. Today we mainly need to return to God, gain life and spiritual power, and learn to overcome the world and the enemy. This is a spiritual reality. We need to take hold of John's testimony first. Then we can go back to the testimony of Paul and then Peter. If we do not

come back to John first, we will not be able to come back to Peter. Since the net has been broken, how can we use it for catching fish? This is why we have to mend the net first by holding onto the reality, before we can do anything else.

Finally, let us pay attention to three verses in particular.

"Another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go" (John 21:18). This is the way the Lord Jesus spoke concerning Peter's end. Peter was such a brave and strong person! According to tradition, he was put on a cross upside down for the Lord's sake. How brave he was! But what did the Lord say? He said that Peter would be bound and taken to a place where he did not want to go. Eventually, the Catholic Church declared that he had been a pope. They say that He sat on a throne in Rome. A huge edifice has the name "St. Peter's Cathedral" written on it. Throughout history, many great persons have flattered, exalted, and applauded him! But would Peter have wanted to be treated in this manner? He would have been extremely unhappy and unwilling. He could never have imagined that he would have been so glorified today. He would never have sat on such a great throne. But he has no say in this matter; he has been bound by the people. His sovereignty has been usurped by nations and individuals. His testimony has been completely buried by them. O brothers! How many people today know that Peter has been bound? They consider salvation to only be liberating and joyful thing. Salvation is truly liberating and joyful. But salvation is not for the enjoyment of pleasure, or to do things according to one's own choice. Rather, it is being subject to God's authority. Only when a person is subject to God's authority will everything be right.

Let us consider Paul's end. "And he remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling" (Acts 28:30). His life ended in a worse manner than Peter's. He even had to rent a house for himself. He could have lived in Ephesus or Corinth. But he had to rent a house because he had no permanent place of his own. His testimony was rejected, and he had to stay in his rented house and not come out. Previously, Paul could go somewhere and find someone to preach to, but now people had to go to his place. Unless they had a heart to go, they could never hear his preaching. Whether or not they believed, Paul could not bother them any longer. They had to make their own choice. Paul was pushed down by men in

high positions and kept in a prison in Rome. People had to seek him out personally before they could see his face. Many people today can only recite the "Lord's Prayer" and the creeds of the denominations. But these are "their own houses"; they are not Paul's house. It is not enough to merely have some mint and anise outwardly (Matt. 23:23). We have to dig into the true meaning of Paul's Epistles. The Epistles to the Corinthians were not just for the Corinthians, but for all the churches. Oh! Paul is covered up by men and cannot come out any longer. Let us look for him quickly and seek the truth of his testimony. Do not allow this testimony to pass by in a vague way. I want to say an honest word: all those who do not want to make the effort will never find Paul. Those who do not pay a price will never find the truth.

Finally, let us come to John. He was exiled to an island. What is an island? An island is different from a sea and also different from land. It is not the sea because it is isolated in the sea, nor is it land because it is not connected to the mainland. It is separated not only from the sea but also from land. It is a solitary place. What is the sea? The sea is the world! The land is today's human religion and organization! An island is not connected to either of them. God is not in the world; neither is He in great human organizations. The best achievements of man are just a big piece of land. God put John on an island, not in the world or in a human organization. Instead, He put him on an island. Was he lonely there? Surely he was lonely! He had neither the joy of the world as a surging tide, nor the secure peace of the land. He surely was very lonely. But John was marvelously touched by the Spirit on the Lord's Day; he saw a great vision, heard the Lord Jesus' voice, and was caught up to the heavens. What a wonderful thing! Though he did not have the joy of the sea or the comfort of land, he had the Lord's comfort and was satisfied. No one connected to the sea and the land is able to be connected to the Lord. If a Christian treasures his position and reputation in religion, he will never go to an island.

O brothers and sisters! The Lord is calling for us to go to the island. He wants us to give up all the outward things willingly and come to Him alone. On the island there is no ship to take us out to sea, nor a bridge for us to cross to the land. But the Holy Spirit will carry us away. There are no exits on any side, but

the way upward is clear. If the way upward is not clear, you will need ships to go on the sea or bridges to go to the land. If you have these other ways, you can never stay on the island or be caught up to the heavens. Oh! We should go back to John first and stand on reality. Then we can go back to the works of Peter and Paul. We need to learn how to be on the island, in the house, and bound. May the Lord bless us.

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# MESSAGE ONE

## THE LOVE OF CHRIST

## •Outline

**I. The Love Of Christ In Romans 8 Being For Those Who Are Suffering**

**II. The Love Of Christ In 2 Corinthians 5 Being For Those Who Are Servants**

**III. The Love Of Christ In Ephesians 3 Being For Those Who Are Like Students**

## •Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Eph. 3:14-19

Rom. 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we have been accounted as sheep for slaughter." But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers Nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2 Cor. 5:14-15 "For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died; And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised."

Eph. 3:14-19 "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, Of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, May be full of strength to apprehend

with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

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These three passages have one identical phrase, which is "the love of Christ." The Bible mentions the love of Christ many times, but only in these three cases does it specifically use this phrase. The rest of the time it speaks of the love of God. Strictly speaking, the love of Christ is the love of God. For example, in Romans 8:35 it says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" while in verse 39 it concludes, "Nor...will be able to separate us from the love of God." Thus we see the love of Christ and the love of God are one and the same. What I am going to speak about today is Christ's love towards three types of people.

## I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN ROMANS 8
## BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING

Every believer in this world has his unique experience, unique difficulty, and unique environment. Paul was saying that whatever problem we may have, the answer is always the love of Christ. Even if we have a hundred different kinds of difficulties, the solution is still the love of Christ. Some believers may encounter tribulation, some believers may be in anguish, others may encounter persecution, and still others, famine. Even if nakedness, peril, sword, etc. all come, they still cannot separate us from the love of Christ because the love of Christ can deal with all kinds of situations. Do we realize that after many people are captured by the love of Christ, they are able to pass through what other people cannot pass through?

A widow may live in great difficulty because of her husband's death. She may be unable to pay rent, and her possessions may be pawned. Under such circumstances, however, she still can keep her smile. When does she smile? When she looks at her child of less than one year in age, she smiles. The reason for her smile is love.

I really treasure the word in Romans 8:37 that "in all these things we more

than conquer"! We more than conquer in all these things, not out of all these things. If all these things did not happen, there would be no need to overcome. Many people think if there is no tribulation, anguish, or persecution, etc., they can overcome. But the Word of God says, "In all these things we more than conquer." It is the love of Christ that enables us to overcome all the tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, and danger. The love of Christ is a power which enables us to overcome all these things. All of these are bitter, but because we have tasted the love of Christ, we do not feel bitter about them anymore.

## II. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN 2 CORINTHIANS 5

## BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE SERVANTS

This love of Christ is for those who are servants, those who serve the Lord. "For the love of Christ constrains us" (v. 14). Constrains in the original text means something washed away by the torrent of water. This is the meaning here. The love of Christ carries us away like one being carried away by the power of water. David Livingstone said if someone could go to Africa for the slave business, would the love of Christ not be strong enough to constrain another to go to Africa? For that reason he went. Having been constrained by the love of Christ, he put aside his life, and countless numbers of people obtained life through him. Indeed, only the love of Christ can constrain a person. Love cannot be seen with the eyes. But once a person has tasted the sweetness and beauty of this love, it is impossible for him not to be washed away by its flow.

"We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised" (vv. 14-15). The love of Christ constrains us because we judge two things. First, if Christ died for all, then we all died. The love of Christ cannot be separated from the death of Christ; the reason for Christ's death is Christ's love. Second, those who live should no longer live to themselves but to the Lord who died and resurrected for them. This is the goal. I cannot help but live for Him because the love of Christ constrains me. I cannot hold onto my own standing anymore.

So many times we feel that it is so difficult to testify to a sinner. It seems that

we blush before we even utter anything. When I was first saved, I wanted to testify to a classmate; but when I approached him, it was so difficult to open my mouth. I went to him again and again, and every time I found myself reluctant to open my mouth to speak of Jesus. But when we are constrained by the love of Christ, we cannot help but testify. If we could choose, we would rather choose not to testify. But when we are constrained by the love of Christ, we cannot help but testify. Praise the Lord, His love constrains us.

Many times, we find that preaching the gospel is not an easy thing. Famine and persecution are unavoidable. I have had the experience of being threatened with a pistol not to preach Jesus any more. I would rather stop the mouth of the pistol with my body, but I cannot stop speaking about Christ. His love carries me away. I always urge young believers to consecrate themselves to the Lord. This is because He loves us. A number of brothers ask me what they should do in order to be a full-time evangelist. Unless we have to, it is better not to be a full-time preacher. Unless we have the feeling of "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16), it is better that we not try to be a full-time preacher. Only when we find Him irresistible will others find Him irresistible. Those who preach the gospel must do so through the constraining of Christ's love. I am not exhorting everyone to be a full-time preacher. However, every believer should testify. Brothers and sisters, have you ever told anyone of the love of Christ? Have you ever felt the love of God burning like a fire within you to the extent that you cannot help but speak of His love? Brothers and sisters! May the love of Christ fill us and constrain us today.

## III. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN EPHESIANS 3
## BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE LIKE STUDENTS

Ephesians 3:14-19: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father...that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." Here the love of Christ is for those who are like students. Paul was a very

learned man. Would Paul make a grammatical mistake and write poorly? Those who have read the original text of the New Testament agree that all the letters Paul wrote used complicated and difficult grammar. But in Ephesians 3, when he spoke of the love of Christ, Paul's grammar was wrong; his writing was not proper Greek. After writing the phrase, "apprehend with all the saints," he stopped. All of a sudden, he wrote these four words: "the breadth and length and height and depth." It seems that there is no connection between the previous text and the following text. Brothers and sisters, this is the real condition of one who speaks of the love of Christ. When Paul came to this point, he did not know how to go on, and he shouted, "The breadth! and length! and height! and depth!" He could not describe it. Even if we were to use the best rhetoric to describe the love of Christ, what we comprehend would be very different from what it really is. When we consider the love of Christ, it seems that our mind becomes powerless; we do not know how to describe it.

The word know is the same in meaning as the word apprehend. The love of Christ is incomprehensible, yet at the same time it is very apprehensible. Day after day while we live on earth, we learn a little more of the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love. There was a preacher who felt a great pressure once while he was preaching. He wanted to speak, but he could not utter anything. So he requested others to pray for him. While all the people were praying, one black person repeated over and over again, "Precious Jesus!" The preacher heard him praying this way for more than an hour. Later, the preacher said, "I have nothing to preach today, but I heard one sentence from a prayer: 'Precious Jesus!'"

Because of the constraining of Christ's love, we love Him though we have not seen Him. Because we believe in Him, we know that He is precious.

## MESSAGE TWO

# THE PRODIGAL SON

## •Scripture Reading: Luke 15:11-32

Luke 15:11-32 "And He said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me. And he distributed to them his living. And not many days after, the younger son, having gathered everything together, went abroad to a distant country and there squandered his estate by living dissolutely. And when he had spent all, a severe famine occurred throughout that country, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed hogs. And he longed to be satisfied with the carob pods which the hogs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine! I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants. And he rose up and came to his own father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fattened calf; slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry, Because this son of mine was dead and lives again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing, And calling to him one of the servants, he inquired what these things might be. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has received him back healthy. But he

became angry and was not willing to enter. And his father came out and entreated him. But he answered and said to his father, Behold, so many years I have been slaving for you and have never neglected a command of yours, and you have never given me a goat that I might be merry with my friends; But when this son of yours came, who devoured your living with harlots, you slaughtered for him the fattened calf. And he said to him, Child, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life, and he was lost and has been found."

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I have spoken on this passage three times already. Today I will not speak much about it again. I am not going to cover the whole parable but only point out a few things. I will speak a little here and a little there in a fragmentary way.

Verses 17 through 19 say, "But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine! I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." Whenever a sinner becomes repentant through the operation of his environment, he has a certain evaluation concerning his own salvation. If a man does not want to be saved, he will not have any consideration concerning his salvation; he will not care about the matter or be bothered about it. But once he is awakened, he will begin to consider how he can be saved and what are the conditions for one to be saved. If you ask any sinner about the way of salvation, you will find out that he has his own idea of being saved. God has His way of salvation, and a sinner has his way of salvation. I am afraid that with a hundred sinners, there are a hundred different ways of salvation. Everyone has his concept, and everyone has his evaluation. The prodigal son had his way of salvation. He thought that when he saw his father, his father would rebuke him with a stern face, and so he would answer, "The inheritance that you gave me has been spent. I cannot use another penny of yours anymore. But you are a rich man and have many hired servants. Just hire me as you have hired one of your servants." For him, salvation was not

to be a son but a slave only!

A sinner's way of salvation is by giving others what they deserve and receiving back what they deserve. It is by working for others and receiving wages from them. The amount of work one does is the amount of wages one receives. It is by being a slave and not a son.

Verses 20 through 22 say, "And he rose up and came to his own father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet." The prodigal son rose up to come to his father. When he saw the father, he repeated the speech he had planned. He said that he was not worthy to be called his son and was going to say more, "but the father said to his slaves." Hallelujah! "But the father." Salvation is according to God's concept and not according to our concept. No one in the world is saved according to what he thinks but according to what God thinks. The prodigal son's concept was to only be a hired servant. Our thoughts are filled with the law, which is always a question of doing something and receiving something back in return.

The prodigal son had prepared a speech for his father. But when he saw the father and was touched by his love, the prepared sentence, "Make me like one of your hired servants," did not come out. If we read the whole passage carefully, we will see that he did not say these words because he was interrupted by his father and had no chance; it was not because he did not want to continue speaking. His father had heard enough and did not want to wait for him to finish his words. "But the father said to his slaves, Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet."

Salvation tells us how God wants to treat us, not how we think that God should treat us. According to our concept, we will always be a hired servant. When we remember the Lord, we think of ourselves as sinners, but God considers us as sons. We think that we deserve to perish, but He puts us at the feasting table. We cannot speak enough of God's grace. Even as we repeat it again

and again, we are not afraid that it will occupy too much of our mind. We may think that we are not worthy to be called sons, but He has done more than we can imagine. Thank the Lord that salvation is not according to our thoughts or our concepts but according to God's thought.

While the prodigal was still a long way off, the father saw him and was moved with compassion. The Samaritan saw the man who fell among the robbers on his way to Jericho and was moved with compassion (Luke 10:30-35). What is compassion? Only after a person has fallen into a low estate can compassion be exercised. Compassion is directed downward from above; it is applied in mercy towards someone. If the son had come back in a grand manner, there would have been no way that the father could have shown compassion toward him. How was compassion exercised? When the father saw that the son had degraded into the position of a beggar and actually was a beggar, compassion was exercised. Only a beggar can become a son. Only a beggar standing by the door can sit at the feasting table. Only a beggar far from God can draw nigh to Him. When our condition becomes that of a beggar, God's compassion is moved.

We should see that the son thought he was not worthy to be called a son; he thought that he would only be a hired servant. But the father told the slaves to bring the best robe out quickly and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. This shows us that salvation demonstrates God's riches and not our poverty. There are some preachers who have been preaching for many years, who still do not understand salvation. Salvation tells us how rich God is. Many times, we think that we are not worthy. When we are somewhat awakened, we are not sure if God will forgive us when we call on Him. It seems as if someone like us has no ground to call on Him at all. But I have to say that our eyes are set on the wrong thing. A rich man has untold riches; he does not think about how much his son has spent but about how much he can give to his son for him to spend.

Let me give an illustration here; it may not be the most appropriate illustration. Once I met a rich man's son. I tried my best to persuade him to repent and believe in the Lord. One day he took me to his father. I told the father

not to stop the son from believing in the Lord, and that if the son believed in the Lord, he would not spend his father's money carelessly anymore. But he said, "What I have is money. I am not afraid of his spending my money." He was not concerned about his son spending too much of his money. In the same way, our God is not concerned that we would spend too much. We think that God has only one hundred dollars and that we need one hundred and one dollars. We are always afraid that after we have spent everything, nothing will be left. But what our Father has is "money"; do not try to limit God. We should realize that salvation tells us how rich God is; it tells us that God has enough for us to spend again and again.

Some may think, "I am not able to overcome a certain sin. I have exhausted all means." But can we say to God that He cannot do anything regarding our particular sin? Many times we do not behave well as a Christian; we become weak and sinful, and our conscience tells us that our condition is hopeless. But the conscience only tells us our condition, while the blood tells us the way that God deals with our condition. The conscience tells us how we are in ourselves, but the blood tells us how God deals with us. Our conscience has been sprinkled by the blood. We have not only the conscience and the blood in the basin, we have the blood sprinkled in our conscience. The blood is not separated from the conscience, and the conscience is not separated from the blood. Rather, we have a conscience sprinkled with the blood, a conscience which is whiter than snow and cannot be made whiter than it already is.

God also has a robe for us, and He is not afraid that we will sell it. He has a ring for us, and He is not afraid that we will pawn it. He has sandals for us, and He is not afraid that we will wear them out. God's children ought to be adorned well and appear attractive. God has enough for those of His household to spend.

Verse 23 says, "And bring the fattened calf; slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry." The robe, ring, and sandals in the previous verse are for the son alone to enjoy because a robe can only be upon one person, a ring can only be upon one hand, and a pair of sandals can only be upon one pair of feet. However, a fattened calf cannot be consumed by one person alone; rather, "let us eat and be merry." Let me give a new thought today, God can be merry! On the night I was saved, I

was so happy. The more I considered, the happier I became, and the happier I became, the more I sang. Although I did not have a tune or a song, I could not care less. This is the joy of a sinner concerning his salvation. But this verse tells us that God can be merry also. It is the joy of God's salvation of man! When a sinner is saved, we think how happy he is. But we have not seen how happy God is when He saves a sinner. When we see this, we will understand God's heart.

Verse 29 says, "But he answered and said to his father, Behold, so many years I have been slaving for you and have never neglected a command of yours, and you have never given me a goat that I might be merry with my friends." This was the word of the older son to the father. The heart of the older son was on the father's happy giving to the younger son. The younger son had spent all, yet the father was happy. The older son had fulfilled his duty in the father's house. His mistake was that he only wanted his father to make him happy. The father wanted the older son to go and join the merriment. Our God wants us to be merry with Him. We have to take care of His heart. The older son wanted a goat for his own merriment. But in everything that God does, He never gives anything to man to enjoy by himself; He always gives something with the intention that man would enjoy it together with Him.

Let us compare two things, the kissing and the feasting. The father fell on the neck of the son and kissed him affectionately. Such kissing caused the son to be happy and satisfied. When the son was kissed this way, he knew that his father had forgiven him and would no longer remember his sin. He received the freedom of forgiveness and was satisfied. At the same time, while the son was sitting at the feast, the father's heart was happy and satisfied because he had gained his son back. Many people do not realize that when a man is saved, God is happy. They think that God has saved them because of their strong pleading. They do not realize that God is happy to save. In saving men, God receives the joy.

When we hear the Father telling us that our sins are forgiven, we have peace and joy. If we have not yet received the freedom of forgiveness, we are indeed poor men. All who are sitting here today have heard that their sins are forgiven; they have peace and do not need to ask anyone or look for any other evidence. As long as God has said it, it is enough. When He says that we are forgiven, we are

forgiven. Unfortunately, we only enjoy half of the happiness; we have not yet entered into God's happiness, enjoyed His happiness, and allowed Him to enjoy His happiness over us. Real worship is having the happiness which God has. Some have said it well, that worship is not just to thank Him but to consider Him as one's joy. We joy in God. There is a phrase in Psalms which says that God is our exaltation's rejoicing (Psa. 43:4). We should all consider God as our exaltation's rejoicing.

Verse 24 says, "Because this son of mine was dead and lives again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to be merry." God says that we should be merry. What are the reasons for being merry? There are two reasons. The first is that the son was dead and now lives. The second is that the son was lost and now is found. This is why we should be merry. Being dead and living again is the son's gaining something. Being lost and being found again is the father's gaining something. The prodigal son was originally a son; now he becomes a son once again. Man was first created by God, but later he fell and was as good as dead. When the Lord Jesus came to save men, He caused dead men to become alive again. This is to be dead and live again. This is not the part we emphasize today. What we will pay attention to today is to be lost and found again.

There are three parables in Luke 15. They are the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Have you ever thought about this? With these three losses, who do you think is the one that lost them? We think that the lost sheep was poor, who was probably fumbling in the barren hills and the scattered rocks, and who had probably fallen into the thorny paths. We forget that the one who lost the sheep was the shepherd. The one who suffered was the shepherd. The one who was poor was the shepherd. We wonder where the lost coin was, but we forget that it was the woman who had lost the coin and it was she who suffered. In the last parable we always think about the poor prodigal son, who wandered in destitution and longed to be satisfied with carob pods when no one would give him anything. When we consider how he turned, we rejoice for the great blessing he received. But who was the one who had lost the son? It was not the son but the father. The poor one was the father; the suffering one was the father. It was the father who had sacrificed his heart and wasted his money on

his son's education. This is why the father said that his son was lost and now was found, and why they began to be merry. Have we ever thought that when we turn back and obey, God's heart will rejoice? The highest point of the gospel is not to show us what the sinner has received but what God has obtained. We have squandered the money, but God has suffered. We should give ourselves totally to God. How much have we given to God? Do not think that it is all right to be a little cold. We have to realize how much God suffers by our little coldness. Do not think that it is all right to love the world a little and be mixed with it a little. We have to realize how much this affects God. This will cause God to suffer. Every time we come before God, consecrate ourselves to Him once again, and deny ourselves once again, God gains something, and we are giving joy to God.

Our personal, petty gains and losses are worth nothing. What counts is for God to gain something. It is a wonderful thought that every time we choose the way of submission to God, we make His heart happy and gain something for Him. God can create the universe, and He can give things to men. But it is possible for Him to lose the heart of men! God cannot force man's heart to go His way! What a joy to consider that a God as great as ours, who is omnipotent, who has everything, and who is the Creator of everything, would want something from those who are like worms and dust! He said, "We had to be merry and rejoice" (v. 32). The return of a prodigal son can cause God to rejoice. The God who holds the universe will rejoice at a little obedience from us. Consecration is not an imposition or concession but a way for us to enter into the joy of God; it makes God happy on account of us. How amazing this is! May we all enter into the joy of God today, and may we all render Him the joy.

# MESSAGE THREE

## SALVATION BY BAPTISM

## ●Outline

- ●A Few Types Of Salvation
- ●The Judgment Of The Flood
- ●The Salvation Of The Ark
- ●The Ark And Baptism
- ●A Few Words To Those Who Are Not Clear About Salvation

## ●Scripture Reading: Gen. 6:1-9, 8:1a, 4-5, 13-18, 20-21; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Mark 16:16a

Gen. 6:1-9 "And when men began to multiply on the surface of the ground, and daughters were born to them, The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took wives for themselves from all whom they chose. And Jehovah said, My Spirit will not strive with man forever, for he indeed is flesh; so his days will be one hundred twenty years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days-and also afterward-when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; these were the mighty men who were of old the men of renown. And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah repented that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him in His heart. And Jehovah said, I will blot out the man whom I have created from the surface of the ground, from man to beast to creeping things to the birds of heaven; for I repent that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the sight of Jehovah. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations; and Noah walked with God."

8:1a "And God remembered Noah and all the animals and all the cattle that

were with him in the ark;…"

4-5 "And the ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters diminished steadily until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen."

13-18 "And in the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and saw that now the surface of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. And God spoke to Noah, saying, Go forth from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you; Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh-birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth that they may swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth. So Noah went forth, as well as his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him."

20-21 "And Noah built an altar to Jehovah and took of every clean beast and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And Jehovah smelled the satisfying fragrance; and Jehovah said in His heart, I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I ever again smite everything living as I have done."

1 Pet. 3:20-21 "Who had formerly disobeyed when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared; entering into which, a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water. Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh but the appeal of a good conscience unto God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Mark 16:16a "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved,…"

* * * *

We are all familiar with the story of Noah. Most church- goers are also well acquainted with this story. We have probably heard the story of the ark many times. Today we want to consider what the Bible really teaches us concerning the

ark. In the Bible there are different meanings to the matter of salvation. In some cases, salvation has to do with our position before God. In other cases it has to do with our acceptance before Him. Some cases have to do with our fellowship with God, while others have to do with our position in the world. It seems that salvation is not that simple and is somewhat confusing. But I can explain and clarify this with a little illustration.

## A FEW TYPES OF SALVATION

In Genesis 3 we see the coats of skins. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (v. 21). This is a type of salvation. But which aspect of salvation does it typify? It typifies our justification before God. The sacrifice of Abel in Genesis 4 is also a type of salvation. God was not pleased with the sacrifice of Cain, but accepted the sacrifice of Abel. Because Cain offered his sacrifice out of himself, God was not pleased with it. Abel's sacrifice was based on the redeeming lamb and accepted by God. All the sacrifices in the Bible speak of God's acceptance. The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 also speaks of God's acceptance of sinners. Ephesians 1 says that God has accepted us in His Beloved. Hence, Genesis 4 is a type of salvation in which God accepts man. The rapture of Enoch in Genesis 5 is also a type of salvation. It is a type of salvation in the aspect of overcoming death.

Genesis 3 is a type of justification. Genesis 4 is a type of God's acceptance, and Genesis 5 is a type of victory over death. The ark in chapter six is also a type. But this type is different from those in Genesis 3 through 5. The first type speaks of our justification before God; the second type speaks of our acceptance before God; while the third speaks of victory over death and receiving eternal life. In chapter six we see the relationship between a Christian and the world. How can a Christian be delivered from all the things that God has condemned? How can he be delivered from all the things that are under God's judgment? The way we receive God's salvation speaks of the way to be delivered from God's condemnation and judgment. This kind of deliverance is one in which we escape out of a certain kind of snare.

There are different kinds of sins. The sins mentioned in Genesis 3 through 6

are all different. Sin against God is mentioned in chapter three; it is a sin before God, a sin of disobedience against God. Man's sin before God requires God's coats of skins for covering so that man can be justified before God. Sin against both God and one's neighbor is mentioned in chapter four. Cain committed the sin of murdering his own brother. He broke two of God's commandments: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This sin requires a sacrifice before one can be accepted again before God. Even when a person has committed a sin before men, he has to be accepted before God first; without this his sin is not yet behind him. The sin of forgetting God is mentioned in chapter five; it is different from the sins in chapters three and four. Men ignored God and acted according to their own will. Daily they ate their own bread and lived their own lives. But in this chapter we see one man who walked with God. While the whole world was filled with death, and man rejected God, He delivered Enoch out of that world of death, and caused him not to see death. The sin of the world as a whole being in opposition to God is mentioned in chapter six. The sin in chapter three is personal sin; the sin in chapter four is one person's sin against another; the sin in chapter five is the sin of the majority of the people; while the sin in chapter six is the corporate sin. Chapter six is on humanity as a world organization, association, and sphere. Consequently, the sin in chapter six speaks of the whole human race sinning against God. Chapter six presents the sphere of the world; it speaks of the world having sinned.

## THE JUDGMENT OF THE FLOOD

Now let us consider chapter six. The beginning of this chapter speaks of fallen angels and sinful men, and how they collaborated to sin. We do not have to ask about the special significance of this passage. All we need to know is that the sons of God, who were fallen angels, and the daughters of men, who were sinful men, were both created by God; they both had spirits. When they collaborated to sin, that was the end of the world. In the first world the angels sinned, and in the second world men sinned. Hence, when angels and men joined together to sin, we know that the end was near, and the sinful angels and sinful men were about

to be judged by God.

By this time, man had become extremely fleshly. Whether he was practicing good in the flesh or committing sins in the flesh, he had become utterly fleshly. Therefore, God would not strive with him anymore. Originally, the Spirit of God strove with man. But now man had disobeyed God and degraded to the point where God's Spirit could no longer strive with him. In other words, man had become so corrupt that God's Spirit was no longer able to contend with him. To put it in another way, man had become so corrupt that even the Holy Spirit could not change him. When a man has become fleshly, the Holy Spirit can do nothing about him; even his own devices cannot change him. As a result the Holy Spirit could only retreat and allow the world to go through judgment. Please remember that our flesh today is no better than man's flesh in Noah's time. If a man has not crucified his flesh with its lusts on the cross, the Holy Spirit cannot operate on him. The Holy Spirit does not exhort man to improve himself, because man can never improve himself. The Holy Spirit only convicts man to be born again. There is no ability in the flesh to do good and not sin. Only those who are regenerated and who have received the new life can meet God's standard. Being regenerated is not merely to weep, confess, become zealous, study the Bible much, or pray much. Being regenerated is to receive another life, a life that comes from God. It is inheriting another life from God. Regeneration is being born a second time.

Because the world is full of sin, some groundwork must be done before the Holy Spirit can operate. After man fell into sin, it became difficult for the Holy Spirit to do anything. The first thing God did after man sinned was to send the Lord Jesus to the world. Since man had become a sinner, the Lord Jesus had to first come. It would have been useless for the Holy Spirit to come first. The Lord Jesus must first judge a sinner before the Holy Spirit can begin His work. This is why the first parable in Luke 15 is on the good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, who came to seek the lost sheep. The second parable is on the woman, the Holy Spirit, who came to sweep the house and look for the lost coin. Without Christ's work of redemption, the Holy Spirit cannot work. The work of the Holy Spirit cannot commence until the work of Christ has been completed. Because the work of

Christ has been completed, the Holy Spirit can begin His work. Therefore, there must first be the work of redemption in Genesis 6, before there can be the work of the Holy Spirit, as typified by the dove, in chapter eight. God must do one thing first before the Holy Spirit can come to perform His work.

Genesis 6:13 says, "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." In God's eyes, the whole world was full of sins and violence; it was fully corrupt. God said that its end had come. Men had reached the end of themselves. God could do nothing except to bring them to their end. When God saw that the earth was full of sins and violence, He judged it. God put all flesh and all living creatures through the judgment of the flood and destroyed them all.

Many Christians are not clear about the place of the world in the eyes of God. Exhorting the brothers and sisters to forsake the world is like a mother trying to pull a piece of chocolate out of the mouth of a child. This is so difficult because men have not seen the significance of the world in God's eyes. Salvation is not just a personal matter, but a corporate matter. Sin is not only a personal matter, but a corporate matter. It was not just the Jews who crucified the Lord Jesus; the world crucified Him. The Jews are not the only ones who are at enmity with God; the whole world is at enmity with God. If a nation is at enmity with another nation, is the enmity a personal matter or a national matter? We know that it is not a personal matter. If a few citizens of one hostile country are well-disposed toward the citizens of another country, the relationship is a personal matter. Whether or not a citizen of the hostile nation is good is not the question. The fact is that the whole nation is at enmity with another nation. One does not hate a citizen of a hostile nation because his own parents are killed by the hostile nation. This is a relationship between one nation and another. Not only is the world at enmity with God as far as each individual person is concerned, but the total realm, organization, tradition, system, and everything of the world is at enmity with God. As long as you have a part in the worldly realm, organization, tradition, or system, you are at enmity with God, and you are in need of being saved from it. If you see this, you will not exhort others to do this and that to

improve themselves, remove their shortcomings, amend their ways, do good, or free themselves from other ills. All these efforts are useless. In God's eyes, the whole world is corrupt. God is at enmity with the world. Those who love the world cannot love God. If anyone loves the world, the love of God is no longer in him. Those who want to be friends with the world are at enmity with God. This is God's view.

Brothers and sisters, do you want to be delivered from hell, that is, the lake of fire? I suppose we all do. We want to be in the New Jerusalem. Many people want to be saved because they want to be delivered from hell, the lake of fire, and go to heaven, the New Jerusalem. This is the kind of salvation many people want. But the Bible speaks very little of this kind of salvation. The Bible calls this kind of salvation justification, or acceptance by God. But there is another kind of salvation in the Bible, which is salvation from the world. If we are not saved from the world, we cannot be saved from the lake of fire.

Genesis 6:8 says that God found only one man, Noah. The first man was corrupted and had come to his end; he was hopeless. Therefore, God found a second man, Noah. This second man found favor in the eyes of God; he is a type of Christ. Through him God established a way of salvation for man to be delivered out of the world. God ordered him to make an ark of gopher wood, and all the living creatures—the fowls, cattle, and every creeping thing, each after its kind—were brought into the ark. Then He sent rain to the earth, and the flood came and covered the whole earth. Who were the saved ones? They were the ones who were delivered from the world, the ones who were in the ark. The ones who were delivered from the world were the ones who were delivered from the flood. Those who are saved from the world are the ones who are saved from the lake of fire. It will not be sinners who will go to hell, but the world that will go to hell. Preachers always tell others that sinners will go to hell. Actually, the world will go to hell. As long as you are a person in the world, you will go to hell.

Once I met a person on a boat, who asked, "Who deserves to go to hell?" I answered, "People like you." Every person, as long as he is a human being, deserves to go to hell. The meaning of salvation is to be saved from the community of the perishing ones. It is to be saved out of the perishing realm.

Although we are not individual criminals, we are still sinners. The Bible does not say that we are criminals, but that we are sinners. It says that everyone in the world is a sinner. Suppose a brother has not committed a certain kind of sin. Since he has not broken the law, he is not a criminal. Therefore, we cannot say that everyone in the world is a criminal. Yet everyone is a sinner. Hence, salvation is being delivered from the world; it is to save a person out of the God-condemned world.

## THE SALVATION OF THE ARK

At that time, Noah and all the living creatures—the fowls, cattle, and creeping things—were saved. Noah is a type of the Savior, and the ark is also a type of the Savior. Noah is a type of the Son of God, while the ark is a type of the Son of Man. The ark was made of gopher wood, and it is a type of the humanity of the Lord Jesus. The salvation that they experienced was a salvation out of the world. At that time, all the fountains of the great deep burst open, the windows of heaven were opened, and the flood came upon the whole earth. This was not a judgment on individuals, but a judgment on the whole world. Salvation is being saved from the world community. All those who were in the ark were saved out of the world. A saved person cannot be saved on the one hand, yet still remain in the world on the other hand. He cannot ride on the fence, with one foot in the ark and the other foot in the world. Everyone who entered the ark was locked inside the ark. After a person is saved, he cannot love the world on the one hand, and love the Lord on the other hand. You may try to do this in secret, but God will not allow you to do this before Him. Therefore, every saved person should reject the world completely and have no love for the world. We should not think that even though certain matters are worldly, we only need to change them a little or turn them around a little. Fundamentally speaking, God has delivered us totally out of the world. Since we are out of the world, we should live a life that is out of the world. This is different from exhorting people to not love the world. The citizens of one nation are at enmity with those of a hostile nation because a hostile relationship exists between the two nations, not because they have been slapped on the face by someone in the hostile nation. This is the issue among us today.

We are those who are delivered out from the world. How are we saved from the world? The world has been usurped, and mankind in general has stood against God. As a result God saves men out of the world. He prepared an ark and brought man out of the world and into the ark. God brought all the living creatures on earth into death, but the human beings and the living creatures within the ark were brought out of the world and through death. Then He released them out of the ark, in order that they would fill the earth. This earth was a new world. This means that the old head, Adam, and everything in him was rejected, while the new head, Noah, and everything in Noah was ready to express the new life so that his descendants could inhabit the whole earth. Those on the new earth typified those who would be in Christ in the future, inheriting the new heaven and the new earth. The ones within the ark typify those who are in Christ. Therefore, the ones who are in Christ will be in the new heaven and the new earth. The ones outside the ark typify the ones who are in Adam, who will be judged by God in the future. The ones within the ark are in Christ; they have the new life to enter the new heaven and the new earth. The descendants of the new life will fill the new earth. Everyone who entered the ark was brought through the water of judgment into the new earth. This signifies that Christ will fill the new heaven and the new earth.

"And the ark rested...upon the mountains of Ararat" (8:4). The name Ararat means "holy ground." This typifies resurrection, the coming out of death; it also typifies the Lord's ascension. The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, which means that the mountaintops were visible. Today we are also on top of our "Ararat"; we have seen the mountaintops, and we are waiting for the land to dry. Our Lord has died, resurrected, and ascended. We are remaining on the mountains of Ararat, waiting for the land to dry. This means that we are waiting for God to judge the earth.

## THE ARK AND BAPTISM

Our focus is not on the many things mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Our special attention is on the matter of baptism. We have seen what Noah did, and how he passed through death. We have seen the flood, and how the saved

ones entered the ark to pass through death and were then ushered into the new earth. First Peter 3 says that the ark's passage through the water is a type of baptism. Some who are sitting here are already baptized. Some are not yet baptized. The water of the flood is a type of the water of baptism. First Peter 3:20-21 says, "Who had formerly disobeyed when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared; entering into which, a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water. Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism." What saves us? What is the subject of this clause? The subject is the baptism typified by the water. The verb is "saves." What saves us? Baptism saves us. Is this not amazing? Can baptism save a person? I must tell you that unless you are baptized, you will not be saved. Peter said the same thing, that the baptism, signified by the flood, saves us through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In addition, Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved."

Many of us have changed Mark 16:16 to read, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized." But the Bible says that baptism comes before salvation. Many of us are confused. We think that we have to be saved before we can be baptized. But the Bible says that those who are not baptized cannot be saved, and that once a person is baptized, he is saved. If a man is saved, it is because he is baptized. If there are a million people in heaven, they are there because they have been baptized.

Do not misunderstand the meaning of salvation by baptism. The Bible speaks of salvation in different aspects. The part of salvation that is known as justification deals with man's position before God. The part of salvation that deals with God's acceptance of man emphasizes the distinction between the world and the believers. The part of salvation that has to do with forgiveness deals with the propitiation of our past sins. The part of salvation that has to do with receiving eternal life points to our separation from death. The part of salvation that deals with the kind of deliverance spoken of here has to do particularly with our relationship with the world. Salvation does not mean merely a deliverance from hell in the future. Strictly speaking, according to the Bible, salvation refers to our deliverance from the world today. How do others

know that we are saved? How do others know that we belong to Christ? We say that we are saved, but can we open up our hearts to show others that we are saved? We cannot see faith with our eyes. Who can see faith? God sees and knows that we are justified, accepted, forgiven, and have received the eternal life, but man does not see it. James told us that man's eyes cannot see our faith; they can see only our work. The first work of every Christian before men is the act of baptism. Our first work before God is to believe, but our first work before men is to be baptized. Baptism is salvation from the world into Christ. It is coming out of one's own house into the ark. Baptism is a declaration to the world, as Noah declared that God's judgment, wrath, and punishment would fall upon the world because of its opposition, rebellion, and rejection of God. He was no longer one of them, and he left them to enter the ark that God had prepared for him.

Therefore, baptism is not just a sprinkling of water on the head, nor an immersion of the body in the water. Baptism is a declaration to the whole world that the world has nothing more to do with us and that we are delivered from the world. The real significance of baptism is that we are no longer living in the world, we are now dead through the judgment on the Lord Jesus, and we will never rise up again. Although we are in the water only for a brief moment, it spiritually means that we will never come out of the water again. From this point on, in the eyes of the world, we are forever separated from it and have no share in it anymore; we will never come back again. Men of this world are most attached to their parents, wife, children, and dear ones. But if one of their dear ones were to die, they would not want to have the dead person around anymore. They would never take a dead man out of the grave and put him in their house to live with them. This should be the way the world looks at a Christian; they should consider him a dead man who has been buried in the grave.

There are two great communities in this world: one is the world community, and the other is the community of those who are saved in Christ. Being saved is being delivered out of the world community which opposes God, which is sinful and unclean, and entering into the community of Christ. This is why we have to be baptized. By baptism we are saved. (Of course, we must first believe in the Lord. Those who do not believe in the Lord cannot be saved.) Mark 16:16 says,

"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Baptism signals a deliverance; it is a great deliverance. It delivers us from the world and everything that is of the world. But baptism is not only a deliverance out of something; it is also an entry into something. Baptism is a grand entry. It is to enter into Christ and enter into His death.

Everyone who believes will have eternal life because of the blood of the Lord Jesus. We cannot deny this. However, we are saved from the world because of our entry into the ark. Baptism signifies that we are delivered from the world community. Suppose someone asks if you have believed in the Lord. You have to say yes; your sins have been forgiven because of the blood of the Lord. The Bible says that he who has the Son of God has life. You may know that you have life, and you may be very clear that you have believed in the Son of God as your Savior. But suppose you lose your temper, argue, and even fight with two or three brothers. After the fight, if you check with yourself, you will realize that you are still a believer and that you are still saved. You will not have any doubt about this. But the other brothers will doubt that you are saved. What does this mean? I can tell you that many people are qualified to go to heaven, but they are not qualified to live on earth. Many people are qualified to live before God, but are not qualified to live before their family. Many people are good enough to live in heaven, but are not good enough to live on earth. This is why you cannot allow others to baptize you into the water or sprinkle water on your forehead based on what you have believed. You must know yourself what baptism is, before you can be baptized. You must know that you have been delivered from the world already. Baptism is a declaration and an announcement to the world that you are no longer joined to the world and that you are no longer standing on its side. You are delivered from the world, and baptism is your declaration that you are standing on the side of Christ from now on.

I am not trying to persuade you to be baptized. I am showing you that before you are baptized, you have to realize that there are two opposing camps, the camp of Adam and the camp of Christ. There is no middle ground between these two camps. At the time of Noah, God declared that the world was His enemy and that the world was at enmity with God. He appointed a way of

salvation—everyone who entered the ark stood on God's side and obeyed God. It is interesting to see that the Bible refers to the entry into the ark and the deliverance from the flood as a type of baptism. Therefore, we have to speak this word to all the ones who are about to be baptized, as well as to all the other brothers and sisters. Many people are baptized already, and a good number are also baptized among us. Why were you baptized? Was it because it was a church practice, a church ritual, a commandment of the Bible, a sign of seriousness in being a Christian, or because other Christians were doing it? Baptism is turning one's back to the world and facing Christ. It is being delivered from the world community and entering into the community of Christ. There is no middle ground between the world and Christ. There was a door on the ark. This door signifies that everything within the door was in the realm of Christ, and everything outside this door was in the realm of the world. If we see this, we will not need anyone to come and tell us at the time of baptism that we need to change ourselves in certain matters. We will know what to do. We will not have to deal with the world like pulling out hairs, plucking them out one by one; instead we can shave them off all at once. It is a pity that many among us do not see this.

We try to change the world, but God is giving us a new world. No human method, such as religious dogmas, literature, science, philosophy, or moral teachings, can change this world. God shows us that even though the world is lovable and enjoyable, it is God's enemy. Living in the world means that you cherish the hope that it will change. Yet God has no hope of changing the world. He has no other way of dealing with the world than to judge it. For the world to improve and be reformed through human methods would take many many years. Thank God that He needs only to wash the world with water and it will become the new earth. In the days of Noah, God washed the world with water. In the future He will burn it with fire. Are we like Lot, tarrying in Sodom and Gomorrah, waiting to be burned by fire? Or are we untouched by the world? Unfortunately, many are like Lot's wife; they live in the world. Are we living in the world, or are we letting all these things go and looking forward to the new heaven and new earth, where righteousness dwells?

On top of the ark was a window or a "light-inlet." This word is used in the Old Testament twenty-four times. The word is translated as noon twenty-three times. This is the only place where it is translated as window or "light-inlet." The light that passed through this window was not a weak light, but a bright light. This is living in the light of God.

## A FEW WORDS TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT CLEAR ABOUT SALVATION

I have to say a few words to those who are not saved. It is an undeniable fact that we cannot improve the world and God will judge it. How are you going to escape God's judgment? There was pitch within and without the ark. The word pitch is the same word as redemption in the original language. Therefore, pitch signifies redemption or propitiation. The ark was pitched within and without, which is a type of the Lord's redemption. Redemption is brought in by the blood of the Lord Jesus, and the lives of all those who are in the ark are preserved. The flood was outside the ark. The world was filled with the flood, and it was dying because of the flood. Yet within the ark everything was living. All punishment has fallen on Christ, the ark; it is no longer on us. The only way for those who desire peace, forgiveness, and deliverance is to enter into the ark. Even if the world were to make ten thousand ships, it would be to no avail.

The world was filled with God's judgment, yet the ark was pitched within. This is a type of the redemptive work of Christ. The ark was also pitched without, which also is a type of the redemptive work of Christ. If you are inside the ark, God's judgment will not come upon you. Suppose there is a person, let us say that she is Japheth's wife, or Noah's wife. Suppose she is weeping inside the ark, saying, "What will we do if the ark leaks and sinks?" We would all laugh at her. Let me ask: If you acknowledge the redemptive work of Christ and believe that His crucifixion on the cross is for your redemption, why are you afraid to declare that you are saved? Why are you still restless? You may consider what would happen if the blood of the Lord Jesus became ineffective. You should ask yourself at this hour if you have truly believed, and if you have truly put your faith in the accomplished work of Christ. Would the ark leak? A person once came to Mr. D. L.

Moody with tears on his cheeks. When Mr. Moody asked him for the reason, he said, "I am afraid of perdition. I have believed in the Lord. But what should I do to save myself from perdition?" Mr. Moody told him the Scripture says that those who believe have eternal life, and that he who comes to the Lord will not be rejected, and that God will save to the uttermost those who come to Him. He used similar texts to talk to the man for two to three hours, but the man's problem was still not resolved. He continued to say, "I have indeed believed in the Lord, but I am still afraid that I will perish." Mr. Moody then said, "You remind me of one of Noah's daughters-in-law, who perhaps wept within the ark for fear of the ark leaking." The man said, "Sir, how can that be? The ark would never leak." Mr. Moody then answered, "You are the person who is weeping inside the ark. You are afraid that the ark will leak." When that man heard this, he became clear.

The Lord Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through Him. It does not matter whether you are wise or foolish. Whether or not you are saved depends on whether you are inside the ark. It has nothing to do with whether you are intelligent or foolish, rich or poor. None of these things counts. The only question is whether or not you are inside the ark. Only those who enter the ark through the work of Christ are saved. The number of people who enter the ark will be the same number that come out of the ark. The number of lives within the ark is the number of lives preserved by God.

If you want to be a genuine Christian, you have to be within the ark; you cannot remain on the earth. You cannot be saved by your own works. You must declare to the Lord: "Everything that is of the world has nothing to do with me. I stand on Your side." Salvation is accomplished once you enter the gate. Unfortunately, many people have only believed in the Lord; they have not cut off all ties with the world. Therefore, you must not only be faithful to serve God, but you must be faithful to do what you testified at the time of your baptism.

Baptism cannot save a person. Salvation comes through the Lord's death and resurrection alone. However, baptism is an expression of our salvation. The blood of the Lord Jesus saves you into God's presence, while the water of baptism saves you out of the world. Even if you forget everything that we have

spoken of today, as long as you can remember the difference between these two salvations, it will be good enough.

## MESSAGE FOUR

# BAPTISM AND SALVATION

## •Scripture Reading: Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9-10

Mark 16:16 “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.”

Rom. 10:9-10 “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; For with the heart there is believing unto righteousness, and with the mouth there is confession unto salvation.”

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In the mind of many people, Mark 16:16 reads, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized." They think that as long as they believe in the Lord, they will be saved, and that after they are saved, they should be baptized. But my Bible does not say this. It says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." This means that it is not enough for a person to believe; he must also be baptized before he can be saved. What does this mean? You have to realize that there are many meanings to the word salvation. One meaning refers to the blessing in the kingdom. Another meaning refers to our departure from the world when the Lord comes back. Still another meaning refers to our present overcoming, and a fourth refers to our going to heaven. Romans 10 and Mark 16 mean none of the above. They do not refer to the blessing in the millennium. Neither do they refer to the redemption of our body at the coming of the Lord, nor to the salvation of our soul-life in the future. They refer to something else, something special. Every believer can experience the various aspects of salvation mentioned above. I cannot speak on all these today. When I heard that someone would be baptized today, I thought about the matter of salvation. I wonder how many people understand the salvation that is spoken of in Romans 10 and Mark 16. Therefore,

we will spend some time to consider this matter today.

There is a common thought that one is baptized when he has believed and been saved. But the Bible clearly says that he who believes and is baptized is saved. Baptism comes first, and then salvation. You may ask what this salvation refers to. Please recall how a person receives eternal life. He receives life through believing. He receives eternal life through accepting the Lord Jesus into his heart as his life. The gospel of John clearly speaks of this. Although you may have believed, how do I know that you have believed? Although you say that you have received eternal life, how do I know? Suppose a man has believed, but he never comes to the meeting, never breaks bread with us, and has not been baptized. He continues to be a Christian in secret and lives like the worldly people, without letting anyone know that he is a Christian. I would say that he has life, but that he is not saved. Truly, he is saved before God. But he is not saved before us and before the world. Therefore, you have to remember that one aspect of salvation has to do with our separation from the world. A man can be a Christian in secret and go to heaven when he dies. Although he may not know what will happen when the Lord comes to judge the believers, he knows that he will have eternal salvation. But during the fifty or sixty years of his life on earth, he is not saved. In the eyes of the Lord, he is saved. However, in the eyes of man, he is not saved because even though he has believed, he has not been baptized. Therefore, he is still not saved to others.

Our salvation before the Lord merely gives us His life. But we must live out this life so that others can see His life; then we are saved in their eyes. After doing this, other believers will recognize us as brothers, and the Gentiles will call us Christians. The world will realize that we no longer belong to it, and the brothers will say that we belong with them. Then we will have a change. We will be freed from the old realm and enter a new realm, and others will sense that we are really separated from them. This is what is meant by salvation through believing and being baptized. I will take this opportunity today to say a few words while some of you are being baptized. As long as a person believes in the Lord, he has life. But he must be baptized before he can be saved. There are many Moslems who are Christians in secret. No one bothers them if they only believe

in the Lord. But the minute they are baptized, they may even be poisoned to death, because the minute they are baptized, they are saved and separated from the others, and others see a difference in them. They have proven in an outward way that they are Christians and demonstrated the faith that is in their hearts. Therefore, they can no longer be tolerated. To believe is to have life within, while to be baptized is to be saved without. When a person is baptized, he demonstrates in an outward way that he belongs to Christ, and others realize that there is a difference in him. This is why baptism is not a small thing.

Romans 10 says the same thing: "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation" (v. 10). Does this mean that as long as one confesses with his mouth he can go to heaven? Must one confess with his mouth before he can go to heaven? No, there are many dumb ones who can go to heaven. Confession with the mouth merely shows those in the world that you are different from them, and that you have been delivered out from their midst. Therefore brothers, let us pay attention to this aspect of salvation. Numerous Christians have life within, but this life cannot be seen outwardly at all. Although they are saved before the Lord, before their friends, brothers, family, and colleagues, they are not saved. I can illustrate this with an example. The last time I took a boat on a journey, I talked with many passengers on the boat who asked me what my line of business was. It was difficult for me to explain to them. What could I say? I could not say that I was a preacher, because I do not recognize this as a profession or as a special class of people. I could not say that I was a Christian, because a Christian is not a profession or business; saying this would not be answering what they had asked. Later, I thought about the fact that I wrote many articles, and I told them that I was a writer. But the minute I said this, I became as one who was not saved among them, because I did not show others my difference. I became the same as they were. One could be a reporter, another a cashier or bookkeeper, while I was a writer. In this way, all of us became the same. In their eyes, I was not a person being delivered from among them. I could have been different from them by following my statement with the words: "I am a Christian." This would have marked a clear boundary between them and me, and would have shown them that they were sinners, while I was saved. They and I were totally different. Truly,

we may be saved, but others may not know that we are saved; they may think that we are the same as them. This is the meaning of the verse, "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation."

The question today is not whether you have believed, but whether or not you have been baptized. We are not asking if you have received the Lord, but if others have seen this change in you. Believing involves a breakthrough in your spiritual life and passing from death unto life inwardly. Being baptized involves a breakthrough in the physical realm and passing from death unto life outwardly. Believing is to pass from death unto life before God, while being baptized is to pass from death unto life before men. Believing is to inwardly receive the eternal life, while being baptized is to outwardly announce to others that from now on, you have opened up yourself to showing others that you are a Christian, that you are hidden no more. Prior to this, you were a hidden Nicodemus, but now you are telling others openly that you are saved and different from them.

A baptized person is like a person who has entered the grave. The ultimate destination of our most loved ones is the grave. Marriage lasts until the grave. The grave is one's final destiny. When a man dies, his corpse can still be seen, but after he enters the grave, he is gone forever and never seen again. Baptism means to be seen no more. It is not a "See you tomorrow," but a "See you never again." The water is a symbol of the grave. When we enter the grave symbolized by the water, we are separated from the world; the world will acknowledge that we are delivered out of it, and that we no longer belong to it. This is why Acts indicates that saved persons are added to the church, because the local church is the outward gathering of all the saved ones. "The whole church" in Acts 15:22 means the gathering of all those who are called by the Lord.

Let me ask you once more. What are you doing when you are baptized today? You are telling others that from now on, your coming and going will not be the same as before; your view toward the world has changed. Although you have taken the same way as others for many years, that relationship is over today. From now on, you stand in a different place; you have been delivered out of them, and are no longer among them. To believe is an inward deliverance, while to be baptized is an outward deliverance. To believe is a deliverance in the spirit, while

to be baptized is a deliverance in the body. To believe is to be delivered from the world morally, while to be baptized is to be delivered from the world in one's conduct. This is the salvation spoken of in Mark 16 and Romans 10.

You must also remember that you are not the only one who is saved in this world. There are many others who are also saved. Most of the ones who are sitting here today are saved. There are many saved people, and you are only one of them. In the past, you were in the world; you helped the world, tried to improve the world, and exercised your strength to serve in the world community. Now you have been delivered from it, and you belong to another community. As before, you have many companions. They are the believers, and they are now joined to you. Therefore, you can no longer be an individual Christian and no longer act independently. Because you are joined to them, everything that you do represents your brothers and sisters. After we are baptized, we become one Body. Wherever you are, the church is there. If there is a place where someone should not go, yet he goes there, he damages the oneness. If we are restricted in every way by the oneness, we will be preserved in our footsteps and avoid many problems.

Therefore, we should remember that whenever we do anything, we should take the brothers with us. One Western brother once related a story. A sister went to listen to a modernistic theologian's blasphemous preaching. When she came back from the meeting, she told an elderly brother that even though the teaching was wrong, his English was good. The elderly brother said, "If you went, I was there also." She said that it was impossible for him to have been there. He said, "Indeed, I did not want to go, but you carried me along with you." This is very true. We all are related to one another as members of the Body. When one member goes somewhere, the other members go along with him. When you are baptized today, you are declaring to others that from now on you are separated from the world and are choosing to live with the Christians. Whatever you do now, all the other brothers are included in your actions. Therefore brothers, please do not carry me to places where I do not want to go, and please do not do what I do not want to do. This may be a difficult thing to practice at times. But we must always wait to see if our brothers agree to our actions.

I hope that all the brothers and sisters would know that being saved is not just going to heaven, but being different from the world and being separated from among them. May the Lord bless His word, and may we have a clear vision of it. May we know that the border of our garments should be fringed with blue. Every one of us should be heavenly and belong to the Lord; all of our actions and walk should express this blueness. Brothers and sisters, baptism is just the beginning of this journey; there is much ahead of us! May we be encouraged to go on.

## MESSAGE FIVE

# THE LAST PART OF THE JOURNEY

## •Scripture Reading: Mark 6:45-52

Mark 6:45-52 "And immediately He compelled His disciples to step into the boat and go before to the other side, toward Bethsaida, while He sent the crowd away. And after He said farewell to them, He went away to the mountain to pray. And when evening fell, the boat was in the midst of the sea and He was alone on the land. And seeing them distressed as they rowed, for the wind was contrary to them, He came toward them about the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea, and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought that it was a ghost, and they cried out, For they all saw Him and were startled. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid. And He went up unto them into the boat, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly astonished in themselves beyond measure, For they did not understand concerning the loaves, but rather their heart was hardened."

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This passage of the Bible has often been a help to me; even now it is a continuous help to me. The passage prior to Mark 6:45-52 speaks of the Lord Jesus feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The passage following Mark 6:45-52 speaks of the Lord Jesus healing many who were sick. These three events form a large type prefiguring the time of the Lord Jesus' death on the cross to the time of His establishing the kingdom. They tell us how the Lord: (1) was crucified for us, (2) ascended to the heaven to become the High Priest for our sake, and (3) will descend again in the future to establish the kingdom.

John 6 also records the Lord feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, but the record is lengthier. It says that after the Lord Jesus distributed

the loaves and fish, He continued to speak a very important teaching: "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven" (v. 51). The Lord meant that just as the people were filled with bread that day, they would have eternal life by similarly eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Hence, the Lord's distribution of the bread typifies His death for us in which His body was broken and His precious blood was shed.

Mark 6:46 says, "He went away to the mountain to pray." This typifies the Lord ascending to the heavens to become the High Priest to pray for us before God.

Mark 6:53-56 typifies the Lord coming again to establish His kingdom and heal many who are sick.

What we will cover today is the account of the Lord compelling the disciples to journey across the sea. This event was inserted between the cross and the kingdom. This is an event for today, an event for the church age. It speaks of the things that will transpire and the attitude we should have during the period of time after the cross and before the kingdom. For now, I will not emphasize what the Lord has done for us. Instead, I will emphasize what we should do.

Verse 45 says, "And immediately He compelled His disciples to step into the boat and go before to the other side, toward Bethsaida, while He sent the crowd away." Brothers and sisters, this verse tells us that everyone of us has a journey ordained by Him. The word "compelled" here is the same as the word "constrains" used in 2 Corinthians 5:14. The Lord constrained the disciples to step into the boat. The Lord has died for them and is now constraining them to take the journey. The Lord has one journey for His disciples, and He constrained them to take it. The most important thing in the Christian life is to seek out the journey which the Lord has ordained and faithfully walk on it. A poor phenomenon among believers today is that many have not found the journey that the Lord has ordained for them. Some, even though they have found it, do not walk on it. This is the reason that their living is filled with so much spiritual death, gloom, and restriction, and this is the reason that there are so many conflicts and arguments in God's work. The most important task for each of us is to put ourselves into God's hand in a quiet, patient, prayerful, consecrated, and

obedient way and wholeheartedly seek after His leading. We should be willing to obey Him and act only in accordance with His will. We should pray that He reveal to us the journey He has designated for us. After this, we should pay any price to wholeheartedly walk on it.

We know that the feeding of the bread took place in Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). From the map we can see that there were two cities named Bethsaida, one to the northeast of Capernaum and the other to the southwest. The Lord commanded them to start from the Bethsaida in the northeast and sail to the other side, toward the Bethsaida in the southwest.

Mark 6:46 says, "And after He said farewell to them, He went away to the mountain to pray." This indicates to us how our Lord departed from His disciples and ascended to the right hand of the Father to do the work of intercession. He left His disciples on the earth to take the journey He had assigned them.

Verses 47 and 48 say, "And when evening fell, the boat was in the midst of the sea and He was alone on the land. And seeing them distressed as they rowed, for the wind was contrary to them, He came toward them about the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea, and He intended to pass by them." What did the disciples encounter on this journey? "And when evening fell." It was nightfall, and the boat was in the midst of the sea. Christ is the light of the world, but He has left this world. When He comes again, He will be the morning star and sun. From the ascension of Christ to His coming again, this world is in a long night. In man's eyes, the world is becoming brighter and more progressive. But according to God's Word, "The night is far advanced" (Rom. 13:12). God does not say that the world is very bright and progressive. Rather, He says that the night is far advanced. We are now in the night. This is why we see darkness all around us. Do you feel that all around you is just darkness? If you do not know what darkness is and if you do not sense that your surroundings are all darkness, I am afraid that you have been assimilated by the world. If we continually walk in the light and continually stay near to God, live in Christ, unceasingly judge the work of the flesh, and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will surely realize that this world is indeed dark.

"The boat was in the midst of the sea." We still have not reached the

destination of our journey. Although the matter of eternal life is resolved for us and we have no more problem with that, whether or not our history on the earth will be one of faithfulness or failure (of faithfulness to the end or desertion halfway), is yet to be determined. The boat is still in the midst of the sea and has not arrived in port. There is still the danger and possibility of changing. We should not be overly self-assured and should not presume that our ending is already determined. Of course, we are delighted to be on the right course, but how we run and end it is still a question.

What did the disciples encounter when they went forward? They were "distressed as they rowed, for the wind was contrary to them." Brothers and sisters, if your walk is contrary to the wind, then surely those opposite you will be walking with the wind. If there is an adverse wind from the northeast to the southwest, then there must be a favorable wind from the southwest to the northeast. If the journey which many Christians take is not contrary to the wind, I doubt whether such a journey is ordained by the Lord. We should take the journey that the Lord has ordained. The Lord has already ordained our place on the earth. He said, "The world hates you." Our journey is one that is contrary to the wind. If we have never been opposed, ridiculed, or persecuted by the world, our position must not have come from the Lord. We should encounter adverse wind; we should not run with the wind. If we walk according to what the Lord has ordained, from the northeast to the southwest, there certainly will be adverse wind. Otherwise, I have doubts about our journey.

"And seeing them distressed as they rowed, for the wind was contrary to them"! Faithful believers experience being distressed as they row, for the wind is contrary to them! In the past few years, temptations have become more numerous and severe than before. Those who belong to the Lord seem to encounter much trouble. Their bodies are often weak and ill. There are often discord and difficulty in their families. Their jobs and living are not as easy as before. Their community and country have increasingly persecuted and attacked them. Even more, Satan and the evil spirits have done their best to stir up trouble with the intention of consuming and afflicting the believers. Oh, these are all adverse winds! If we stand firmly on the course which the Lord has ordained, we

will realize that the wind is contrary and indeed distressing! What about the condition in the church during the past few years? We have not seen the Lord raise up any great persons. Heresies of all kinds are more numerous than before. There are more deceptions by the evil spirits and more worldliness than before. In such a generation, by taking the Lord's ordained journey without turning any corner, can we encounter favorable winds and not be distressed?

Yet we would rather be distressed than drifting. We would rather toil in rowing than wander in drifting. We would rather take the difficult journey than take the easy path and drift. If we want favorable winds, we do not have to turn around; we only need to stop rowing for a moment, and the wind will bring us back to the original spot. Drifting about does not require any effort. If, however, we choose to stand firm, we will feel distressed. As long as we are willing to compromise a little, relax a little, and backslide a little, the wind will carry us back; there is no effort involved. Loving the world requires no effort; neither does following the world require any labor. Standing firm for the Lord and being faithful to Him certainly invite contrary winds. Consequently, there will be toil in rowing.

Brothers and sisters, it is extremely easy to return to the former place. This is the time for us to choose and the time for us to be faithful. May we take the journey which the Lord has commanded.

The disciples were rowing from the evening to the fourth watch of the night. The Jews had three watches, and the Romans had four which corresponds with the Chinese system. The fourth watch is probably three o'clock in the morning. They were rowing constantly. Turning back would have been embarrassing for them. Would it not have been better for them to go to Capernaum, tarry, and rest a little? But they did not do this.

The fourth watch is the darkest hour of the night; it is the very end of the night. It is also the time for us to hold on and continue. I know you have temptations because I also have temptations. I know you have trials because I also have trials. Now is not the time for rebuking because the temptations are too great. The greatest danger and the greatest temptation now is to be a little indifferent and compromise. This is like dozing off for a short while. We are too

tired. In the beginning, a constraining love sustained us with strength for a while. But now things seem to have gone on for too long, and the situation has become too difficult. As a result, we become cold. I have seen many believers who were very energetic and brave in the battlefield a few years ago, but who have now become cold and withdrawn. This is because the winds have become too contrary. It is more difficult to overcome a slight indifference than to overcome other temptations. It is easier to overcome sin; journeying on in contrary winds is too tiring, and we tend to become a little cold.

Brothers and sisters, if the Lord constrained us in the beginning, commanded us to take the journey, and compelled us to cross the sea to the other side, how can we stop from going forward? If we stop, the currents will carry us to a place farther from the Lord, and the favorable winds will also carry us to a place farther from the Lord. We would rather be distressed than drifting. What we need now is the Lord's encouragement. Paul told Timothy, "For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). "Fan into flame," in the original, means to do a little stirring. Brothers and sisters, may the love we had at the beginning be stirred up again and become vigorous again. Perhaps you have stumbled. Now you should rise up. The writer of the book of Hebrews saw that among the Hebrew brothers, some "may seem to have come short of it" (4:1). Their initial zeal for the Lord seemed to wane. Therefore, he entreated them to "set straight the hands which hang down and the paralyzed knees" (12:12).

Mr. Müller, who had worked in China, once said that the key to receiving God's great success is to persevere through the last half hour. Brothers and sisters, how many temptations have you overcome? Although the darkness is great, it will not last long. What does Isaiah 21:12 say? "The guard says, / Morning is coming, / But so also is night." Although it is night now, the morning will come shortly. At such times, I beg you to persevere through the last half hour. Our eyes should not be set on the night, neither should we consider only the difficulties. It would be too foolish to quit now, and it would be too foolish to relax now because in a short time we will be over on the other side.

Mrs. Penn-Lewis once said, "Many believers say that they have encountered

a lot of pressure. The battle now seems to grow thicker day by day. It seems as if we are the only target of Satan. But the question now is whether you can persevere through the final half-hour. Daniel 7:25 says, `And he will…wear out the saints of the Most High.' To wear out is to consume. Now the work of consuming the saints has already begun. It is harder to recognize Satan as the one who consumes the saints than to recognize him as the roaring lion." When I was in Kuling, I often strolled by a stream and saw a rock as big as a washbasin with a hole in its middle. The hole was formed by the daily grinding of the many small pebbles.

Satan acts likewise with God's children. He does not kill you with one stroke. Rather, he will try to consume you day by day. After a while, without knowing it, you will be seriously wounded by him. Brothers and sisters, although you are suffering, can you not persevere just a moment? Can you not persevere with the Lord in this final half hour? Is it really true that you are not able to watch with the Lord a moment? Oh, today is our time, the time when we ought to stand firm. If a person has never experienced adverse winds, he is most pitiful! If a person has never reckoned that the world is bitter, corrupt, and can persecute people, this person has never started his journey! You will encounter hardship and realize that the wind is contrary only when you are faithful in your walking. Only then will you hear a voice telling you, "It is too hard. Why not loosen up a little and rest a moment?" But it is foolish to rest now because much of the way has been covered.

"And He was alone on the land. And seeing them distressed as they rowed, for the wind was contrary to them, He came toward them about the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea, and He intended to pass by them." The Lord wants to see if we will keep our faith or renounce it. He wants to see if we will advance or retreat. His eyes are on you and me. He pays attention to every step we take. He knows how great our temptations are and how difficult our circumstances are. He will not let us endure beyond the fourth watch. When the night is far advanced, He comes to us. He has died for us and ascended to the heavens to pray for us. At the same time, He sees our hardship. When the night is far advanced, He will come.

There is something special in verse 48: the Lord "intended to pass by them." Many have found this difficult to understand. It seems as if the Lord had no intention to go to the disciples. But if we consider what the Lord is doing today, we will not have any problem understanding this. Since the Lord had commanded His disciples to go to the other side to Bethsaida, He descended the mountain and went forward to Bethsaida. Could the Lord go to another place to wait for them? The Lord was looking for the disciples along the same path which He had commanded them to take. If they had turned at a corner, the Lord would not have met them when He came. If they had gone on a wrong course, the Lord would not have gone on a wrong pathway to wait for them. This is very sobering! I have always considered that if the Lord commanded me to go to Shanghai and I went instead to Nanking, I would miss the rapture when He comes. This is because the rapture takes place only along the pathway that the Lord has ordained. If you are not there, you will miss the rapture. Each one of us has to bear his own responsibility as to which way he should go.

Verse 51 says, "And He went up unto them into the boat, and the wind ceased." As soon as the Lord comes, everything is fine. Thank and praise the Lord, the wind may be contrary, but it will not remain contrary forever. Though rowing is a toil, we will not need to row forever. Perhaps the Lord is on the way. Brothers and sisters, we can suffer hardship on this earth because the Lord has died for us in the past and will come back again in the future. The Lord's constraining love is behind us, and the hope of His coming is before us and drawing us. One missionary said, "I have the Lord as my portion; this is why I can forsake all." The Lord's eyes are on us. We should not fear hardship. If we change direction now for fear of hardship, all the hardship we have endured in the past will come to naught.

A person who is very deep in the Lord once said, "When we read 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 2 Timothy 3:1-13, we can realize that before the Lord's coming, there will be a falling away, and perilous times, and evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse. These apostasies do not refer to education, religious activities, able pastors, splendid worship halls, or intellectual and material progress. Rather, they refer to the denial of faith and the power of God.

Presently, some famous denominations are inclined towards the Higher Criticism (which is actually low-class unbelief), which denies God's supernatural work, such as regeneration, sanctification, definite answers to prayers, and the revelation of the divine things to men through the Holy Spirit."

In the days before the Lord's coming, there will be great deceit and delusion. If it has its way, even the elect will be deceived. Furthermore, the "form of godliness" will exceedingly increase. The decrease of faith will be due not only to the love of the world and the denial of God's Word, but will also be due to the false faith fashioned by Satan. One brother said, "These works of Satan will become an invisible influence in the air surrounding us. They will become a form of godliness, which will be inhabited by the evil spirits and which will be occupied with the oppression of Hades. These evil spirits will do their utmost to harm, deceitfully lead, confuse, and oppress God's children. They will affect our bodies, suppress our mood, and darken our mind. Various strange feelings and trials unheard of in the past will come upon us and will strip us in a surprising way of all willingness and ability to incline toward God. Our spirit will be tired and weak, our mind will be dull, and our will will slumber. We will be strangely covetous of the things which God forbids and will surprisingly love the amusement and customs of this world. We will find it difficult to preach with full freedom and power and will find it hard to listen attentively to a message or kneel down to give ourselves to prayer continually. At such a time as today, when the evening is at hand, we must quell this kind of atmosphere!" Oh, let us be strong in the Lord! Satan will certainly endeavor with unthinkable power to deceive our mind and our will; he will make it difficult for us to carry on an intimate walk with the Lord, and we will find it easy to live according to the flesh and harder to faithfully serve God and give ourselves to prayer. It will seem as if our entire being is stirred up to oppose our following the Lord Jesus to the end and seduce us to make a covenant with the world.

The atmosphere around us wants to distract us from God, so that we would be cold in prayer, dull in our spiritual senses, and blind to the reality of the heavenly things and to the glorious presence of the Lord. It also causes us to neglect our fellowship with God and think that it is difficult to maintain a

constant fellowship with Him.

We sense that all these things are beginning to affect us. The lusts of the world are knitting a stretched-out net through many ways. This knitting has become stronger and more powerful in many believers. Many things which were prohibited in previous generations are not only done today but practiced without any sense of shame. Many places of worship have not only rejected spiritual things and ceased from having revival but are introducing all sorts of entertainments and dubious activities.

Generally speaking, everywhere on earth, we see a waning of faith and a departure from the truth. We admit that there are exceptions and there are places which are blessed by God. But taken as a whole, the condition of all the churches on earth gives us a mournful picture.

As we behold this situation, we cannot help but call upon the churches of God to rise up, strengthen themselves, and return to fellowship with God, so that in the remaining days, they will please the Lord and be prepared to "be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10) and give an account of what they have done.

Brothers and sisters, what we have spoken are true words. I do not know what your feeling is toward them. Every day I sense that the whole world is against us. We can only have one of two attitudes: stand fast or relax. The world still welcomes us and so does Satan. But the Lord has compelled us to go to the other side to Bethsaida. If, at this time, we are not faithful, we will never be faithful. Many of God's children have suffered for the Lord and have taken the lonely journey. Shall we be like what one British brother wrote in a poem, which says that while others go to the Lord through a sea of blood, we go to Him on a bridal sedan? Moses said unto the sons of Gad and sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to the war while you stay here?" (Num. 32:6). Brothers and sisters, while others are faithful and suffering, can we sit still in peace? Surely there is hardship, but that is far better than drifting. Every one of us ought to faithfully serve the Lord and every one ought to take the journey that He has ordained until we reach the other side.

## MESSAGE SIX

# THE WIDOW, THE WIFE, AND THE VIRGIN

## •Outline

**I. Widow**

**II. Wife**

**III. Virgin**

## •Scripture Reading: Luke 18:3; Rev. 18:7; 17:1; Rom. 7:2-4; 2 Cor. 11:2-3

Luke 18:3 "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent."

Rev. 18:7 "As much as she has glorified herself and lived luxuriously, as much torment and sorrow give to her; for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow."

17:1 "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits upon the many waters,"

Rom. 7:2-4 "For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law regarding the husband. So then if, while the husband is living, she is joined to another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God."

2 Cor. 11:2-3 "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would

be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ."

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The verses today tell us that the church or Christians have three kinds of circumstances before God. Before speaking about these three circumstances, I want to relate one thing first: there is a line from Genesis to Revelation of women being used by God to typify His children, His people. In the verses which I have read today, God likens His children to women. In one case He likens them to a widow; in another case He likens them to a wife; in the third case He likens them to a virgin. Every Christian who lives in the world is a widow, a wife, and also a virgin. In the world, there are great differences between a widow, wife, and virgin. Yet in the Bible, Luke says that a Christian takes the position of a widow (18:3), Romans 7 says that a Christian takes the position of a wife (vv. 2-4), and 2 Corinthians 11 says that a Christian takes the position of a virgin (vv. 2-3).

Every Christian is a widow towards the world. At the same time, he is a wife with respect to the enjoyment of the riches of Christ, and a virgin with respect to his restriction for the sake of Christ.

## I. WIDOW

"And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent" (Luke 18:3).

"As much as she has glorified herself and lived luxuriously, as much torment and sorrow give to her; for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow" (Rev. 18:7).

"And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits upon the many waters" (Rev. 17:1).

One thing that moves my heart very much is that on earth today, our heart is a widow's heart! We do not love the world because the world is not attractive or because the Bible forbids us. It is not because the world and the lusts of it will pass away. The world is lovely, and the things, objects, and people of the world are lovely. Although the Bible has sixty-six books, only one book, Ecclesiastes,

says that all things are vanity under the sun. A Christian does not love the world because the world is vain, but because our Lord was crucified in the world. Consequently, our heart is a widow's heart.

If the one you love is in a certain place, the place becomes lovely. The place where he is becomes paradise to you. But since He is not here, our heart is a widow's heart. This world has become a void to us. We are not attracted by the world because the world is unattractive. It is comfortable and pleasurable to dress and eat well. But if our heart is drawn to the One we love, all these things will become nothing to us. Since He is not here, our world has become bitter. If a woman can still dress and eat well after her beloved husband passes away, those around her may criticize her, saying, "What kind of a heart does she have!" Is it wrong for her to dress well and eat well? It is not wrong, but since her husband is not here anymore, her heart should no longer care for these things. It is not that these things lose their taste in themselves, but they no longer have the same taste within her. It is not that the world has become more unattractive, but that we do not have a heart to love it anymore.

Among the vast sea of humanity, I feel lonely because He is not here. When I am alone, my heart is on fire because I think of Him. When I walk by the seashore, see the waves, and hear the sound of the tides, I do not feel lonely or isolated because He comforts me. Brothers and sisters, there may be many things in the world which can attract you, but if the Lord fills your heart, all those things will be counted as nothing.

When He was in the world, He was killed by men. He left only a cross and an empty grave. Our Lord has died; therefore, we are widows. It is not that the world is evil or unattractive, but that He is not here. Brothers and sisters, we are truly widows in this world. Our Lord is not on this earth anymore. As a result, the world can no longer attract us. If there is a brother or a sister who feels no need for the Lord to satisfy their heart, I do not know what kind of heart they have. In Luke 18 the Lord says, "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent." Our condition in this world is that of a widow, one who is being ridiculed and insulted by others.

In Revelation 18 Babylon typifies the fallen church. She says in her heart, "I

sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow." Only fallen ones do not consider themselves as a widow. Whenever you become fallen, you will lose the characteristics of a widow. Oh, if we want to serve the Lord faithfully in this world, we have to be a widow with respect to the world. We have to maintain a widow's attitude toward the world daily. Once the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast?" (Matt. 9:14). Jesus said unto them, "The sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them, can they? But days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (v. 15). Oh, today He is no longer here. This is the time for us to fast. Are we fasting with respect to the world? This earth is not our home; we have no happiness on this earth because He is not here.

Today the bread of the Lord's table tells us that He is not here. The cup also tells us that He is not here. The bread tells us that He was killed. The cup tells us that His blood was shed. Because He is not here, our heart is not here. What can replace Him in our heart? Nothing can replace Him. We want to be free from the world because the One we love is not here, not because the world is unattractive. For where our treasure is, there our heart is. Since my treasure is not here, my heart is not here.

## II. WIFE

"For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law regarding the husband. So then if, while the husband is living, she is joined to another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead (pay attention to this phrase), that we might bear fruit to God" (Rom. 7:2-4).

The Bible not only tells us that we are a widow in the world; Romans 7 also says that every Christian is like a wife. I wonder if we know the difference between a widow and a wife. A widow does not have a husband; she has nothing

to rely on. A wife has a husband and someone to rely on. Who should bear a family's financial responsibility? It is the husband, not the wife. It is not normal for a husband to rely on his wife to support the family. A widow has lost her support in the world. A wife, however, receives all of her supply from her husband. Brothers and sisters, do you know that our relationship with Christ is one of a husband and a wife? All our needs are supplied by Him. We do not have to worry about how we can receive our supply for the month. We can receive all of our supply from Christ. We may have a bad temper. We may be proud and cannot forgive others. We may be weak in our work and have no burden to pray or any taste for the Word. But, brothers and sisters, let me say that all these problems can be solved by Christ. Through the power of His resurrection, we can bear fruit.

It is a universal custom that as soon as a woman is married, she immediately uses her husband's name. I wonder who can use Brother Chang's name. Not his brothers, his children, or even his parents can use his name. Only his wife can have the same name. Many Christians do not see the preciousness in the words "in My name." We do not realize how much blessing there is in the phrase "in My name." We can receive whatever we ask in His name. We can cast out demons in His name, anoint patients in His name, forgive sins in His name, and preach in His name. What does this mean? Who can use the Lord's name? Some may think that when they cast out demons, all they have to do is say the Lord's name, and the demons will be chased away. Others may think the name is used only as a formality when they perform baptism. Let me ask: Can we go to the bank and draw money in the name of Brother Chang? This name is his, not ours. We can only use our name. But praise and thank God that every Christian can do things in the Lord's name because we belong to Him, and all that He has is ours. He is the Christ, and we are His people.

Brothers and sisters, every Christian has the right to use His name. The day we believed in the Lord, we were united with Him. Therefore, His name is ours. This is why we can pray in His name. We can do things in His name because we have been joined to His resurrection. There is nothing that we cannot acquire from God. Just as a husband loves, cherishes, supplies, and supports his own wife,

Christ does the same for us. Let us remember that with respect to the riches of Christ, we are not a widow, but a wife.

## III. VIRGIN

"For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

The Bible not only tells us that our attitude toward the world is one of a widow, and that our position with respect to the riches of Christ is that of a wife, but it also tells us that in waiting for the Lord's return, we are a virgin. This means that we need to keep ourselves chaste while waiting for His return. Paul said, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God." We know the meaning of jealousy. Because of Christ, Paul was jealous over the fact that some others had won their hearts. We belong to the Lord, and no one should snatch us away. Suppose I have a friend who is engaged to a girl. While he is away, his fiancée turns her love to someone else. As his friend, I would surely become jealous. She should not have done this to my friend. For my friend's sake, I would become jealous over the fact that someone has taken away her heart.

Paul was afraid that their hearts would be corrupted from the simplicity and purity toward Christ, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness. Every Christian should have an undefiled heart, one that has not been touched by anyone else. Let us check ourselves today before God and see if we have lost the simplicity and purity toward Christ. If there is a believer whose desire is not Christ but his own enjoyment, his Lord will not be pleased.

Brothers and sisters, today we need to say, "Lord, I am Yours. May You preserve my garment, my heart, my thoughts, and my everything as undefiled and pure. Oh, may I be touched by nothing." This is like the words in the Song of Songs, which say, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (4:12). The words "enclosed" and "sealed" are used again and again because no one should get into our garden. Our garden is opened to our Beloved only. None can draw water from us and be satisfied. None can draw

water from us and quench his thirst. The well and the spring within us are kept for Him. Brothers and sisters, day by day we ought to maintain such an attitude. We are for the Lord, and no one should touch us. Paul said, “Henceforth let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the brands of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17). Oh, we bear the marks of the cross, and no one should trouble us anymore.

# MESSAGE SEVEN

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE CORPORATE

## •Outline

I. "Whether We Were Beside Ourselves, It Was To God; Or Whether We Are Sober-Minded, It Is For You" (2 Corinthians 5:13)

II. Being Subject To God And Subject To One Another (James 4:7 And Ephesians 5:21)

III. "That There Would Be No Division In The Body" (1 Corinthians 12:25)

## •Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:13; Rom. 9:3; 1 John 4:7; James 4:7; Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Cor. 12:25; Eph. 5:21; Hosea 7:8

2 Cor. 5:13 "For whether we were beside ourselves, it was to God; or whether we are sober-minded, it is for you."

Rom. 9:3 "For I could wish that I myself were a curse, separated from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh,"

1 John 4:7 "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God."

James 4:7 "Be subject therefore to God; but withstand the devil, and he will flee from you."

Eph. 5:22-24 "Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord; For a husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the Body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be subject to their husbands in everything."

1 Cor. 12:25 "That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another."

Eph. 5:21 "Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ:"

Hosea 7:8 "Ephraim - among the peoples / He mixes himself; / Ephraim is a

cake / Not turned."

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During the past few days I have been paying attention to one thing, which is what a Christian has to be in order to be a cake that is turned. What is a cake that is not turned? It is one that has heat on one side and no heat on the other side. To be a turned cake is to be cooked on both sides. This is a great principle in the Bible. In many matters a Christian has to pay attention to both sides. If he pays attention to only one side, he will be like a cake not turned. One side will be either burned and overcooked, and the other side will still be watery and uncooked. If the sisters have vegetables or meat that are burned on one side and raw on the other side, it means that the food has not been turned. Please remember that it is most important to be turned. Anything that is not turned is burned on one side and raw on the other. The meaning of being turned is to pay attention to both sides. A person should pay attention to one side as well as to the other. He should learn from one side as well as from the other.

The message this afternoon may not be a principle of spiritual life, but it is a principle of a believers' daily living. This principle is the balance between the corporate life and the individual life. On one hand, we have to pay attention to the corporate life. On the other hand, we have to pay attention to the individual life. On one hand, we are members. But on the other hand, we are also the Body. This is why we have to pay attention to our life as members and to our life in the Body. We are not alone but with all the ones who constitute the Body.

In the Catholic Church today, all the authority rests in the hands of the pope; all Catholics listen to the pope. There is no such thing as sects with them. But Protestantism with five hundred or more years of history had, by a few decades ago, over fifteen hundred sects. Since then, there may be even more. The Catholic Church is unified, and from the first day until now, everyone has been following the orders of the pope. Catholics are very obedient to the pope. But with Protestants, there are many sects, each with its own beliefs and ideas. Catholics have gone to one extreme; the conscience of the individual is not important and everyone simply follows the pope. Protestants, on the other hand, only care for

their own conscience and ignore the views of others. Once a few people develop a different view, they put up a sign and start another group. The result is many denominations. Catholicism is an unturned cake, and Protestantism is also an unturned cake.

The Bible is in between these two extremes. It speaks of personal liberty, the voice of the conscience, and it also speaks of listening to others and submitting one to another. We are the Body; yet at the same time, we are the members. Every one of us should be an independent individual in this world. At the same time, every one of us should submit to other brothers and sisters. We have to maintain our life as members and also maintain the Body life. We have to pay attention to the corporate life and also pay attention to the individual life. If we pay attention to one aspect only, we will become an unturned cake. If we only pay attention to others and do not have any ideas of our own, we will become an unturned cake. Before God, we have to pay attention to the individual as well as to the Body. Today we will mention some differences between the individual life and the corporate life, but you have to excuse me for not being able to go into detail.

## I. "WHETHER WE WERE BESIDE OURSELVES, IT WAS TO GOD; OR WHETHER WE ARE SOBER-MINDED, IT IS FOR YOU" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:13)

Being beside ourselves is being crazy; we do this to God. But we are sober-minded for others. On one hand, this is very personal; on the other hand, this is very corporate. Being beside ourselves is a personal matter. Being sober-minded is a corporate matter. For example, a person may study the Bible by himself in the morning. He may receive some light from the Lord and unconsciously hit the table a few times. There is nothing wrong with this. While I am standing here today, if I hit the table when I think of a verse, would you not say that I am unsound? Paul was beside himself before God but sober-minded before men. If you are alone by yourself, you can hit the table or chair and be beside yourself with joy before God. But if you are before men, you have to be sober-minded. Many people are bound before God; it seems that they do not

know how to pray. Actually, a person's heart should be as hot as possible before God. When we are before God by ourselves, we can be very free and jump up and down in an ecstatic way or shout "hallelujah" all the time. But if you are in a meeting and others are with you, or someone can hear you in the next room, you cannot shout and cry as you wish. You have to be sober-minded before men. I may be speaking too frankly, but this is the teaching of the Bible. Paul said that we can be beside ourselves only before God, while before men we have to be sober-minded.

An unseemly thing today is that men display the ecstasy that they should have before God to others. The Bible never permits this. Can you pray when you are in your room with only your underwear and no socks? We all can do this. But if you are in a meeting, you surely cannot pray this way. What you can do before God may not necessarily be permissible before men. We still have to be sober-minded before men for their sake.

What is the meaning of being sober-minded? Being sober-minded is being careful and having self-restraint. Being sober-minded is being polite; it is not being crazy, but proper. If you never pray by yourself and only pray in front of men, and if you never read the Bible in your own room and only read in front of people, you are like a shop that exhibits every item of its merchandise and has nothing left in the warehouse. This is not being beside yourself before God; it is living a fallen life, one that God will never bless. There is the need for soberness before men. There is also the need for being beside ourselves before God. If we do both, we are a turned cake.

If I lived in a rural place with no one around me, not even shepherds or ranchers, I could shout and pray as loud as I wanted. If I did this, no one would touch me. But I live in Wen-teh Lane. Even though I live in a room by myself, my neighbors would think that I am sick or that someone had died in my room if I suddenly shouted in the middle of the night. Please remember that a person can only be beside himself before God; he must take care of soberness before men. You have to learn to be sober before men and beside yourself before God. Many people are sober before God and men. They are lifeless before men and God. Paul was beside himself before God, but he was very unassuming before men. The

letters he wrote were serious in their tone, yet when he met men face to face, he was very unassuming. He was very normal. We should learn to be beside ourselves before God and sober before men.

A few years ago when I was sick, I went for some rest to the place of a brother, who was very good in prayer. His room was next to my room but I often could not sleep at night because of my fever and bodily weakness. I noticed once that a light was on in his room. When I knocked at his door and asked why he was not in bed, he told me that he was about to go to bed. After a while I went over to see him again, and he was still not in bed. He finally went to sleep about two o'clock in the morning. I am not against praying the whole night, but you should remember that you can only be beside yourself before God. If you are beside yourself before men, others will not be able to stand you. You may not need to sleep, but others do. You may want to stay up late, but others do not. When I saw him the next day, I said, "Brother, I am not saying this because I did not sleep well last night. But if you continue to do what you are doing, it will not be good for you and for others." He did not believe my words. Later, he began to vomit blood. Before God, we can be beside ourselves. But if we are beside ourselves before men, we are an unturned cake.

Brothers, please do not be offended by my frank words. I hope that you will take care of both sides. On one hand, we should be lively before God. On the other hand, we should be very normal before men. If you want to be a special Christian, only be one before God. Do not exhibit all your treasures before men. Do not speak with a special tone of voice or walk in a special kind of way. We should act very normal before men. We should wear what others wear and eat what others eat. We have to be a turned cake. If we are beside ourselves before God and men, we are an unturned cake. We have to realize that both aspects are precious. God is pleased with both. We have to be zealous before God and normal before men.

The brother that I spoke of earlier was married. I have asked others about this brother. I have been told that his wife will fix a meal and he will not come to the table. He will not eat his lunch at noon and sometimes does not even come by two o'clock. At five or six o'clock in the afternoon, someone still has to remind

him to take his lunch. He is beside himself before God, but he is not very sober before men. This is not the right attitude for a Christian. Do not think that just because you are zealous, you can eat lunch at six o'clock in the afternoon. If you are all alone, you can have lunch at midnight, but if your wife and others are waiting, you should keep the time. You cannot discard manners before men. On one hand, we should be as zealous as possible before God, but on the other hand, we should do our best to take care of the brothers and sisters when we are among men.

## II. BEING SUBJECT TO GOD AND SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER (JAMES 4:7 AND EPHESIANS 5:21)

James 4:7 tells us to be subject to God, and Ephesians 5:21 tells us to be subject one to another. Brothers, do you see this? Here are two sides once again. On one hand, we have to be subject to God, and on the other hand, we have to be subject to one another. Being subject to God is a personal matter, but being subject to one another is something that we should practice among the brothers. In the church today, some people are unturned cakes. As long as the brothers and sisters agree on something, they follow even if it is a sectarian teaching or heretical doctrine. As long as the majority of the people agree, they follow. As a result, even God's commands and biblical teachings are set aside. This also is an unturned cake. They have taken care of man's side but ignored God's side; consequently, they have become unturned cakes. But there is another group of people who would not care for what other brothers and sisters feel or think. They only do what God says. They are like the brother I have mentioned, who thinks that all that a person needs is zeal and who does not care for his wife at all. This is also an unturned cake.

There are many things that are God's will, but often they are limited by man's hand; consequently, there is the need for patience and waiting. It is true that knowing God's will is enough, but it is also good to have the testimony of two or three brothers. If a finger moves, does only one finger move and the whole body not move? Is it not true that when a member moves, all the other members move as well? A member cannot move by itself because, even though

there are many members, the Body is one.

I will say a few words especially to the co-workers. In China we are making a start in many areas. Obviously, there are many dangers that we have to avoid. Not only do we have to learn obedience in our conduct, but we must learn obedience even in the matter of doctrine. Otherwise, division and sectarianism will arise among us. Suppose you receive some light. Since it is from God, you may ignore everything else and start preaching about the light. But the brothers who are with you may not see as clearly as you. In such a case, you should wait for their consent before you preach. If you do not do this, division will occur. You may say that God has revealed this to you, but a brother may say that he has not seen it clearly enough and fears that it may be a heresy. In this instance, you should wait. The Bible says that we should be subject to God, but the Bible also says that we should be subject to one another. When the brothers have different views, they should not argue or be divided. They can wait and pray, and they can gradually learn and watch. Let me say an honest word: nothing helps a person's spiritual progress more than waiting. If something is genuine, it will still be genuine after a person waits for a while. If something is wrong, there is even more of a reason for waiting. It is fortunate when a person waits; when he waits, mistakes are avoided. However, unless we truly deny ourselves and bear the cross, we cannot wait. To wait humbly requires God's grace. We should learn this lesson.

We should obey God's word, will, and command at all cost. Among the brothers and sisters, any problem that can wait for a solution should wait for a solution. Of course, if we care only for waiting and ignore obedience to God, we also become an unturned cake. Many people do not obey just because others object. This is to be an unturned cake. If a matter is doctrinally clear and according to the teaching of the Bible, even if there is the frustration from the flesh, we should not wait for the consent of others before we obey. There is a limit to our being subject to one another. When you intend to be subject to God and I intend to be subject to God, there is the need for us to wait for each other. If a brother is not clear about a certain question, and he asks me to wait a while, I should be willing. I should be willing because I know that this brother is one who

is subject to God and seeks to please God. Being subject to one another is only necessary among those who are willing to obey. If a man has never obeyed God, you will not receive his consent even if you waited for a lifetime. In this instance, you cannot wait for him. Otherwise, you will become an unturned cake and be dragged down by him.

Brothers, before the Lord, we have to do our best to pay the price to obey Him. Toward the brothers and sisters, however, we should wait when there is a need for waiting. Individual accomplishments and lonely endeavors are never according to God's attitude in the church. Acts 13:1-3 says, "Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers...And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." The denominations call this the ordination and establishment of the clergy. But can teachers ordain apostles? There cannot be such a thing. The laying on of hands here means that one has a share in the affairs of the other. In the Old Testament, when a man put his hand on the head of a sacrifice, it meant that the going away of the sacrifice was his going away, and the death of the sacrifice was his death. The laying on of hands here means that these ones expressed their participation with Barnabas and Paul. Paul and the others went in the condition of one accord among the prophets and teachers in Antioch. This is why they could return to Antioch later and could relate to the others the grace that God had entrusted to them and the works that they had done. This is an important principle. A person has to be subject to God, and he also has to be subject to the brothers. He should consider not only what God has to say, but also what the brothers have to say. This is true not only in the work but also in the meetings. The principle of being subject one to another can take us a long way. We have to be subject to God, and we also have to receive the consent of the brothers and sisters.

Once I wanted to go to the country to preach the gospel. The particular village I wanted to go to had some cases of robbery and murder. Before I left, two elderly sisters advised me not to go. So I canceled my boat ticket and the house I had rented there. Personally, I knew God wanted me to go, but I also knew that

God wanted me to be subject to them. The flesh is always in a hurry. However, I was also aware that I should obey the Lord. Later, some other brothers went and many people were saved. Although I had no part in it, I was satisfied. We should obey the Lord. But if we are not subject to the brothers, we will become an unturned cake. We have to be turned this way and that way. If we are not, then we will become an unturned cake.

## III. "THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIVISION IN THE BODY" (1 CORINTHIANS 12:25)

In studying the book of 1 Corinthians in the past, we have seen the Body of Christ. We can advance individually, but no growth is independent of the Body. For example, my mouth eats, but my whole being is also eating. Can I say that my mouth eats but that my whole being does not eat? When my hand works, my whole being works. When my feet walk, my whole being walks. The move of one member is the move of the whole body. I have used this example before: when I take a check to the bank to cash, the cashier gives me the money. Do just my hands receive the money? Will the cashier say, "I am giving your hands the money; I am not giving it to you"? Are there any cashiers who would say this? Everyone would acknowledge that when my hands receive the money, I receive the money.

There is an important truth in the Bible: the growth of one member is the growth of the whole Body. When two eyes see, the whole body sees. When two ears hear, the whole body hears. When the mouth speaks, the whole body is speaking. When the hands work, the whole body works. When one member moves, the whole body receives the benefit. Therefore, a person cannot live an individual life. All the work and conduct of a member is related to the whole Body. This is why there is a need for the same care for each other. You cannot be independent and presume that you have nothing to do with the other members. You should not cause the whole Body to fail by your own failures. When the eyes are blind, the whole body is blind. The Lord says that you should testify. Yet you do not open your mouth. When you turn back, the whole Body turns back. The mouth eats, but the whole body receives the nourishment. The nose smells, but

the whole body senses the aroma. The ears hear music, but the whole person enjoys the music. The Body (that is, the Body of Christ) has a universal aspect and a local aspect. When one meeting suffers, the church suffers as a whole. Whatever a person eats, smells, and hears affects his whole body; similarly, the goodness, evil, progress, and fall of an individual Christian affect the whole church.

We should be willing to follow the Lord alone. But we should take care of the pace of the brothers and sisters. Some are too individualistic. They are accustomed to fighting and doing things by themselves. They do not care for the other brothers and sisters. They have forgotten that they are just members. Let me say an honest word: we should soar like an eagle in the sky, advance spiritually, and obey God individually. But we should also humbly wait for the other brothers and sisters and go on and obey God corporately.

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Brothers, have you seen the relationship between a member and the Body? I have mentioned these three points to show us the corporate and individual life. We should maintain the individual part of our life. At the same time, we should pay attention to the corporate part of our life. On one hand, we should pay any price to allow God to gain something. But on the other hand, we should also pay any price to gain the oneness of the brothers and sisters. Do not think that you can monopolize everything. The whole body is not the eyes, and the whole body is not the ears. We should not neglect God's side, and we should not neglect man's side. May God bless us so that we know the preciousness of the individual life as well as of the corporate life. May we not annul the corporate life by our individual life, and may we not annul the individual life by our corporate life. Let us be a turned cake. If we are only cooked on one side and are not turned, God will not be pleased with us.

# MESSAGE EIGHT

## GOD'S MASTERPIECE

## •Outline

- •Our Condition Before Believing
- •The World
- •Satan
- •The Flesh
- •God's Salvation In Christ
- •Means Of Salvation
- •The Purpose Of Salvation

## •Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:1-10

Eph. 2:1-10 "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins, In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience; Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest; But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; Not of works that no one should boast. For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them."

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Before I expound this portion of the Scripture, I would like you to pay attention to Ephesians 1. Chapter one can be separated into two large sections. The first section speaks of what one receives by the riches of God's grace—the apostle told the believers the measure they had received, that God in Christ had blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (vv. 1-14). The second section is the apostle Paul's prayer. Though they had obtained, he prayed for them lest they not know what they had obtained. In this way they might come to know the might of His strength that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead (vv. 15-23).

Chapter two is an explanation of the mighty power of resurrection in the previous chapter. It fully explains the question concerning salvation. Verses 1-10 first speak of our condition before we believed in the Lord. Second, these verses tell what Christ has accomplished; third, they explain how we can obtain what Christ has accomplished; and fourth, they speak of what we should do after we have obtained what Christ has accomplished. We will now look at this portion verse by verse.

## OUR CONDITION BEFORE BELIEVING

Verse 1 says, "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins." The last chapter calls to our attention the surpassing greatness of His power and the might of His strength. Chapter two starts off by letting us know what kind of persons we were before we were saved. If we want to see what salvation is, and if we want to grow spiritually, it is most important for every one of us to know what kind of persons we were originally. The Bible not only says that we were sinners who committed sin and did evil; it also says that we were dead! We always think that we are just sinners and that all we need is improvement. However, we do not realize that we are dead persons who cannot be improved.

What is a dead person lacking? Life. We were dead in our offenses and sins. It was not just that we were so evil, committing sins; we were also short of life. Death includes two things: first, it has no life; and second, it cannot produce life. Thus, because of what we were, we could never be like God. Only with life is there the possibility of growth, power, and organic unity. Because we did not

have the life of God, we were dead to the holiness, power, and glory of God; we could not be holy, powerful, and glorious as He is. Only a living one can live; no dead one can live. Originally, we were dead. Unless we received life, it would be impossible for us to have a holy living.

God said we were dead. Let me ask, is our death like wood or rock? No, dead wood or rock stays the same all the time. The death of our being, however, decays and corrupts. We become more and more rotten. God does not want us to improve, because we are dead. We should not try to improve a corpse. We do not have the strength to do good. We cannot overcome the world. We cannot resist temptations, because we are dead.

What kind of death is this? This is not physical death; it is not ordinary death. It is a death that dies in offenses and sins. Offense in the original language means a slight overstep. For example, in running a race, alongside the track there are straight lines to set the boundaries. Overstepping these lines a little will constitute a violation of game rules, and one will be disqualified from the race. This slight overstepping is called an offense. Sins are filthy and dirty things. Offenses are not as serious as sins. All through our lives we live between these two—offenses or sins. Not committing sins, not loving the world, and not being moved by temptation were beyond our power to control because we were dead in offenses and sins.

The Lord Jesus also said that man is dead. "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:24-25). The Lord said that when a sinner is saved, not only will he have eternal life and escape condemnation, but he will also pass from death into life. The Lord also told us that a sinner is not merely a sinner; he is a dead person. This is why He said that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God.

Because one is dead, he has absolutely no hope for God's holiness, righteousness, power, and glory. There is no possibility for him to attain these things. Since we know that man is dead, the first thing to overcome is death. We

are not afraid of sin, but we are afraid of death. Medical doctors all know that there are poisons in many kinds of food. But a man with an active life is not afraid of the poisons. His concern is not how to get rid of the poison, but how to have a strong life that fights off the poison. Sin will not die, but a vigorous life can overcome sin.

When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He never committed a sin. Was it because He had an especially good family? Or was it because He had an especially good environment? Was the society at the time especially good? Or was it because the world did not tempt Him or Satan did not test Him? We know that none of these was the case. It was not because the Lord did not meet any difficulties. Rather, the Lord had the life of God, and sin and evil could not touch Him. This is why we are not afraid of sin but are afraid of death. Sin will not die, but we can overcome it with life.

Ephesians 2:2 says, "In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience." Verse 1 speaks of death, and verse 2 of our walk. Verse 1 speaks of the original condition of man—death, verse 2 of what is worked out by man.

In which denotes the offenses and sins in verse 1. Originally, man took offenses and sins as a way to walk. We have to be clear. We were dead in offenses and sins and had no power and life; therefore, we walked in offenses and sins. The world advises us to cultivate and improve ourselves. So we thought that if we prayed more and read the Bible more, we would overcome sin. But because we were dead, we had no way but to walk in offenses and sins.

The Bible says we have three enemies: (1) the world, (2) Satan, (3) and the flesh. In this verse, two enemies are mentioned—the world and Satan. The next verse mentions the flesh.

## THE WORLD

According to the age of this world can be translated "according to the fashion of this world." This shows us that man is driven around by the world. Is it not true that we like to follow fashion? Sins differ from age to age. Every

generation has its own sins; likewise, every period has its own sins. When we were dead in our offenses and sins, we were fond of fashions.

## SATAN

"The ruler of the authority of the air" is the devil. The earth is for man, and the air is for the devil. The Lord once compared the devil to the birds in the air. "The ruler" is "the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience." "The sons of disobedience" are the people of the world. The Bible mentions the sons of light and the sons of the kingdom of God. The sons are especially qualified by these adjectives. They are "the sons of light" because they do things in the light and "the sons of the kingdom of God" because they are going to inherit the kingdom. Thus, to say "the sons of disobedience" means that the wills of these people are against God.

It is very easy to commit a sin. One does not have to fast for three days and three nights in order to sin. He does not have to try hard or exercise his will. Because there is an evil spirit moving in the heart of man, it becomes very easy to commit a sin.

This verse helps us to realize what we were originally: "according to the age of this world," we loved the world; and "according to the ruler of the authority of the air," we obeyed the devil.

## THE FLESH

Ephesians 2:3 says, "Among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Verse 1 says, "you," and verse 2 also says, "you." But when we come to verse 3, it says "we." Paul included himself. He did not want to mislead the Ephesians into thinking that only the Gentiles and the Ephesians were portrayed in verses 2 and 3 and that Paul, being an apostle, Jew, and Pharisee, was thus different. Paul wanted others to see that even an apostle and a Jew was by nature the same as the Gentiles, dead in his offenses and sins.

What were we doing among the sons of disobedience? Not only did we love the world and obey the devil, but we also "conducted ourselves once in the lusts

of our flesh." Conducted ourselves in the original language implies activity. Originally, man's moving to and fro from morning until evening was just the activity of the flesh.

Doing in the original means "satisfying." Doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts means satisfying the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. The desires of the flesh are on the outward things, and the desires of the thoughts are in the mind. When we were doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, we were trying to satisfy ourselves both outwardly and inwardly.

Brothers and sisters! We have to see clearly that our destination was determined: We "were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." According to our nature, we were the same as the rest. Hence, our destination was also the same as the rest—children of wrath, waiting for the judgment and wrath of God! If this is all we have, how miserable we are! But thanks be to God that there are two words after this that turn the tide: "but God."

## GOD'S SALVATION IN CHRIST

Ephesians 2:4 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us." Oh! I was dead in my offenses and sins and could not overcome the temptation of the world, the enticing of Satan, and the corruption of the flesh. But God has a way, brothers and sisters. Please remember, it does not say, "But I." This would mean me setting my will, rejecting sin, and trusting in the Lord in this or that way. Rather, it says, "But God." Praise the Lord! We have, "But God!" God is rich in mercy! Because of His great love with which He loved us, He came to save us.

Verse 5 says, "Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." This is the great love with which He loved us. Christ died and rose again after three days. It was the life of God in Christ that quickened Christ. The stripes on Christ's back, the thorns on His head, and the nail wounds on His hands and feet were all healed; only scars were left. What doctor is there who can heal such a severe wound and heal it so quickly? No one. Christ was made alive this way because He has the life of God. When we were dead in our offenses and sins, God gave us life, in the same manner that the

life of God was given to Christ to make Him alive from the dead. So to be saved is to have the life of God enter into a dead person and make him alive.

Brothers and sisters, do you think it is difficult to be free from sins and evil? Do you think it is difficult to deny the world? Do you think it is difficult to withstand Satan? There are examples of people being taken over by the devil. When the Lord told the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders, chief priests, and scribes and be killed, Peter said, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" (Matt. 16:22). The Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23). Peter, after being taken over by Satan, began to demonstrate a fear of suffering. Judas betrayed the Lord because Satan got into his heart (Luke 22:3). Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the money because Satan had filled their heart—they loved the good name of consecration, yet they were unwilling to have a complete consecration themselves (Acts 5:3). We consider many things to be very, very difficult for only one reason: we are dead in our offenses and sins.

Even when we were like this, God made us alive together with Christ! In the same way that God put life into Christ and made Christ alive, He is also putting life into us and making us alive. When the temptation comes, there is no need for us to struggle. We have to realize that death is reigning and that only life can overcome it. For instance, if we are going to lose our temper, we should not tell ourselves how we should strive to control it; rather, we should tell the Lord, "Lord, may Your life fill me." Brothers and sisters, to overcome sin requires the law of the Spirit of life, not our own righteousness. We put righteousness against sin and life against death. But God overcomes death with life; He also overcomes sin with life. "For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." There is a difference between sin and death; however, to overcome both sin and death, we only need life.

Ephesians 2:6 says, "And raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Brothers and sisters, Christ has redeemed us not only that we may receive a new life, but also that we may be raised up. What is the difference between being made alive in verse 5 and being raised up in verse 6? Do we know the difference? Being made alive and being

raised up have no difference in what we gain practically; however, being made alive and being raised up are very different in their meaning. Verse 5 says God made us alive together with Christ. We were dead in our offenses and sins, and God gave us life which made us alive. Verse 6 says He raised us up with Christ. God made us to die with Christ so that we would be dead to sin. Therefore, God raised us up with Christ so that we would live to Him. The Bible speaks of our two relationships to sin: we were dead in sins (Eph. 2:1), and we have died to sin (Rom. 6:2). Dead in sins means that even though we are alive, we are dead to everything but sin, only loving what is sinful and evil. It is like a person who enjoys smoking opium; he smokes opium all day long. His every thought is filled with opium. We say that this kind of person is dead in opium. Dead to sin means that we have broken off the relationship with sin. Sin can no longer tempt us because we are dead. If the man who used to enjoy opium does not enjoy it anymore, he is like a dead person to opium; the opium can tempt him no longer. Those who are dead in sins need to be made alive together with Christ; those who are dead to sin need to be raised up together with Christ.

Thanks and praise be to God! We have obtained all of these things. We have been made alive together with Christ, and we have been raised up together with Christ. God has made us alive together and raised us up together with Christ. Not only so, He has also seated us together with Christ in the heavenlies.

Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us we were in three kinds of conditions when we were dead in offenses and sins: (1) according to the age of this world, (2) according to the ruler of the authority of the air, and (3) in the lusts of our flesh. God has redeemed us and has overcome Satan in Christ Jesus. He has given us resurrection life to conquer the flesh, and He has seated us in the heavenlies to overcome the world. God's salvation enables us to overcome these three enemies: the flesh, Satan, and the world. If we are seated in the heavenlies, then we are in complete victory.

We have been made alive together, raised up together, and seated together with Christ in the heavenlies. I would like for you to pay attention to the most important point: you have been made alive together with Christ, you have been raised up together with Christ, and you have been seated together with Christ in

the heavenlies. Someone might say to you that you should be raised up together with Christ. But let me tell you: you have already been raised up together with Christ. Someone might encourage you to seek after an ascended life, but let me tell you: you are already seated in the heavenlies. When Christ was made alive, we were made alive together with Him. When Christ was raised up, we were also raised up together with Him. When Christ was seated in the heavenlies, we were seated with Him in the heavenlies. We thank God that together we have obtained all these things!

If you are tempted this afternoon to lose your temper, you may think that victory over temptation is not by struggling but by life, and in so thinking you may pray to God, "O God, please make me alive, raise me up, and seat me in the heavenlies." Are you right in doing so? If you do this, I tell you, you do not yet understand God's salvation at all.

What is salvation? Salvation is God's accomplishment for us. God has already made me alive together with Christ, raised me up together, and seated me together with Him in the heavenlies. I do not have to ask God to make me alive, to raise me up, or to seat me in the heavenlies. He has already done this. This is faith. Faith is to believe that what God has done is true. Unbelief is to think that you ought to do something. Psychological illusion is to imagine things that are not as though they were; but faith is to see the unseen things. Just because we cannot see them does not mean that they do not exist.

Therefore, in Christ we have been made alive, have been raised up, and have been seated in the heavenlies. When temptation comes, we should speak boldly, "You cannot touch me, for I have been raised up." When the world comes, we should speak boldly, "I have ascended to the heavenlies." This is salvation. This is not struggle. Lest the Ephesians would misunderstand, after the words, "Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ," Paul immediately followed with an explanation: "By grace you have been saved." In verse 8 he purposely mentioned again, "By grace you have been saved." What is the meaning of this? For what reason did he say this? There was a good reason. Paul was afraid that we would think that to live is very difficult. We might not know how we can live and how we can get this life. He said that this matter is

God's doing. It is by grace—not that I want to be made alive, but God has made me alive; not that I want to be raised up, but God has raised me up; not that I want to sit in the heavenlies, but God has seated me in the heavenlies. What God has prepared for us is all by grace. The first half is God's doing; the second half only needs our believing. Believing is not by feeling; if it is by feeling, it is bound to fail. Today we have to remember this well: salvation involves at least these three parts: (1) to be made alive together with Christ, (2) to be raised up together with Christ, and (3) to be seated together with Christ in the heavenlies.

Verse 7 says, "That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This verse unfolds the goal of His salvation. What is the kindness of God toward us? It was mentioned before: that when we were dead in sins, God made us alive together with Christ, raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenlies. "The ages to come" are the countless generations in the future; this is for a demonstration to the angels. When has there been a person who has died and come back alive? But the kindness God has toward us through Christ has made dead persons alive.

## MEANS OF SALVATION

Verse 8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Being saved is the experience of Ephesians 2:5-6. By what means does salvation come? By grace. Romans 11:6 says, "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace." What does this tell us about grace? There is no need for you to do anything. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

Grace can save us from the temptations of the world, the enticing of Satan, and the lusts of the flesh. This is all God's work. The foundation of God's work is the grace of God, but it is through faith. The channel of this grace is faith. For example, electrical wire is for the transmission of electricity. Grace is like electricity, and faith is like the electrical wire. "By grace" indicates that it is God's work. "Through faith" indicates that faith is the channel through which grace flows.

What are we to have faith in? Thank and praise God! He has made us alive

together with Christ, He has raised us up together with Christ, and He has seated us together with Christ in the heavenlies. This is not a psychological illusion. It is not just something we say with our mouth. It is a speaking by faith of what God has accomplished in Christ. Do not for a single moment let Satan say to you that you have not been made alive. You should say, "I have been made alive." Do not let the world say to you that you have not ascended to the heavenlies. You should say, "I am seated in the heavenlies." Brothers and sisters, in the same way that you were saved, even so today, you who are so weak and incapable, God's Word assures you that you have been crucified, raised up, and seated in the heavenlies. If you believe in what God has done, everything will be accomplished.

However, there is one problem, that is, the question of faith. For instance, I would ask you whether you believe that you have been made alive, raised up, and ascended? You may say that you believe. But by the afternoon, when a temptation comes, if you only say with your mouth, "I have been made alive, I have been raised up, I have ascended," it will not work at all. You will become helpless. It seems as if all the faith is gone. What should you do? Thanks be to God! Although you cannot believe, His grace can work to such an extent that you can believe—"this not of yourselves"; it is "the gift of God." Not only is salvation not of ourselves, even this faith is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. There is a basis in the Bible for saying that God gives us faith. Second Corinthians 4:13 says, "And having the same spirit of faith." According to the original language, this phrase may be translated, "We, having received the same spirit of faith." Philippians 1:29 says, "Because to you it has been graciously granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe into Him." This shows us that we can believe because grace grants us to believe.

Does this mean that God is believing for us? No. How can we then believe? It is God who loves us and works in us until we can believe. God is changing our nature, and God is giving us a clear revelation so that we can believe. At least we should have a faith that asks God to make us believe.

Ephesians 2:9 says, "Not of works that no one should boast." We cannot even do a little bit of good. It is all by grace. We can boast of nothing. Brothers and sisters, our worst trouble is that we all want to try. We all hope that we can

do well. We must believe in what Christ has accomplished, that we are separated from the world and that we have a separated life. Salvation is not of works. If one depends on works even a little, he will surely fail because the position he stands on is wrong. Please remember that you were dead, and that there is no ability in you to accomplish the righteousness and holiness of God. You must have faith in what God has accomplished. You should also know that even this "faith" is given to you by God.

## THE PURPOSE OF SALVATION

Verse 10 says, "For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them." In our natural state we make a big mistake, a hateful mistake. Formerly we thought that salvation was of works; now we think that since salvation is by grace and we are saved, we do not have to care for anything anymore. It is as if we do not even have to pray. All we have to do is just go to sleep and let Christ win the victory for us. As a result, we simply become lazy persons. The previous mistake is to consider justification and sanctification as something of works; the latter mistake is to think that once we are saved we do not have to do anything. But Paul says that God has saved us for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The word masterpiece, according to the original language, is used twice in the New Testament. It means the best in a lifetime. For example, among the paintings of a painter, the best one in his life is his masterpiece. The phrase "we are His masterpiece" indicates that we are His best; there cannot be any better. God has made us alive together, raised us up together, and seated us together with Christ.

Where did God create this masterpiece? In Christ Jesus. This shows us that when the Lord was made alive, God put us in Him. When the Lord resurrected and ascended, God also put us in Him. The creation here is the same as the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Man says, "If I do good, I will obtain salvation." But God says, "Since you have obtained salvation, you should do good." Doing good works comes after having

been raised up and ascended to the heavenlies; you do good works because you are already God's masterpiece. You must do good works, pray, read the Scriptures, and witness to others. However, if you think you will make your life better by doing these, you are wrong. Rather, by confessing that you already have a good life, you go about doing good. One should first believe that he is sanctified, then he goes about doing good. Some people fall into the danger of saying, "Christ has done everything. Hence, I do not have to do anything." This is wrong. Rather, we should say, "Since Christ has done it, therefore I should do it." Paul said, "For which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power" (Col. 1:29). Paul was striving because of the operation which operated in him in power. The more there is the inward operation, the more there will be the outward striving. God's thought is higher than our thought. We should not lean toward any one side. We should not depend on works for salvation, and neither should we do nothing just because we are saved by grace.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "Which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them." "Walk" here is in contrast to "in which you once walked" in verse 2. Because we were dead, we walked according to the dead; because we are alive, we walk according to the living. First, we die, then we commit sins; first, we are made alive, then we walk. You should say boldly, "I am able now because I have been made alive." Have you believed in Jesus as your Savior? If you have, you have already passed from death into life. Now you can walk.

Brothers and sisters, we have to believe that we have obtained salvation and that we can go about doing good works. May God bless us and His word, so that we may walk in what God prepared beforehand. We should pray more diligently, read the Scriptures more diligently, and offer up ourselves more diligently. May God bless us that we may be willing and walking for the accomplishment of His good will.

## MESSAGE NINE

# A TWO-SIDED TRUTH

## •Scripture Reading: Phil. 2:12-18

Phil. 2:12-18 "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and reasonings That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world, Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with you all. And in like manner you also rejoice, and you rejoice together with me."

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We know that the Epistle to the Philippians was written by Paul in a prison in Rome. While he was in prison, Paul wrote not only the Epistle to the Philippians but also the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. Each of these three books has its own special emphasis. Ephesians is on the Body of Christ. Colossians is on Christ and His relationship to the church. Philippians does not cover deep doctrines like Ephesians and Colossians. Its general subject stresses one thing, which is to have no discord. Philippians 4:2 says, "I exhort Euodias, and I exhort Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord." These two workers were sisters. There was disharmony between them, and Paul wrote to exhort them.

Philippians pays considerable attention to humility, harmony, and loving one another. Philippians can be considered as a kind of footnote to 1 Corinthians

13. Paul exhorted the Philippians to have lowliness of mind and to consider others more excellent than themselves. Each should not regard his own virtues, but the virtues of others also. Then he spoke of the Lord's emptying Himself, how He took the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, and humbling Himself to become obedient unto death, and that the death of a cross. Paul told them that this was the mind of Christ, and he exhorted them to have this mind in them, which was also in Christ Jesus. But immediately a problem arose. Although they might have been willing to follow this example, they were unable. It is one thing to hear and another thing to do. The apostle Paul spoke of the Lord's emptying Himself, His humbling, and His becoming obedient unto the death of a cross. This is such a lofty standard. The two sisters might have wondered how they could meet this high standard. Therefore, Paul had to go on to tell them how they could reach this standard. This is the subject of verses 12 through 18.

Verse 12 says, "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." "So then" indicates that these verses are a continuation of the previous verses. The words "my beloved" were used whenever Paul was about to say something very important. Since he addressed them this way, what follows was very important. "Even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence." What does this mean? Paul was saying in effect, "When I preached the gospel among you, you obeyed me. Now that some troubles have started, you should obey me all the more. Not only was the gospel preached to you when I was among you, and not only was I a pattern to you, but you obeyed me while I was in contact with you. Therefore, you should obey me now all the more." These words reveal three things: (1) While Paul was with them, they obeyed because they were in contact with him. (2) While Paul was away, they were still obedient because Paul had committed them to God. (3) Now they needed to obey in one thing more—to work out their salvation in fear and trembling.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We should read these words over and over again. Fear is towards God, while trembling is towards oneself. On the one hand, we should fear God, and on the other hand, we

should be trembling in ourselves. Because temptation is so fierce, we should tremble. Because God is so great, we should fear. But please note how this salvation is being worked out. We thank the Lord that God has a way to work it out.

The Bible divides salvation into three stages. The first stage is in the past, when God saved us out of the punishment of hell. The second stage is in the present, when God saves us from the power of sin. The third stage is in the future, when God will save us into the kingdom to reign with Christ. We can illustrate these by a few examples:

Second Timothy 1:9: "Who has saved us." This is in the past. Everyone who believes has obtained this salvation.

Hebrews 7:25: "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him." This is a present salvation, something that we obtain today.

Hebrews 9:28: "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation." This is a future salvation.

The Bible clearly shows us that there are three kinds of salvation. One is in the past, one is in the present, and one is in the future. Although some Christians have received the past salvation, they may not have received the present and future salvation. Some Christians have received the past salvation as well as the present salvation, and they will also receive the future salvation. It is possible for a person to be delivered from the punishment of hell yet still sin every day. A person may be delivered from the punishment of hell, but he may not necessarily be able to reign in the future. Let me quote three more passages to prove these three stages of salvation.

Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved." This is the past salvation.

Romans 5:10: "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." This is the present salvation which we receive through the life of the Lord.

Romans 8:24: "We were saved in hope." This is for the future.

We praise and thank the Lord that we are saved! But there are still two salvations that are not yet accomplished. This is why we have to pursue them. If

a person is not yet saved, we tell him that the minute he believes he will be saved. This salvation refers to the salvation from the punishment of hell. Even though we are already saved, we still need to be saved from the power of sin, and we still need to seek after the glory of the coming kingdom. This is why we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Mr. D.L. Moody was a powerful preacher and a capable soul-winner. But he said that he had never in his life seen a lazy man be saved! This means that even though a man may want to be saved from the punishment of hell, if he is lazy, he cannot make it. "Therefore He says, Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph. 5:14).

During the past few weeks, I have been speaking on the fact that we cannot do anything, and that the minute we try, we suffer greatly. But if we surrender and believe, Christ will do everything for us. This, however, is only half of the story; there is still the other half, which is the working out of our own salvation with fear and trembling. We have to be responsible for this part. If we do not do this part, we will become unbalanced. It is true that Christ has died for us, shed His blood, and resurrected and ascended for us. Some think that since this is the case, all they have to do is worship and be absolutely passive. There is no more need to pray, to read the Bible, or to consecrate themselves. However, the very fact that God has accomplished salvation means that we should be all the more zealous. God has done it, and we should work it out. But how can we work it out? The next verse tells us.

Philippians 2:13: "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." Verses 12 and 13 can be considered two sides of one glorious truth; they include everything. If we look at the first verse, we may think that we have to do everything ourselves. But if we look at the second verse, we see that everything is done by God. On the one hand, these verses say that we should work it out. On the other hand, they say that God will do it. These are not contradictory words; they are complementary words. Verse 12 says that we should work it out, while verse 13 says that God will enable us to work it out.

These two verses explain a very important two-sided truth in the Bible. From the Bible we see, on the one hand, that God has many solemn

commandments; He commands that we do this and do that. It seems as if He has put an unbearable burden upon us. We are pressed beyond measure, unable to move our feet, and are pressured to the point of death. On the other hand, there seem to be many promises of God which promise that God is doing this and that for us; everything seems to be according to His grace and everything seems to be His work; it seems as if we have nothing to do. Because some do not understand this two-sided truth, they become biased. Some people think that everything is related to God's commandments, and that we have to obey them ourselves. They see God's commandments as a heavy burden. On the one hand, they cannot lift it, yet on the other hand, they cannot drop it. They feel that they are pressured to the point of death. Then there are some who think that everything is according to God's grace and God's work. God accomplishes everything, and man does not have to be responsible for anything. Inevitably, this leads to laxity. These biases (no matter which side one is biased toward) are dangerous in that one can neither fulfill the scriptural commands nor obtain the scriptural promises. God's truth is equally important on both sides. God is working in us, and at the same time, we are working it out; we work out what God has worked into us. If we merely allow God to work within us without working out this work ourselves, we will have nothing. However, if we try to work things out ourselves without allowing God to work within us, this also will result in nothing.

Everything with the human life can be summed up in the words "the willing and the working." To will is an inward resolution, while to work is an outward act. We act out whatever we have inwardly resolved to do. This is the meaning of willing and working. The willing refers to the condition of our heart, while the working refers to our outward conduct. Yet both our inward willing and our outward working are the result of God's operating within us for the accomplishment of His good pleasure. All the willing is done through God's operation, and all the working is done also through His operation.

We often want to obey God yet find ourselves unable to obey. But God tells us that He will work in us to the extent that we will obey and work out what needs to be worked out. Many Christians find it very painful that they cannot do many things. They often want to tell God how painful it is to try to obey Him, and

that they cannot make it. They do not want to love the world, yet they cannot stop loving it. They do not want to hate others, yet they cannot stop hating. God has not ordained that we should suffer. His intention is to operate in us until we become able to do whatever we should do. Hence, we should say to the Lord, "Although I cannot obey, give up the world, or love others, I ask that You operate within me until I become willing to obey You, drop the world, and stop hating others." If you believe, you will see a change after you pray this way. Even a matter that you have not been able to overcome for a period of three to four years will be overcome through such committing and believing.

When Mr. Chapman first began his work for the Lord, those who gathered to hear him grew in number day by day, and a great building was erected at the place where he preached. Mr. Moody heard of his fame, and took a train to where his church was, in order to listen to his preaching. When Moody arrived, he sat quietly and listened. After the meeting, Mr. Chapman recognized Moody and stepped down from the platform to greet him. He asked Moody for a frank comment. Mr. Moody said, "Brother, your work is a failure; it will not be successful, because there is something wrong with your life." When Mr. Chapman heard this, he was not happy. He thought, "Mr. Moody should not have criticized me this way. He does not have the authority to say this to me." Nevertheless, he realized that Moody had pointed out something to him, and he knew that in at least one area he was not perfect. He realized that he was too attached to his wife and children; for two or three weeks, he felt very bad about it. In the end, he told the Lord, "I cannot give up my love for my wife and children. But I pray that You will make me able." From that day on, he found the proper way to love his wife and children. Later he became very prevailing in his work. When someone asked him to give a testimony, he said, "If I can preach the gospel or deliver any message, and if there is any goodness in me at all, it comes from that one time of obedience that I had."

God will operate in us to the point that we become able. Abraham ordered the old servant to find Rebekah for Isaac. The old servant had to do his best to bring her to Canaan, but Abraham prepared the camels and needed items for the journey (Gen. 24:10, 61). The one who was wounded by the robbers on the way

to Jericho was carried by the Samaritan on his own beast and brought to the inn (Luke 10:30, 33-35). We do not have the strength to walk, because we have suffered the sin-wound; we will never be able to walk by ourselves. But God operates in us until we can will, work, and do everything. He operates in us both the willing and the working for whatever is according to His good pleasure. If we can remember this, everything will be well.

Mr. D.M. Panton in England once said that when God is in us, we can do everything God can do. When one woman died, her epitaph said, "She has done what she could not otherwise have done!"

Daily we live a life which is seemingly impossible to live. If it is ever possible for us to experience full salvation, and if our life can ever be clean and perfect, it is because of God's operation in us. Many people want to imitate Christ, but they never succeed. God must first work before we can work. We have to lay hold of this fact daily: it is God who operates in us. It is not our working, but God who first works, and then we work. If we see the lofty standard of the Bible, think we should meet it, and try to meet it, we will surely fail. We ought to ask God to operate in us until we become willing.

Mr. Panton once told a story. A doctor charged a nurse to ask a patient to do one thing. The nurse told the patient accordingly. But the patient said that he could not do it. The nurse went back and told the doctor. The doctor went to find out why the patient could not do it. After he examined the patient, he said, "The problem with this person is not that he cannot do it or that he will not do it, but that he cannot make himself willing to do it." The problem with us is that within we are not willing, while without we are not able. Within, we are not willing to give up the world, and without, we are not able to give up the world. But God can operate in us until we become willing and able to fulfill God's good pleasure, and until we actually carry it out.

God has worked in; therefore, we can work out. Because God has operated within us, we can work out whatever He has worked in. Our burden today is the way to practice. It is not a matter of waiting or praying, but a matter of working it out. Everyone who has believed in the Lord has Christ living within him. "Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are

disapproved?" (2 Cor. 13:5).

There are two common mistakes. One is to think that we should do good; we hope to do good and to have a spiritual living. The other mistake is to think that since we are saved already, we do not have to move a finger anymore; there is no need to pray, read the Bible, or consecrate, because Christ will automatically make us zealous. The mistake of the first group is to try to do good by themselves. The mistake of the second group is to think that there is no need to strive and pursue after a person is saved. Actually, if a saved person is not diligent, he will not have a spiritual living. Yet, if we do not believe in God, nothing will avail either. We must believe that God operates in us to will and to work, and that therefore we can pray, read the Bible, and testify. The believing comes first, and the working out comes afterwards. The kingdom is taken by violence; the violent ones seize it (Matt. 11:12). Day by day we have to work out our salvation. We should not say that there is no way, because God has done everything. Since we have received what we have received, we can surely make it. Let me give a few illustrations.

The Lord taught the disciples, saying, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day and turns again to you seven times, saying, I repent, you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). Immediately after this word, the disciples prayed, saying, "Increase our faith" (v. 5). The disciples knew that they could not do it. It is terrible enough for someone to sin once, twice, or three times. If he sins seven times and repents seven times, this is too trying and difficult to endure. Therefore, the disciples asked the Lord to increase their faith. How did the Lord answer them? "If you have faith like a mustard seed, you would have said to this sycamine tree, Be uprooted and be planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you" (v. 6). What does this have to do with forgiveness? When we have faith within, we can say to the hatred within our heart, "Hatred, go away." When we have such a faith, we can forgive others when they come to ask for forgiveness. When we believe that God has done it, we can make it. Not only do we need faith before we can forgive others, we need faith before we can read the Bible, pray, or give up the world. When we believe that God can make us do it, we

can do it.

Philippians 2:14 says, “Do all things without murmurings and reasonings.” The apostle told us that it is God who operates within us to will and to work. The result of such operation is obvious: the saints will be in harmony with one another, and there will not be murmurings and reasonings. To have no reasonings means to have no doubt or wavering. To have no murmurings means to be able to believe and to love one another. Verse 13 says that God’s life is working in us, while verse 14 tells us of the resultant perfect harmony.

Not only does Philippians speak of this. We can find similar examples in Ephesians and Colossians. After Ephesians 3:19 speaks of being “filled unto all the fullness of God” (verses 20-21 being words of praise), 4:2-3 immediately speaks of “all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love, being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” When God’s power operates within a believer, the resultant outward manifestation among the believers is peace. Colossians 1:11 says, “Being empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy.” The might of God’s glory is God’s great power. We may think that once we receive the might of God’s glory, we will be able to perform miracles, do works of wonders, and accomplish unimaginably great things. Little do we realize that the result is nothing other than endurance and long-suffering. Yet this is the ultimate expression of God’s power.

It is more difficult to pray to God and ask for an answer than it is to be patient with a bothersome saint. It is hard to endure. Yet God’s power can make us able to endure. All three books tell us that when we receive the operation and filling of God’s power, we will have peace with others, and we can endure and suffer.

Philippians 2:15 says, “That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world.” To be blameless is to be irreproachable. To be guileless is to be inwardly simple and not double-minded. Crooked means something that is not straight, while perverted means to come apart or to become disjointed. This verse tells us that a Christian is set apart

from the generation which has deviated and become disjointed from God's will; he is simple and blameless, and is a light in the world. To shine is an expression of life.

Verse 16 says, "Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain." Some believers think that they can lead others to Christ by their good works, and that there is no need for them to open their mouth to testify. But only ignorant believers would say this. We should hold forth the word of life. We should present to others the word of life; we should lift it up high so that others may see it. We should not only testify with our life, but also testify with our mouth. The Bible never says that witnessing is only done by our life and not by our mouth. Among our relatives, friends, and those whom we have contact with, we should open our mouth to testify. Otherwise, we have not held forth the word of life. While Matthew says, "You are the light of the world" (5:14), it also says that we should confess the Lord's name (10:32). If you can believe and work out what you believe, you should also believe that, in addition to shining, you can testify to those around you. Paul said if we do this, we are perfected.

"The day of Christ" is the day when Christ reigns. To "run" refers to seeking out sinners and preaching the gospel to them. To "labor" refers to our ministering to the believers, shepherding and teaching them. According to the apostle, if the believers would do the above things, they could boast in the day of Christ that they had not run in vain or labored in vain.

Verse 17 says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with you all." "The sacrifice and service of your faith" is the living sacrifice in Romans 12:1, which comes as a result of presenting our bodies. According to Paul, if the Philippians would do the above things, he was willing even to die with them and sacrifice his own life for them. If they would offer themselves as sacrifices to God, Paul was willing to sacrifice his own life. Paul had rejoiced before. But now he would rejoice together with them all.

Verse 18 says, "And in like manner you also rejoice, and you rejoice together with me." In the last verse Paul was rejoicing, and was rejoicing together with

them all. This verse says that they should rejoice and rejoice together with Paul. Those who are under the operation of God's power have nothing to say except to rejoice.

Brothers and sisters, we should believe that God has done His work, and therefore we can work out what He has worked in. All we need to do now is be willing.

# MESSAGE TEN

## IN CHRIST

## •Outline

- **•What Do We Have In Christ?**
- **•How To Be In Christ**

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We have to remember that we are all sinners because we are all in Adam. Everyone that is born of Adam has the Adamic nature. We do not need to make an effort to lose our temper, lie, etc., because Adam's nature, life, and behavior have all flowed into us. God's way of salvation is not by making us better but by delivering us out of Adam and putting us into Christ. Similarly, everything of Christ has flowed into us. The Bible shows that as long as we are in Adam, we will sin; and as long as we are in Christ, we are righteous. But in the most secret place of our heart, there is an erroneous desire. We wish that God would do something on us. Many people make this kind of mistake. However, God never does anything on us; rather, He puts us into Christ.

Some people think that because the root of sin is still in us even though we are saved, we need to ask God to do another thing on us: to remove the root of sin in us like pulling out a bad tooth. Perhaps someone has said that we need to pray to ask God to pull out the root of our sin. Perhaps some have said that after they prayed for a certain period of time, they succeeded and were sanctified. But if we expect God to accomplish something on us, this will never happen. The Bible shows us that all of God's work has been accomplished in Christ. Since the day Christ died, every spiritual thing has been accomplished in Christ. God will not do any more. If we ask God to perform a work on us, God cannot. We can only receive what God has already accomplished in Christ.

Everything is in Christ. Do not hope to receive some special light while you are praying or hear some voice telling you that a certain sin has been removed. Do not expect to have a special feeling that will fill you with joy. You may think that these are good things. Actually, thinking this way involves an evil heart of unbelief. This is not God's work. Whatever God does has been done in Christ; it is not done in you. It is not a matter of what God does on you; God has done everything in Christ. If you believe, you will have it. But if you want God to do something on you, you will never have it done. When you are in Christ, you have what is in Christ by receiving.

Many times when you are ill, you wish that God would just touch you with His little finger so that you would be healed. However, God has healed you in Christ; God cannot do anything on you again. As long as you are in Christ and receive, you will have what you need. Once you believe, the healing is yours. Do you want to be victorious? You can never do it! Only Christ is victorious. Do you want to overcome the world? You can never do it! Only Christ overcomes the world. Do you wish that God would do something? God will never do it because He has already done everything in Christ. Do you think that overcoming is something that only happens today? No, it happened when Christ overcame. May God grant us the light of revelation and show us what is already in Christ. If we do not have faith, we will have nothing; but if we have faith, we will have everything. In Christ there is victory, justification, holiness, forgiveness, as well as all the other spiritual blessings. God will not work these things on us again. If we enter into Christ, all that is in Christ will be ours. This does not mean that we extract something from Christ for our nourishment. Rather, it is entering into Christ and letting everything in Christ flow into us.

When we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ. Not only are we immersed into the water, we are also immersed into Christ. The second part of Romans 6:3, "Baptized into His death," indicates that the baptismal water refers to death. The first part of this verse, "Are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus," indicates that the water also refers to Christ. Many times we think that God gives us a glass of water to drink. Instead, God wants us to enter into Christ. If we see this clearly, we will know that we do not

have to ask God to do something on us. It is done in Christ. Everything is in Christ.

## WHAT DO WE HAVE IN CHRIST?

Romans 8:1 says, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." You cannot be condemned, because you are in Christ. Can you say to God, "I am a sinner, please forgive me and do not condemn me"? No. God cannot do this. God forgives you in Christ. You need not look at yourself. You only need to look at Christ. How do you know that you will not be condemned in the future? Can you rely upon your experience of a certain day or a certain time? The only way you can stop me from rebutting you is by quoting the Scripture. If you quote the Scripture, no preacher on earth can rebut you. Even God cannot rebut you because His Word says, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." Does this verse tell us that we are changed? No, it says that he who is in Christ is a new creation. Some say, "I was a Christian for many years but was very weak. But on a certain day of a certain year, I was revived and became a new creation." What evidence does he have that he became a new creation on a certain day of a certain year? My evidence is not a so-called revival which supposedly made me a new creation; my evidence is God's Word which says that whoever is in Christ is a new creation. Perhaps some may say, "According to the Bible, I am in Christ, and I am a new creation. However, when I look at myself, I do not seem so new." I can say that sinners and even many Christians do not have faith. After reading this you should kneel down and say, "God, I thank and praise You; Your Word says that whoever is in Christ is a new creation. I am in Christ; therefore, I am a new creation!" Whenever temptation befalls you and tells you that you are still an old creation, you should say, "God's Word says that whoever is in Christ is a new creation." If you do this, Satan will retreat. If you pay no attention to the temptation and only stand on the side of God's Word, you will overcome. Overcoming does not depend upon feeling but upon God's Word.

God will not do any work on us. If He removes the root of our sin, we will have no need to believe. God has accomplished everything in Christ. He wants us to look to Him day by day and believe His Word which says that we are a new creation in Christ. God does not lie. Whatever God speaks will be done. If we believe, it will be ours. This is the secret of overcoming.

Ephesians 1:6 says, "...His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved." God accepts us only in the Beloved. No one can please God outside of Christ. God can keep us and accept us only in Christ.

Colossians 1:14 says, "In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Being saved and being forgiven are both in Christ. Have you asked God to forgive you? Suppose a Christian has committed a sin and asks God to forgive him. Do you know when God forgives him? Some say the evidence that you have been forgiven comes only after you have prayed to the point of having peace in your heart. But are there not many people who still have peace in their hearts even after committing sins? Are there not many people who still have no peace even though their sins have been forgiven? Your feeling is not dependable. If a Christian has sinned, can you tell him how long he has to pray before he can obtain forgiveness? You should know that your sins were borne by Christ more than nineteen hundred years ago. You died in the death of Christ; you are forgiven. All you have to do is to bow down and take what Christ has accomplished. If you expect God to do a new thing on you, it is impossible to say how long you would have to pray. When you ask God to forgive you, you are really asking for the forgiveness in Christ to flow to you. Your forgiveness depends upon your faith that God has forgiven you in Christ. It does not depend on feeling.

Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." We are justified because we are in Christ. God does not justify us because we do good. God justifies us in Christ. If we want to wait until we regard ourselves as righteous before we believe, we will never believe.

First Corinthians 1:2 says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those

who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place." We are justified because we are in Christ; we are sanctified also because we are in Christ. Many people make a big mistake by saying that God has given them holiness and that they were sanctified on a certain day of a certain month. If we expect God to work on us until we are sanctified, this will never happen. All we need to do is to receive what is in Christ.

The light in a car is supplied by only a little amount of electricity that is stored in the battery. If we are in Christ, we will be like the light in a room; although the source of the electrical power is not in the room, electricity flows into the room. Once the connection is made and the switch is turned on, the light will come. But when the connection is broken or the switch is turned off, the light will not come. When we are joined to Christ, we have everything; once we are disconnected, we find ourselves to be just like unbelievers. A single work is never accomplished on us; everything is accomplished in Christ. We are merely a wire through which electricity flows.

Romans 8:38 and 39 say, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." All these things cannot separate us from the love of God. There is only one reason: this love is in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:10 says, "And you have been made full in Him...." We have been made full because we are in Christ, not because of ourselves.

Colossians 3:3 says, "And your life is hidden with Christ in God." Our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

Romans 8:2 says, "For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." We are freed because we are in Christ, not because of ourselves. Those who believe this are blessed. But those who beg for it will not receive.

Ephesians 1:3 says, "Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." This verse surely has much for us to enjoy. No matter what the spiritual blessings are, they are altogether in Christ. If you have this verse, you can say, "I thank and praise God because He has given me every spiritual

blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." The extent of your belief in God's Word is the extent of your receiving of the reality.

John 16:33 says, "In Me you may have peace." Peace is not found outside of the Lord. When we are in the Lord, we have His peace.

Philippians 2:1 says, "If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any tenderheartedness and compassions."

Second Corinthians 12:2 says, "I know a man in Christ." This speaks of a person who is in Christ; his whole being is in Christ.

If you carefully read the Bible, you will not ask God to do a work on you. If you want God to do a work on you, you will not only be disappointed today and tomorrow; you will be disappointed until the day you die. If the electrical switch is turned off, you cannot expect the lamp to have light. The moment the switch is turned on, immediately there is light. If you do not believe in Christ moment by moment, you will not be victorious. You need the Lord every moment. In Christ you have everything.

## HOW TO BE IN CHRIST

(1) He who believes into Christ is in Christ. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." This is a union. When you believe into Him (Christ), your sin becomes His, and He becomes one with you.

(2) Having believed into Christ, we should be baptized into Christ. Baptism is to be immersed into Christ. Romans 6:3 says, "Or are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" The way we are immersed into the water when we are baptized is the way we are immersed into Christ. If a copper coin is put into a bottle of sulfuric acid, the copper coin will melt, and we will not see the copper coin anymore. When we are immersed into Christ, we are melted into Christ and become one with Him. This is faith.

(3) "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:30). God has immersed us into Christ. Inwardly, we believe into Him; outwardly by baptism, we are

immersed into Him. God joins us to Christ. God has done this for us. Therefore, we have righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. It is wonderful; we have it all. We have no righteousness in ourselves; Christ is our righteousness. We have no sanctification in ourselves; Christ is our sanctification. We have no redemption in ourselves; Christ is our redemption. Our eyes must be fixed on Christ. May God remove our veils, so that we would see how complete God's accomplishment is.

Mr. Hudson Taylor once tried hard to overcome. He said, "I am always asking, but God never gives it to me; one day when I read John 15:5, `I am the vine; you are the branches,' I immediately received the light." Later he knelt down and prayed, saying, "I am the most foolish person in the whole world; the overcoming life that I am looking for, I already have." You are a branch; it is not that you want to be a branch. You are a branch; the life is yours already. For many years Mr. Taylor asked to be joined to the tree like a branch. Little did he realize that he was already a branch and already joined to the tree. It was not until the day he received the revelation from God and had genuine faith that he had the victory. Later he was able to accomplish great things for the Lord. Once he was asked to speak at the Keswick Convention, and he related this story. He said, "After I failed, I sought for the overcoming life, only to find that I could never obtain it. But the day I believed, I received it."

Brothers and sisters, we are not hoping to draw out some sap from the root to nourish us. We are branches of the tree. We do not have to care for anything as long as we are the branches. We do not need to take something from the tree to cultivate ourselves. All we have to do is believe that we are the branches. God has joined us to Christ. Everything that Christ has now belongs to us. If we believe, we will overcome.

On the one hand, we are baptized into Christ; on the other hand, by means of the bread and the cup, we contact Him. This is the way for His life to freely flow.

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# TWELVE BASKETS Vol. 12

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# MESSAGE ONE

## THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

## ●Outline

- ●The Meaning Of Baptism
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## ●Scripture Reading: Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4

Acts 22:16 "And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

Rom. 6:3-4 "Or are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life."

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## THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Today we will consider a special subject: the meaning of baptism. We will not spend any time to find out what baptism is and is not. Rather, we will specifically consider the meaning of baptism, the biblical teaching concerning it, and the emphasis in baptism. Why does the Bible tell us that we should be baptized? First, we will ask why a person needs to wash himself in water. He washes because his body is unclean. Because there is dirt on his body or on his feet, he has to wash. No one goes to the water to make himself unclean. Men go

to the water to clean themselves; otherwise, they would not go into the water. Therefore, the first meaning of baptism according to the Bible is to be washed clean. If one does not want to be clean, he does not have to be baptized.

Furthermore, when do we throw things into the water? When do we throw a basket of manure or rubbish into the water? We throw them into water when we do not want them, when we want to dispose of them. The second meaning of baptism according to the Bible is to bury, to dispose of, something. When we do not want something, we bury it.

## THE WASHING AWAY OF SINS

We have just read two passages of the Scriptures. What does Acts say? When Ananias was sent by the Holy Spirit, he saw a clear vision. He was told to rise up to meet Saul of Tarsus and say to him, "And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Why do we have to be baptized? What is the purpose of baptism? The purpose is to wash away our sins.

Many people misunderstand this verse. Some time ago, two brothers from Kiangsu came and asked me about this verse, saying, "This verse tells us to wash away our sins. Some have asked us if their sins are washed away if they are not baptized." Many people have the same misunderstanding. The Bible clearly tells us to wash away our sins, but what does it mean?

The Bible tells us that baptism is not a ritual. It tells us that being baptized is to bear witness before men. What do we do when we go into the water? When we go into the water, we are testifying before God, before men, before the angels, and before the devil that we have believed in Jesus, and that our sins are forgiven and washed away. Baptism is a confession before God, men, angels, and the devil that Christ has accomplished a real, complete, and reliable fact for us. Being baptized is showing and testifying to this fact.

Ananias told Saul to rise up and be baptized. Why did he have to be baptized? It was to wash away his sins. Ananias was not saying that baptism can wash away sins. Baptism itself cannot wash a man of his sins. The thing that baptism testifies of and demonstrates is what washes away man's sins. No water on earth

can wash away any of man's sins. But the Lord's blood, testified of and demonstrated by the baptismal water, washes away all of man's sins. Have you believed? If you have believed, you should rise up and be baptized immediately, washing away your sins. The first meaning of baptism is to wash away sins.

Brothers and sisters, no one who is filthy in God's eyes and whose sins are not yet forgiven can be baptized. No one should be baptized who is ignorant of the fact that his sins are washed away and that he has eternal life and is saved. For such a one to be baptized is wrong. Every man who goes into the water must know what he is testifying of. What is a testimony? It is seeing and testifying. In other words, it is testifying what one sees. First one sees and then one testifies. Those who have not seen anything cannot testify. A man must know that his sins are forgiven and washed by the blood of the Lord before he can testify before men that his sins are washed away.

From this we can see that infant baptism is wrong. If a person who is being baptized cannot testify, his baptism cannot be counted as a baptism. Any baptism performed on an unbeliever or on anyone before he believes is unreliable and means nothing. Only those who can testify that their sins are forgiven and washed away are qualified to be baptized. What a man does in the water is to testify to the accomplished works of Christ and that his sins are forgiven.

Last Lord's Day we pointed out that as soon as a person believes, he knows if he is saved. After a man knows that he is saved and that his sins are forgiven, what should he do? He should testify. Where should he testify? The first place to testify is in the water. This testimony is before God, before men, before the angels, and before the devil. It is a testimony that one's sins are washed away. This is the first meaning of baptism. It is also the condition for baptism.

If a person's sins are not washed away, he is not qualified to be baptized. He must fully know that his sins are forgiven before he is qualified to be baptized.

## THE TWO ASPECTS OF SIN

The Bible is most amazing in the way it is written. I have said this before and I will say it again that there are two aspects to sin, and there are two aspects to the way God deals with sin. The Bible tells us that there is a difference

between sins and sin; one is before God, and the other is within us. Our sins before God have to be forgiven and washed away, while sin within us must be overcome, and we must be delivered from it. Our sins before God have been borne by the Lord Jesus, but the sin within us can only be removed through reckoning ourselves as dead. For the sins before God, we have the washing of the Lord's blood. For the sin within us, there is the need for the deliverance of the Lord's cross. We need God's forbearance and forgiveness for our sins before Him, and we need freedom and deliverance from the sin within us. These two aspects of sin are entirely different. Today, we can only briefly consider the difference between these two aspects of sin. The Lord willing, we will discuss them in detail later.

For now, I will not mention the difference in the nature of sin and sins; we will only consider the difference in the effect of these two aspects. First, let us consider our sins before God. Our sins before God give us no peace in our conscience. Whenever we think of judgment, hell, death, and questions related to man's end, we feel that we have sinned before God. Whenever we think of God's holiness, righteousness, and His ordination, we become fearful. Today, those who are sitting here who have not received Jesus as their Savior surely have this kind of experience. If they do not have this experience, I feel sorry for them because this means that they are ignorant, insensitive, and unaware of their own danger. Anyone with a little thoughtfulness will feel at a loss and not have peace when they consider Hades, death, hell, eternity, God's judgment, or sin. The reason for this is that they are sinners before God, and as long as their sin is not removed, they will not dare to think about these things. Once they consider these things, they realize that they will go into the lake of fire and suffer eternally. They fear and have no peace. This tells us that we are sinners before God. Our sins before God cause us to have no peace and to be afraid to think about such things as judgment, end times, and death.

But man not only has sins before God, he also has sin in himself. A seminary student once said to his teacher, "I have found one new thing in the Bible today, which is the doctrine of sin. Of course, the Bible mentions it. But I did not see it until today." The teacher said, "Have you only discovered the doctrine of sin from

the Bible today? I found that out from man's heart long ago." There is no need to go to the Bible to find the doctrine of sin; we can find it easily from man's heart. Everyone can testify that sin is not only before God but is also within us.

We may lose our temper easily. We may think that outward things are causing us to lose our temper. Actually, all the outward things do not give us our temper, but a burning within causes our temper to burst out. We may try to suppress it by force. But we cannot do it; as soon as there is an opportunity, the temper will burst out again. When there is an explosion, we cannot blame it all on the sparks of fire; there must first be explosives. Sins issue from within. Many people think that the reason their thoughts are unclean and filled with sins is that they have read unhealthy books which entice them to sin. But many times when the environment is clean and excellent, and there are no temptations anywhere, is our heart clean? A young man said that he had read too many novels and that his mind was filled with evil and unclean thoughts. He asked if there was any way to cleanse his thoughts. Can we get rid of the unclean things within us just by shaking our heads? Can that be done? I can tell you that nothing will shake these things out from you.

Sin dwells within man. It has roots, and they cannot be removed. Many sinners like to gamble or smoke opium. Certain outward factors are not seducing them into such acts, but an inward sin is pressing them to act this way. Sin has its punishment before God and its power within man. It causes us to do things we are not willing to do. Even if we try to suppress it with all our power and will to keep it from breaking out, when an opportunity is there, it breaks out just the same. This is the true condition of man. Sin reigns within man. We are its slaves. It has the power to snatch us away and cause us to do that which we are not willing to do.

## THE TWO ASPECTS OF DELIVERANCE

Since there are the two aspects of sin, the aspect before God and the aspect before men, there are also two aspects of deliverance. There is the punishment of sin and the power of sin. Therefore, there are two aspects of deliverance. This does not mean that there are two deliverances; it means that there are two

aspects of deliverance. The Lord delivers us from fear, punishment, the condemnation in the conscience, and all unrest. At the same time, He delivers us from the power of sin. The Lord's deliverance is complete. He saves us from God's punishment and from the power of sin.

How did the Lord die to deliver us from the two aspects of sin? The Bible tells us that a sinner has to die. The Lord bore the punishment of death for us. He shed His blood to redeem us and wash us of all our sins before God. The Lord's blood cleanses us. It is amazing that the Bible never tells us that the Lord's blood cleanses our heart. Who can find a verse that says that the Lord's blood cleanses our heart? Some may say that Hebrews 9:14 says that the Lord's blood cleanses our heart. But it says that the blood cleanses our conscience, not our heart. I can honestly tell you that there is no place in the whole Bible that says that the blood cleanses our heart. It only says that the blood cleanses our conscience. What is the conscience? The conscience is the part within us that condemns us, that tells us that we are wrong and deserve to perish. The Lord's blood only cleanses our conscience from condemnation and brings peace. The Lord's blood shows us that even though our sins deserve punishment, the Lord has died for our sins and accomplished God's righteousness. However, through the cleansing of the Lord's blood, we cannot become moral and sin no more or be released from sin. The Lord's blood can only cleanse us before God and remove the condemnation in the conscience; it does not cleanse our heart. It does not make our heart clean or rid it of sins. The Lord's blood is objective; it is not subjective. It does not cleanse our heart; it only cleanses our conscience.

All men are corrupt. With the Lord's blood, there is forgiveness of sin and no more punishment. But the Bible does not tell us that the blood can remove the power of sin. That is another matter altogether. On the one hand, the Bible tells us of the Lord's blood. On the other hand, the Bible tells us of the Lord's cross. The blood signifies death, and the cross also signifies death. The blood relates to punishment; it deals with our sins before God. The cross deals with the power of sin within us. The cross cleanses our heart and enables us to overcome sin.

Now we have to consider the difference between the cross and the blood. The Lord's blood removes the sins before God, while the cross deals with the sin

within man. Please remember that the cross does not crucify the inward sin. We have to understand this. Many people who preach the doctrine of sanctification are wrong in this matter. The Lord's cross has not crucified sin. We cannot find one verse in the Bible that says that the cross has crucified sin. Who can find a verse that says that the cross has crucified the sin within us or outside of us? No one can find a verse on that point. Then what has the cross crucified? The Lord was crucified there. Some have said sin was also crucified there. But who has said this? The Bible tells us that the old man has been crucified, not sin. Powerful sin was not crucified but the old man who loves to be directed by sin was crucified. The root of sin—the sin that acts as the root—was not eradicated, but the old man—the one which cleaves to the root of sin—was crucified by the Lord on the cross. I will tell you a gospel word today. When the Lord was crucified, He was not crucified there alone. We, who are corrupted beyond measure, who sin, and who are defiled, were also crucified with Him on the same cross! We have been crucified with Him!

Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." Please remember that it says that our old man is crucified with the Lord. It does not say that sin is crucified with Him. Brothers and sisters, have others told you that sin can be crucified on the cross, and that the root of sin can be eradicated? There is not such a thing.

In this verse in Romans, we can see three things: (1) the old man, (2) the body of sin—the body that commits all the sins, and (3) sin. This verse tells us three very important things: (1) that our old man has been crucified with Him on the cross, (2) that the goal is to annul the body of sin, and (3) that the result is to cause us, our person, to become no longer a slave to sin. When the old man is crucified, we can no longer sin and will no longer sin. However, sin itself has not died; it is still living.

Let me illustrate these three things—the old man, sin, and the body of sin—by an example. Sin is like the master; the old man is like the steward, while the body is like a puppet. Sin has no power to direct the body of sin or cause it to sin. Sin directs the old man. When the old man agrees, the body becomes a

puppet. Therefore, when our old man is alive, it remains in the middle. The body is outside, while sin is inside. Inward sin tempts the old man and stirs up the lusts in the old man. This causes the old man to give an order to the body to sin and practice all kinds of evils. The body is weak; it will do whatever it is told to do. It does not have power over itself; it cannot do anything by itself. It can only act when it is directed by the old man. In delivering us, the Lord does not kill the body or eradicate the root of sin, but crucifies the old man, so that the old man becomes crucified with Him.

Of the three things in Romans 6:6, only two are left. The body is outside, and sin is inside. In the middle another one, the new man, has been raised up to take the place of the former old man. When inward sin tries to induce the body to sin, it tempts the new man and tries to stir up any lust. However, the new man will not listen to it or yield to its proposals. Formerly, the old man's mind was set on sin; he loved to sin and craved sin. But the new man does not go along with sin; he ignores sin and refuses to answer the demands of sin. Therefore, the body is not able to sin.

Please read Romans 6:6 again. We have only explained this verse briefly. The verse is clear enough. We know that sin is very evil, and we all hope to remove sin from our body. But we do not realize that the existence of the root of sin, like the existence of the devil himself, has nothing to do with the fruit of sanctification. What is evil and bad is our old man. The reason we can be tempted to exercise our lust or commit outward sins is that our old man is still alive. However, the Lord has crucified our old man with Him.

What is the purpose of the old man being crucified? The purpose is "in order that the body of sin might be annulled." The word "annulled" may be translated as unemployed. This means that without the old man, the body of sin cannot do anything. Formerly, the body of sin followed the direction of the old man in our daily living; sinning was its profession. All it did was sin and nothing else. The old man loved sin very much, it craved sin, and it loved to do all the sinful things. This is why the body followed it to sin, making it the body of sin. Now the old man has been dealt with by the Lord; it has been crucified. Therefore, the body of sin has become unemployed; it has lost its job. When the

old man was alive, the body of sin practiced sin as its profession and job. Although sin still remains and still wants to be the master, we are no longer its slave. Although sin tries again and again to stir up the body to practice sin, the new man, through the reigning of the Holy Spirit, will not permit this to happen. As a result, sin cannot cause the body to sin. Therefore, the Bible tells us that the result of the crucifixion of the old man and the unemployment of the body of sin is "that we should no longer serve sin as slaves!"

The old man is dead. This is why we can overcome sin completely. The Lord's blood was shed and has delivered us from our sins before God and stopped our conscience from condemning us. By the blood, we know that we will no longer perish, we have peace, we are reconciled to God, and we have rest. But if we only know this aspect of salvation, we are still living a suffering life. We may know that sin is forgiven, but we may still practice sin as our profession; we may not have any victory over sin practically and may not be bearing the fruit of sanctification. We may still be forced to sin every day. We will find that we still do not have peace, and our fellowship with God is cut off. Although we know that we are saved and have eternal life, our daily sins have robbed us of the joy of salvation. Thank God that the Lord's salvation is not a halfway salvation. The Lord shed His blood to cleanse us from our sins, and His cross has removed our old man and delivered us from the power of sin.

Please remember that a believer does not die by killing himself or by committing suicide. Some have preached that Christians ought to put themselves to death so that they will no longer sin. This is wrong. We were crucified on the cross when the Lord Jesus was crucified there. Let me ask: have we died? Thank the Lord that the old man, who is so hard to deal with and dies with so much difficulty, has been crucified on the cross by the Lord! Thank and praise Him! Hallelujah!

Do we realize that we are evil beyond measure? I know that I am most evil and detestable. Many times when I was under the oppression of the power of sin, I wished that I could have died. But unfortunately, I could not make myself die. Later, I saw that when the Lord was crucified on the cross, my old man was crucified with Him, so that my sinning body no longer would be a slave to sin.

How happy I was! Because of the Lord's work, sin is now under my feet; it has no more power over me. Thank and praise the Lord!

Our sin cannot be removed by prayer, Scripture reading, godliness, worship, asceticism, or sufferings. We are delivered from sin by the Lord crucifying our old man with Him on the cross. Remember that the blood deals with the sins before God, while the cross deals with the old man.

What then should be our attitude towards sin? Read Romans 6:11: "So also you, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but living to God in Christ Jesus." Some have changed this verse to read, "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin," thinking that by just considering, sin would die. But there is no such thing. Some have said that the root of sin can be eradicated. Others have said that we can consider sin to be dead. But I must tell you that it is not a matter of considering sin to be dead, but a matter of reckoning ourselves as having been crucified.

The Lord has crucified our old man on the cross; the body of sin has been annulled, and we should not be a slave to sin any longer. But many people do not understand why their experience does not match these facts at all. They are still sinning and not able to come out of sin's domination. The body is still busily motivated by sin. Why is this the case? The reason is that while the Lord has accomplished a full salvation for us, we have not accepted His work and believed in what He has accomplished. We have not applied His victory by faith. He has crucified our old man, but we do not believe that our old man has been crucified in a definite way. We still consider our old man to be alive. This is the reason that after we are told the fact in Romans 6:6, verse 11 tells us what we should do. Romans 6:6 tells us that our old man has been crucified. Verse 11 tells us that since the Lord has crucified the old man, we should reckon it as dead so that it no longer can make us sin. We can therefore say to sin, "Our old man is dead, and I am no longer your slave." If we want to wait to find out if sin is dead and the lusts are gone, we will never find them dead. Sin is more alert than we are; it is more alive than we are. As soon as an opportunity comes, it will seize us. It will not die. But this is all right because our old man has died. We cannot overcome sin. The way is not to consider sin as being dead, but to believe in the accomplished work of the Lord, which is to reckon our old man dead.

Romans 6:11 says that we should reckon. How does one reckon? Two plus two is four. Why do you reckon that it is four? It is because two plus two is indeed four. Therefore, the meaning of reckoning ourselves dead is not that we are not dead but we try temporarily to consider ourselves dead, deem ourselves dead, and think that we are dead. It is not to say to ourselves that the old man is gone. The death of the old man is something that God has accomplished. This is why we can reckon it as being true. Reckoning means that God has counted us crucified; the fact is reckoned on God's side, and we reckon ourselves dead as a consequence. We reckon two plus two to be four because two plus two is four and not three or five. God said that we are crucified. We believe this and acknowledge that we are dead. To believe is to say that since God has declared our sins forgiven, we also declare our own sins forgiven. God says that we are dead, and we acknowledge ourselves as being dead. Christians must stand daily on the ground of Romans 6 before we can overcome all sins. I am not boasting, but I can say that no sin is too hard to overcome because the Lord has crucified our old man on the cross. This is why we can overcome all sins.

## BURIAL

Now let us come back to our main subject. Why do we have to be baptized? On the one hand, it is because our sins are washed away. On the other hand, it is because we have died. We should be baptized because our sins are washed. Baptism testifies to the fact that our sins are washed. We should be baptized also because our old man is dead. Baptism testifies to the fact that our old man is indeed dead. What is the first thing that we should do to a man who is dead? Will anyone try to leave a dead man on display for more than a few days? After a few days, the body begins to stink, and worms attack the skin. Last year a sister died. We loved her very much, but there was no way that we could keep her for more than a few days. Once a man dies, there is no use for him anymore and the first thing to do is to bury him. The act of burial is a testimony that the one who is being buried is dead. Suppose there is someone whom we love dearly, as dearly as we love ourselves. She is dying of an illness, but there is still a pulse and still a little breath within her. While she lies there motionless and speechless, would

we put her into the coffin? We would surely not do this because we do not believe that she is dead. When do we bury our dear father, mother, wife, or friends? We bury them when we know for sure that they are dead and they can live no longer. As long as there is a little hope of life, we would never bury our dear father, mother, wife, or friends. When they have died and the situation becomes hopeless, we bury them. We cannot bury a person before he is dead; nevertheless, the first thing we do to a dead person is to bury him.

The Bible tells us that since we are crucified, we are buried with the Lord. The meaning of baptism in the Bible is not just a washing but a burial. This is why we must be baptized. This means that we believe we are dead persons. This is why we ask others to bury us in the water. We do this because we believe that we are dead and that we will not change. If a man does not believe that he is dead, he cannot be baptized because to do so would be to bury someone who is alive. It is wrong to bury a living person. Those who are baptized must believe that they have been crucified with Christ. How do we show that we have believed? How do we testify to the accomplished work of Christ? We testify through baptism. When we are buried in water through baptism, it shows that we believe that the Lord's blood has cleansed us from our sins and that His cross has crucified our old man with Him. We are baptized because we believe in these facts; baptism proves that we are already cleansed and already dead.

Therefore, there are two conditions for baptism. The Bible tells us to rise and wash away our sins. This means that we believe God has redeemed us from sin and has washed us, so we testify to this by means of baptism. The Bible also tells us to rise up and be buried in the water by baptism through believing that we are dead. Not only are our sins washed away, but our person is buried. Sins are washed away, and the person is also washed away. This is the meaning of baptism. This is the testimony of baptism.

## A CONCLUDING WORD

Friends, can you give such a testimony? I do not have to exhort you to be baptized. Those among us who have not believed in the Lord Jesus do not have their sins forgiven, and I hope that you would believe right away. If you have

believed and do not know that you can overcome your sins fully because you are still losing your temper, sinning, and committing evil, you should realize that the Lord has crucified you with Him on the cross. Now nothing should cause you to sin. You can overcome all sins. Please exercise your faith to stand on the ground of Romans 6, believing that you are dead. What can sin do to you? A believer must stand on the ground of Romans 6:6 and 11 before he can overcome sin. Otherwise, he can piously pray and read the Bible, but it will not avail anything. He must first reckon that he is dead before these other things can be added to him in a useful way.

If anyone sitting here has believed that the Lord's blood has cleansed him from his sins and that He has crucified our old man with Him on the cross, he should rise up and be baptized and hand himself over to the burial.

Here I would say a word in passing. The proper baptism is to be immersed. No other baptism can be considered a baptism. Please consider one thing. If I remember correctly, the first instance of burial in the Old Testament is in Genesis 23:8: "And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me." What is the meaning of burial? It is removing the dead out of one's sight; it is causing the eyes not to see the dead one. If you are not immersed in water, it cannot be considered a burial. Being buried is not seeing the old man any longer.

Today I am not telling you what is a baptism and what is not a baptism. I am telling you the two meanings of baptism. The first meaning is the washing away of sins, and the second is the reckoning of our old man as crucified and buried. May we all be able to testify that the Lord has delivered us from sin and that not only are our sins forgiven, but that we ourselves are dead. May we not only be able to testify this with our mouth but in our daily walk as well. May we all believe in the accomplished work of the Lord so that we can receive the peace and joy of forgiveness and be liberated, freed, and overcoming persons. Amen!

## MESSAGE TWO

# A SHALLOW LIFE

## •Outline

**I. Not Having Enough Earth**

**II. Having No Root**

**III. The Rocky Place**

## •Scripture Reading: S.S. 4:12; Hosea 14:5-7; Mark 4:5-6, 16-17

S.S. 4:12 "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, / A spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

Hosea 14:5-7 "I will be like the dew to Israel; / He will bud like the lily / And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon. His shoots will go forth; / And his splendor will be like that of the olive tree, / And his fragrance, like that of the trees of Lebanon. Those who sit under his shade will return; / They will revive like grain / And will bud like the vine; / His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon."

Mark 4:5-6 "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered."

16-17 "And likewise, these are the ones being sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. Yet they have no root in themselves, but last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled."

* * * *

Mark 4 has many important things to say concerning the Christian life.

Concerning this passage, the first thing that brothers and sisters often ask is whether this passage refers to saved ones or unsaved ones. But we should not ask whether the seeds refer to saved ones or unsaved ones. The parable of the sower is not for the purpose of showing how these four kinds of soil relate to saved ones or unsaved ones. The purpose of this parable is to show us the four kinds of conditions under which man receives God's word. Therefore, it does not refer only to the word of regeneration. If it is God's word, there will be these four kinds of reactions. There will be four reactions in the case of Gentiles receiving eternal life, and there will be four reactions in the case of Christians being perfected before God. Please remember that the principle and teaching covered here have to do absolutely with the condition of the one who is receiving the word; they do not have anything to do with whether or not a person is saved. Therefore, we must not bring the issue of salvation into this passage. This passage only tells us the condition of man's receiving or refusing God's word. It is therefore applicable to the believers as well. In other words, this portion of the Scripture is not just for the Gentiles but for the Christians as well.

Now by God's grace, I will show you the kind of living that is pleasing to God and that will remain. What is the kind of living that will last and stand the tests? By God's grace, I will show you the deep degree to which God's word has to work in us before we can have the real growth in the divine word.

I know that all of us are after spirituality before God. I know that all of us desire before the Lord that we become believers who please God. We all hope that our living and work will be acceptable to God. No doubt this is what we are after. But why are there so many people who have failed along the way? Why are there so many who have only gone halfway? How many today are fully obedient to the Lord? How many are following the Lord all the way? There are many who have a good start but not many who have a good continuation. It is not surprising for anyone to have a good start. What is precious is a good continuation. A good start does not guarantee a good ending. Those who are obedient at the beginning may not be obedient at the end. When we read Leviticus, we find that those who are twenty years old are evaluated more highly than those who are sixty years old. Why? The reason is that some who were fully

for the Lord when they were twenty years old retired before they were sixty.

How many will follow the Lord all the way? When you were young, you were obedient. Why then have you now slackened? Perhaps a few years ago, things were not as they are now. Perhaps the heart you now have is totally different from the heart you had when you first began to follow the Lord. Perhaps some time ago, you were willing to suffer for the Lord and endure tribulations for the sake of God's will. But your condition today is different from the beginning. Is there anyone who will follow the Lord all the way and not stop halfway? Before you encounter tribulations, and before you find things contrary to your own will, it is easy to say, "Lord, I will obey You at all costs." But when the Lord's will is different from your will, when the Lord's arrangement is different from your expectation, and when you see a great mountain blocking your way and consider it too high to climb over, you will not say before the Lord, "I will obey You at all costs." This is the way many obey. In the beginning, when you see the importance of God's eternal will and the seriousness of His will with respect to Christ, you make up your mind, saying, "God, I will obey at all costs." But when God's ordained way becomes different from your way, and your expectation different from God's, you drop the necessary yoke, go around the cross that is set before you, and lose your heart to follow the Lord all the way.

Brothers and sisters, there is only one kind of life that will glorify the Lord; it is a life that bears the cross all the way to the end. Oh, we can never avoid the cross. If we are not truly dealt with by the Lord, and if we do not deny our self and take up the cross to follow Him, sooner or later we will not be able to get through. If we have not been thoroughly dealt with and have not fully consecrated ourselves once for all, there will be a day when we come face to face with something we will not be able to endure. False spiritual growth can deceive us and deceive others, but sooner or later, we will see that we cannot get through in a certain matter. A man can give up everything, but he cannot give up himself. If we are not thoroughly dealt with, we will not be able to get through in anything; we will find that the price is too great to follow the Lord and will give up.

Now we want to see the reason why some cannot follow the Lord all the way.

May we find light from the Scripture, and may we receive help from God and revelation from the Holy Spirit to see this reason.

Mark 4:5 says, "And other seed fell on the rocky place, where it did not have much earth, and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth." Immediately it sprang up. This is what happens today. To spring up is to have the hope of life. To spring up means that the seed has sprouted. To spring up means that the word is no longer just the word but has been changed to life. To spring up means that you have not only confessed the word but have received it into you; the word has begun to grow within you. To spring up means that the outer shell of the seed has been broken and the seed has sprouted. It means that you have accepted the word and made a start. Thank the Lord that we have all made a start. The word of the cross has already made a start in us. Its sprout has come forth. But the Lord said that even though some began this way, they did not have a good ending. He said, "And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered" (v. 6). What kind of persons are these? They are the ones who have a good beginning but do not have a good ending. They are the ones who have obeyed at the beginning but have turned back halfway. What kind of persons are these? They are the ones who are willing to give up everything for the Lord at the beginning but become reluctant to do so later. They are the ones who sprang forth but have eventually dried up. They are the ones who sprang forth but are now drying up. To spring forth means that life is present; to dry up means that the hope that was present is gone. Many who failed halfway had much hope at the beginning; they knew that this way was the right way, and they expected much from this right way. Yet after three to five months, or three to five years, they are finished and dried up. The life they initially had is gone, and all the signs of life have disappeared from them.

What is the reason for this? The Lord Himself gave an explanation: "And likewise, these are the ones being sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. Yet they have no root in themselves, but last only for a time; then when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately they are stumbled" (vv. 16-17). According to the Lord, they have met with affliction and persecution and have fallen back. The

persecution spoken of here comes because of the word; it is not the ordinary kind of persecution. The affliction spoken of here comes also because of the word; it is not an ordinary kind of affliction. They received the word but cannot receive the affliction and persecution that come with the word. As a result they fall.

With every word, there is its affliction and persecution. When a Gentile, that is, a sinner, receives the Lord, spontaneously he encounters affliction and persecution. However, I will not go into that now. What I am saying is that when a Christian receives the word, any kind of word, he will surely encounter affliction and persecution. Therefore, he cannot take the word as his ornament and presume that whatever he heard, he can preach. He may be able to do this with other kinds of knowledge, but he cannot be so quick with the word. He must pass through genuine dealings, truly be dead and crucified for the word's sake, and truly broken by God for the testimony's sake before he can be a proper testimony. It is not a question of putting together a few similar verses, categorizing them a little, and composing a little to come up with a message. That is not a message. He can find many things like this in a concordance. He must be genuinely dealt with before he can have a message. Therefore, no word can be free from its accompanying affliction and persecution.

Why is this the case? After we have heard a teaching and received it, God will surely create an environment that calls for the need of that word. For example, we may hear a word on patience today and receive it. God will then create for us an environment that requires patience. Or we may hear a word on brotherly love and receive it. God will create for us an environment that requires love. What the ears hear and the mouth says is not reliable. The only thing that is genuine is being able to practice the word when things occur. This is why all the words bring their affliction and persecution. They are there to test if you have really received the word. There is not one teaching in the Bible that can be acquired without paying a price for it. Coming behind all His teachings is God's creation of an environment that calls for the need of such teachings. The purpose of this is to test if the things we have received are genuine or false.

Many times, when the brothers and sisters hear a word on the cross, a word

on absolute consecration, or a word on absolute holiness, they become very excited and think that they have it, know it, and understand it. Brothers, do not rejoice so soon, for shortly thereafter affliction and persecution will come to you. They will come to test if you have indeed received this word. If you have, the affliction and persecution will prove that you have received it. If you have not received it or have only received it in a superficial or shallow way, the coming of the affliction and persecution will overwhelm you. Please remember that the affliction and persecution are there only to expose your true condition; they will never take away what is real. They only prove that you have indeed received the Lord's word; they will not cause you to lose the Lord's word. If something is gold, it will never be turned into brass through the testing of fire. No matter how hot the fire, it will not change the nature of gold. However, if something is only gilded with gold, if it is only covered with a coating of gold but does not have gold within, its nature will be exposed by the fire.

Please remember that you may hear a teaching, but the teaching is not necessarily yours. After you hear it, God will immediately give you a test to determine whether or not the word is yours. Although you have heard a word and have some scriptural knowledge about that particular word, you have not paid the price to join yourself to the word; you have not denied yourself and accepted the cross in your experience. You say with your mouth that you will obey. You may even pray happily saying, "Lord, I am willing to fully lay aside myself." Brothers and sisters, I can tell you that the Lord's sun will soon come. If you really have life, if you really have roots, and if you are genuine toward the Lord, the sun will help you to grow; it will help you with your development. But if you do not have roots, you will be dried up as soon as the sun comes out. All the trials are there to help you grow. If what you have is not genuine and not purely for the Lord, the trials will smash all that is not real and deceptive. They will show you what you really are within, exposing everything you have within and without to show you if both are the same.

Brothers and sisters, do you know what the sun is? Do you know what affliction and persecution are in reality? Let me tell you. They are the ultimate expression of the Lord's love—the cross. There is nothing that cultivates our life

more than the cross, and there is no better trial than the cross. The cross has separated the whole world into two classes. On the one side are the overcoming ones, and on the other side are the defeated ones. The difference between the two is the cross. The cross makes a separation between the two. I know of many people who were just like the people in the world in the beginning; they felt happy in the world. But once they were enlightened and received God's revelation, they resolved to serve the Lord properly from that time forward. They resolved to be disciples, set aside everything else, and follow the Lord properly. They felt that they were quite good and that they could probably go on in this way. But they were deceived because they did not know their real condition. God would not allow them to be forever ignorant of their real condition. For this reason, He did something to expose their true self. They had a high evaluation of themselves, so God gave them special trials. He could not allow them to remain in darkness forever. This is why He had to give them the cross, to expose their true self.

Then one day, they found that they had a problem with God and began to argue with Him. I am afraid that many Christians have already had an argument with God and developed a problem with God. One day you will find that God has not dealt with you according to your expectation. You will find that God has not done what you expected. You hope that God will do things one way, but He decides to do them another way. You hope that God will not do things that way, but He does them exactly that way. You feel unhappy and consider in your heart that God has done the wrong thing. When you see that God's speaking is different from yours, that His work is different from yours, and that the places He wants to go are different from the places you want to go, you will be dissatisfied with His arrangements and begin to argue with Him, asking why He is doing these things. You will begin to be angry with God and misunderstand Him. It may never occur to you that a servant of the Lord will encounter these things. But to your surprise, they will take hold of you. These things will not be a part of your plan, but they will fill your environment, school, home, and office. As a result, you will begin to argue with God and blame Him.

Brothers and sisters, please remember that this type of argument will keep

you back and make you dry. Please remember that all of our spiritual dryness begins with arguing with God and being unwilling to yield to Him. Every argument is followed by failures. If God has failed, and you have won, you will surely become dry. Therefore, every time you go to God, the cross is your test; it will determine if your life is rich or dry.

I know that many of you have argued with God this way. I also know that many of you are still in the midst of arguments and have not settled them yet. You continue to complain about the way God has dealt with you. Brothers, let me tell you that the outcome of such arguments will determine how you live from this point forward. In other words, the richness or dryness of our life depends on the way you handle such arguments. If you win, God will fail, and there will be no other result but dryness. Never rejoice at your victory or your freedom. Never think that you have won forever just because you have gained what you desired. This is really a pronouncement that your life is drying up and that your living is falling fast. This is the experience of many people. All spiritual dryness comes when you begin to argue with God, when He has failed and you have won. Your life will never flourish when God fails. Actually, this will never happen. Brothers and sisters, if you are in the middle of a dispute with God and the matter is not yet settled, if there is an unresolved problem between you and God, and if you are still not clear concerning the will of God, I can frankly say that this is very dangerous. You have to be very careful. If you blame God or despise His arrangement, you will fail right then. There is no need to wait until the whole thing is exposed; your dryness will begin right then.

Therefore, God will not allow us to hear a message or offer a consecration and let the matter be concluded. Every time you say that you will not fail, that you will be an obedient Christian, and that you will follow the Lord to walk in the way, the Lord will test you immediately. The Lord will not allow you to bear the name of being obedient to Him, without first testing you. He can only use those vessels that have passed the test. Whether or not you are faithful is not determined at the time you hear a message, nor is it determined by your confession or acceptance. Since God cannot trust in you, He allows affliction and persecution pertaining to His word to come upon you and test you to see how

you will react. Then you will prove if you really are for God or if you were merely making a superficial confession. At the time of your trial, you may not praise Him as much as before. During those times, you may not be as clear about God as before. But He still has to test you.

Friends, when I first began to work for the Lord, I went one day to visit an elderly sister, Miss Barber. We sat in the living room together. She began to ask me, "Is your intention in giving yourself to serve God something that God wants? What does the Lord want you to do?" I answered, "He wants me to serve Him." She then asked, "What if the Lord does not want you to work for Him?" I answered, "He surely wants me to work for Him. I know that." She then began to read with me the passage in Matthew 15 concerning the Lord feeding the four thousand with the seven loaves and the fish. She asked me what this passage meant. I answered that the disciples put the loaves and the fish in the Lord's hand, and when the Lord had blessed them, they became manifold and the four thousand were fed. She then added one word, which I can never forget to this day. Of course, at that time I was quite bewildered. She said that all the loaves in the Lord's hand were first broken before they were distributed. Any loaf that was not broken could not be changed and could not sustain another's life. She also said, "Brother (actually she was older than my parents), please remember that many times we are like the loaves, who would say: `Lord, I will consecrate myself to you.' But even though we have consecrated ourselves, we secretly hope in our heart that the Lord will not break us. We hope that the loaf can always be whole, beautiful, and always remain unchanged. But no loaf that is in His hand is ever unbroken. If you do not want to be broken, it is better that you do not put yourself in His hand."

It has been twelve years since the day she talked to me about this. During these twelve years, I have deeply learned this lesson. I realize deeply that this word is true. Every loaf that is in the Lord's hand is broken by Him. Therefore, allow me to say the same thing to you now: "If you do not want to be broken by the Lord, please do not put yourself into His hand." This is where the problem lies with many people. When they hear the teachings concerning overcoming, they are very happy and say, "God, I will consecrate everything I have to you." But

when God begins to break them, they cry, “Oh, I did not expect to encounter such things.” Brothers and sisters, this kind of living is painful and difficult to bear. On the one hand, God has laid hold of us, and we cannot be like other ordinary men anymore. On the other hand, we do not want to be broken that way. Therefore, if you have not counted the cost and are not ready to be broken by Him, you will find yourselves dissatisfied with God, and God will be dissatisfied with you.

If you do not want to follow the Lord, God can do nothing with you. But if you realize that it is right to obey the Lord and do not want your life to dry up, wanting instead to have a strong and vigorous life, you will have to allow God to test the reality of the word you received with affliction and persecution. I do not know how many people have experienced dryness as a result of failing the test of this word.

In another two days, we will consider God’s eternal purpose. It is questionable whether or not we can come up to that standard. Many times we hope and desire, but we have not passed through the dealings in a proper way. As a result, we cannot be as we wish. Therefore, the cross is our test. The cross will separate us, and we will see on which side we are. I will not go into this at this time. I will speak on the reason that the seed becomes dry. Why do seeds grow so fast, yet dry up so soon? Why do they dry up immediately after the sun comes out? The Lord gives us three reasons in Mark 4.

## I. NOT HAVING ENOUGH EARTH

He said that the first reason is that there is not enough earth. This means that the earth is not deep; there is not much depth to the earth. A person in this condition has just a small amount; everything about him is shallow. There is not much within him; he is very superficial. He is easily satisfied and easily hungry. He takes in little and is satisfied with a little. It is easy for him to rejoice and easy for him to be sorrowful. It is easy for him to laugh and easy for him to cry. He is standing in a shallow place. He is a person living according to his environment, that is, he lives in his emotions. There is nothing in this world that is more shallow than his emotion and environment.

If a tree is large, its roots will surely be big, because it has to go deep into

the earth to find water. Some roots go down as far as two or three miles because there is no water on the surface. When roots find no water on the surface, they will go to the depths. They will go down miles for water. One can find palm trees in the middle of the Arabian deserts. They wave with lush greenness under the scorching sun. The reason they can do this is that their roots have stretched themselves to the sweet water; they are no longer afraid of the hot sun. Therefore, even though they are most severely burned, they can absorb the cool water freely because they are not living on the surface of the earth but within the depths of the soil.

Oh, all those who live by their environment or by their feelings are living on shallow ground. Although I have not been working for the Lord for a long time, according to my experience, the most difficult kind of people are those who say "yes" to everything. No matter what you say, they respond with "yes," superficially accepting what you say. They appear to be very attentive. Actually, within them, they have nothing. The people who laugh and cry easily, who are easily affected by the weather, who become happy or sad because of their feelings or environment, are difficult to handle. The people of shallow earth are controlled by their emotions or environment. The deep ones are not that way. What they see is not the environment, but the Lord behind the environment. What they know is not the emotion. They have locked up their emotion and know the Lord from within.

Brothers and sisters, what becomes of those with a little earth? The Lord shows us a profound lesson here. If we are not looking at the Lord behind the environment but are living by our emotion or the environment, we will not be able to hold fast to any doctrine or teaching. What is the Lord doing among us today? He is seeking for some among us to be the overcomers. We will never be able to be the overcomers if we live every day according to the environment without any assurance at all; this is to live by our feelings without the knowledge of the Lord. Many Christians are happy when they progress in a smooth way. But when they encounter any darkness, they feel that everything is depressing. They do not know anything about the work of the Holy Spirit. They are not living by the Lord, but by man's word, their own thoughts, and the arrangement of the

environment. If they live this way, they will immediately fail when the trials come. Once the cross comes to them, they will fall. Therefore, if we fall back at the trials and do not take up the cross to press on, we will not be of much use to the Lord. Rather, we will be shallow, without much of anything, sensitive in our feelings, and living according to our feelings.

## II. HAVING NO ROOT

The Lord tells us that the second reason for barrenness is the lack of roots. What is a root? In a tree, the part that can be seen is the trunk, while the part beneath the ground, which cannot be seen, is the root. The branches have life and are visible; the roots are invisible. The roots are buried in the earth. Therefore, the roots refer to the hidden life. Those who do not have any root before the Lord will be dried up in their life. Those who do not have a hidden life, who do everything before men and have nothing special before the Lord, cannot stand the test of the cross. Brothers and sisters, let me ask you honestly, is your living only what is seen by men? Do you have any secret life before the Lord, inside your own room? If your prayers can only be heard in the prayer meetings, if you only read your Bible to others, and if your works are all before men, you do not have any roots.

Do you know what the roots are? The roots are the parts that cannot be seen, that are hidden, and that are in secret. The visible parts are not the roots. Therefore, before the Lord you must ask yourself how much of your living is actually before Him? Other than the part of your living, testimony, Bible reading, and prayer that have been done before men, how much has been done in secret? If you do not have a secret or hidden life before God and if you do not have any secret prayer, reading, or obedience, I can say very frankly that you do not have any roots. When the cross comes, it is no wonder that you cannot bear it. The only reason for this is that you lack a crucial, hidden life. Nothing can preserve you as much as a hidden life. If you see that a brother has fallen or failed, or has come into trouble, without asking anyone, you can surely say that prior to this trouble he lost his hidden life. He lost his hidden life during the previous weeks, months, or even years. Your spiritual life depends very much on your hidden life

before God. If you cannot sustain a hidden life, you will be weak before the Lord. Therefore, you should realize the importance of the hidden life.

The shutting of the door in Matthew is a kind of root life. What did the Lord say in verse 6:6? He said that when we pray, we should enter into a private room, shut the door, and pray to the Father who is in secret, and the Father who sees in secret will repay us. The Lord is very particular; He said that the Father will see us in secret. Prayer is something that can be seen. We have always thought that prayer is something that is heard; however, the Lord did not say that prayers are heard, but that prayers are seen. Many times when we have no words before the Lord, our attitude alone is precious enough, because God is seeing and not just hearing us. Brothers and sisters, how much of what we are can be seen before God? How much of our living can be seen by God? How many times are we only seen by the Lord and no one else? Or are we doing everything in front of men?

Now I have to say a few words particularly to the brothers who are co-workers. No one is as susceptible as the Lord's workers. We suffer more temptations than others, because it is easier for us to put everything before men; we can even display what we have in secret. Brothers, let me ask again, how much of our lives are seen by God alone and not known by men? How much of our lives are spiritual before God and have never been told to men? How many of us have the experience of Paul, who hid his experience for fourteen years? How many of our things are kept exclusively for God's enjoyment? If we do not have anything like this, I can honestly say that we do not have any roots. If we do not have a hidden spiritual life and have not been dealt with by God or smitten by Him in a hidden way, everything will be superficial and of no account.

Everything that man has must first be properly tested on the cross and able to stand the test before it can be considered reliable. If a man is deeply rooted in the death of Christ, he may go through trials, but he will still stand. Let me ask you this question: would you still say that you believe, if you are being persecuted for the Lord's sake to the point of death, with someone saying, "I will kill you if you continue to believe in Jesus"? How do you know that you would not fall back in an attempt to spare your own life? The only protection you have when you go through trials, tribulations, and persecution is to have deep roots. If

the roots are not deep, you will surely fail. If the roots are not deep, you will not be able to be an overcomer. If you want to remain standing in that day, you must have deep roots in ordinary times. This means that you must have a hidden life before the Lord and must continually have hidden experiences. Therefore, the only way that we can know that we will not fall in that day is by having an adequate amount of hidden life today.

## III. THE ROCKY PLACE

Those with shallow earth may still have a desire for deep roots, but there are rocks that block the way. There are rocks where the roots are. They may outwardly look the same as other soil; just like others, they are filled with dust and mud. But within there are hidden sins and the self. Outwardly, they look the same as everyone else. They can listen as others listen and speak as others speak. But in hidden places, big rocks block the way. This is why they cannot be deep. What are the rocks? In the Bible, rocks have many meanings. I can only mention one today, the hardened heart. If you want to be spiritual, you must not have a hardened heart. Many people have never received a blow to their will; their self has never been broken before God. They can say a great deal about God's will and provide many reasonings. They always have their own ideas about God's will. They always say I think that something should be done this way or that way. God has not yet destroyed their wisdom, nor torn down their will. They are still scheming and planning, but there are rocks underneath, so they cannot go deep.

Brothers and sisters, allow me to say an honest word: we cannot have real spiritual progress unless we allow ourselves to be broken by God. The cross is our only source of progress. If God does not break us, we will never become useful. He must break the rocks beneath us. Otherwise, we will never be deep. Only one kind of people will go all the way down to the depths; they are the ones who are as soft as a child. Only one kind of people can take firm roots; they are the ones who fear and tremble at God's word. Unfortunately, a countless number of people have to think before they will make a decision concerning God's command! They think that God's command requires discernment and selection. Thank the Lord that there are also many here who have obeyed in a very simple

way. Thank the Lord that there are many who only care “who” is giving the command and never question “why” before they obey. Brothers and sisters, a disobedient heart is a rock. May God shine His light on us, so that we may see the enormity of the rock within us.

The rocks are not only your self; they are your hidden sins. In your life there is always one sin which has not been removed because of the high price; it remains there, and you are reluctant to remove it. If you leave it there, you will never receive spiritual riches; you will never go deeper because of it. Therefore, you have to deal thoroughly with your sins. Even the hidden sins have to be dealt with thoroughly. If you have not dealt thoroughly with the hidden sins, and if the stubborn self is not thoroughly dealt with, your roots will never be deep.

Brothers and sisters, how many things has God pointed His finger at in you? Are you unwilling to look at Him? Are you fighting and refusing to surrender? Perhaps there is already a problem between you and God. Perhaps you have seen God’s will and are debating with Him. This is what the Lord wants to show you today. Brothers, if you really want to serve Him and acquire the truth before Him, the large rocks must be removed. Otherwise, the earth will always be shallow, and the roots will not be deep. If you cannot remove the hidden sins, the stubborn self, and the opinions that are expressed as “I don’t want to” and “I will not,” you will never acquire any spiritual power. If there is a problem between you and God, it will be impossible for the earth to have any depth or the roots to be deep. Thank the Lord that in spite of this, He can still do His work. Your heart is hardened, but the Lord can change you. I know that many people here have been smitten by God before.

But I also know that there are many here who are quite stubborn. However, if the Lord can break others, He can also break you. If the Lord was able to sit on a donkey that had never been sat on when He entered Jerusalem, He can sit on you as well. Anyone who has ever sat on a donkey knows that a donkey that has never been sat on is the most difficult kind. But the Lord could do it. He could very safely sit on that donkey and enter Jerusalem. In the same way, He can sit on you. Although you are very stubborn before God, the Lord can break you, no matter how stubborn you are. You should sincerely pray today, “Lord, I am really

hard within. Many times I have held onto my own will and have insisted on my own opinions. That is why so many times, I have been a shallow person. Please break me." We do not know how shallow our life is before God. If we allow God to break our hardened heart, if we do not live by our feelings or the environment, and if we ask God to give us more of a hidden life, we will see forward progress. If we deal thoroughly with every cross that comes our way and take up the cross every time it comes, we will become deeper and deeper, moment by moment.

Although we have read two other passages of Scripture, I cannot cover them in detail today. I can only speak about them briefly because there is not much time left, and I have already covered much of what I wanted to speak. Let us cover these passages just a little to make up for what we have missed. In Hosea 14 Lebanon is mentioned three times. First, it is mentioned in contrast to the lily. Second, it is mentioned in contrast to the olive tree. Third, it is mentioned in contrast to the vine. Lebanon is repeatedly mentioned; there is Lebanon in contrast to the lily, Lebanon in contrast to the olive tree, and Lebanon in contrast to the vine. Lebanon is repeatedly mentioned because there is a kind of cedar tree in Lebanon. Cedar trees are tall trees with very deep roots. Very few trees have roots as deep as the cedar tree. The Bible considers the cedar trees of Lebanon to be the greatest trees in the world. They signify those who will take deep roots. Do not treasure what the world says to you, because the Bible shows that the Lord is only pleased with those who have roots that go downward.

In this passage the Lord shows us three things. First, He made a contrast between the lily and Lebanon. Second, He made a contrast between the olive tree and Lebanon. Third, He made a contrast between the vine and Lebanon. Why does the Lord make a contrast between the lily and Lebanon? He makes the contrast because the lily is very attractive. Christians should not have flowers that are grown in gardens, but in the valley. Lilies grow in the wilderness, not in homes. They grow in the valley and do not need gardeners to cultivate them. Rather, they are sustained by water from heaven; they are fully cultivated and sustained by God. The beauty of the lily lies in the wilderness; it lies before God.

Hosea 14:6 says also that Israel's splendor shall be as the olive tree. According to my consideration, there is absolutely no beauty in the olive tree. It

would be more plausible and real to say that its beauty shall be as the peony. Saying that its beauty shall be as the olive tree does not seem too appropriate. However, God's beauty is not in appearance but in fruit. We know that the olive tree is a tree bearing fruit for oil; it is a tree that bears the fruit of the Spirit. The beauty of the olive tree lies in its fruit, which typifies the Spirit. This is something inward; it is not something that appears before men.

Further on, it says that Israel shall grow as the vine. I do not know how many of you have seen blossoms on a vine. We have grown a vine in our home every year since my youth. But I have never seen anyone putting vine blossoms in a vase, and I have never seen vine blossoms. Unless you look for them carefully, you cannot find the blossoms; the blossoms are as small as specks of dust. Before they have fully blossomed, they become grapes. Why does it not say peach blossoms or plum blossoms instead of vine blossoms? The one reason is that our flower is not for beauty, but for fruit-bearing. There are three kinds of flowers in this world. One is for display only, like the chrysanthemum flower. Another is both for display and for fruit, like the plum blossom. The third is for fruit-bearing alone, like the blossoms on the vine. God has no intention that we be like the plum blossom or chrysanthemum flower, which are for display. God has only one requirement: we have to have roots that go downward. Lebanon is mentioned three times, and each time we are told to take care of the hidden life. This is very crucial. Perhaps a life that bears spiritual fruit does not look that good. The prayer life is not something that looks good. However, we are living to God and as long as God considers it to be good, that is enough.

A similar passage is found in the Song of Solomon 4:12, which says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse;/a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." [The word spring is translated "well" in the Chinese Union Version.] A garden enclosed means that it is not a public garden; it is not a garden into which everyone can go. Rather, it is a garden enclosed, reserved for special ones. The flower in our garden is set apart for Christ and is not for anyone else. Not everyone can see it. "A well shut up." There is a difference between a well and fountain. A well is something man-made, while a fountain is something natural. Abraham always dug wells. Whenever his servants found a source, he dug a well.

However, a fountain is natural and has not been worked on by man. The Lord says that we are a garden enclosed and that we are not open at any other time; the only time we are open is when we open to the Lord. We are also a well shut up. A well is for man's use. However, even though it is for man's use, it is still limited by the Lord and shut up for Him. The fountain signifies what we have received from God; it signifies the joy we have received from the Lord. The well is before man, while the fountain is before God. None of these can be shown to others purposely; they are all concealed. All of our experiences in prayer should be concealed and not made public. Even the part that is for man is concealed. In short, all the good things that we possess should be locked up for the Lord.

All of the speaking today concerns only one thing, that is, to go "down." We have no goal other than allowing the cross to do a deeper work in us. Brothers and sisters, there are too many superficial and shallow things. There are too many things growing outside, exposed on the surface, and seen only by man. What is lacking is a hidden part before God. What God is seeking today and the one thing that grips our heart, is a hidden life before Him, something invisible to man. The life that God wants is like the life of a sister, a life that is hidden in the background. God has no intention that we put everything on the outside and have nothing hidden and secret. May God grant us the grace to accept His demands and not be as we were before. May we ask and allow God to grant us a real breaking so that we can go on in the way ahead.

# MESSAGE THREE

## THE EXTENT OF THE BELIEVER'S SALVATION

## •Outline

**I. Conscience**

**II. Heart**

**III. Heart, Soul, Mind, And Strength**

**IV. Mind**

**V. Thoughts**

**VI. Heart And Mind**

**VII. Will And Mind**

**VIII. Speaking**

**IX. The Lust Of The Body**

**X. Members Of The Body**

**XI. I**

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We all know that we are sinners and that we have eternal life through faith. Today we want to see to what extent God saves us through Jesus Christ. In other words, to what extent will our person be saved by God through Jesus Christ?

In the last two or three years, I have noticed one thing: I have felt that there is definitely something wrong with my personal Christian life. When I read the Bible, I confess that I do not have what the Bible says. Although the Christian life of some seems to be worse than mine, and although some who have deeper experiences have answered my questions by saying that I have already attained, I still feel that I do not have what the Bible says. Thank God! Now I know! Indeed there are better things in Christ. Indeed these better things can be obtained and

can be obtained even now.

So, today what I want to talk about is the extent of our heritage in Christ Jesus. This is not about the future heritage in heaven—something which we will have in the future. We are not talking about eternal life—something which we have through regeneration. We are not talking about the glory in the kingdom—something which will be ours in the millennium to come. Rather, we want to emphasize the extent to which God can save us as persons today.

Let us read some verses in the Bible. We will read them one by one as we move along. We want to see the extent to which God can save us today.

## I. CONSCIENCE

Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" This verse speaks of the extent to which Christ saves our conscience. His blood can purge our conscience from dead works.

Brothers and sisters! Please ask yourselves today if there are still accusations in your conscience. If from time to time there are still accusations in your conscience, then what you have obtained is not yet complete. The Lord saves us, and His blood purges our conscience. Our conscience can be purified by His blood from every kind of self-accusation. When we gather together, we pray, "O God! We thank You that our hearts have been sprinkled from an evil conscience." But many times we still feel uneasy. What we have done is just a cover-up and a mental gloss-over. But the blood of God's Son does purify. If your conscience still accuses you, it does not mean that God's salvation cannot save you to that extent. It merely means that the salvation which you have received is not yet complete. Thank and praise God! He can save us to such an extent! It is possible for our conscience to be purified.

## II. HEART

Mark 7:21-23 says, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these wicked

things proceed from within and defile the man." Also Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart." These two verses speak of the original defiled condition of our heart. They also tell us how Christ can save our heart to the extent of being pure.

Brothers and sisters! The heart mentioned in Mark is our natural heart. What about this heart? The Lord said that all evil things come from men's heart. All these evils are from the heart. But the Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." The Lord is able to save such a bad heart to the extent of being pure.

The salvation of our heart does not mean the suppression of the inward evils so that they do not break loose. The salvation of our heart means that our heart is cleansed from within. If we plan to cover up or seal up, this is not salvation, because we have not been saved by God to the extent of being pure. We have to ask God, "How many evil thoughts are there in my heart? How much deceit? How much jealousy? How much pride?" If all these are merely suppressed inside us and we are merely covering them up tightly, our heart has not been saved. What God says is, "Blessed are the pure in heart!"

Today our shortcomings, problems, and lack of testimony are due to the fact that our heart has not been cleansed to that extent. Many times we see someone sin, but we dare not reproach him, because we realize that this person's outward condition is but the blossoming of sin; the seed of this blossom is also in his heart. Although we do not love the world like some, our hearts are nevertheless affected. We are no different from others. When we do not have a pure heart, we do not have a testimony.

God would not leave any filthiness in our heart. Even a heart that is as evil as the one mentioned in Mark can be saved by God to the extent of being clean. God can save us until we have a pure heart. We praise and thank God that He can save us to such an extent! He can deliver such an evil heart to become a pure heart.

## III. HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH

Mark 12:30-31 says, "`And you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul and from your whole mind and from your

whole strength.' The second is this: `You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" These verses say that God can save us to such an extent that we love God with all. He can also save us to the extent that we love others unselfishly.

How difficult it is to love God with all! Oftentimes we want to love God, but we secretly want to love the world as well. We want to serve God, and we also want to serve mammon. Oftentimes the love in our heart toward God is distracted by many people and many things. But God can save us to the extent of loving God "with all." We can love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength. God can even save us so that we not only love God, but we also love others without any selfishness at all.

Brothers and sisters! If we cannot love God to the extent of "with all," if there are still other persons, other objects, or other things besides God as the center of our love, and moreover, if we cannot love others as ourselves in addition to loving God, then the salvation we have obtained is not complete. Christ can save us to such an extent that we can love God "with all" and we can love others unselfishly. This is possible. We praise Him!

## IV. MIND

Second Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ." This verse implies that our mind can be saved to the extent of being "simple and pure."

Many times we want to obey the Lord, consecrate to the Lord, and only love the Lord. But how difficult this is! It is very, very difficult because we do not have the strength. We often find ourselves failing. We wish we could love the Lord with all our love. We wish our heart towards the Lord would be simple, without corruption, and single and pure. How good such a condition would be! We hope for this experience, but it seems that it can hardly be realized. However, God can save us to such a degree. This is possible. This can be done. Our heart must be simple and pure. If we are always double-minded, we will be like Eve. On the one hand, Eve saw that the fruit was good for food and, on the other hand, she was reminded of what God said about not eating the fruit. On the one hand, she saw

that the fruit was pleasant to the eyes and was to be desired; on the other hand, she thought of God's commandment of not eating. Her heart was moved, and once she loved the fruit, she ate it. For just an instant and by a slight deviation, Eve lost her simplicity and purity toward Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Do we want a simple and pure heart toward Christ? We should love Him! We should not be afraid of loving Him too much. We should love Him unreservedly and love Him without reasoning. Praise and thank God that He can save us to such an extent that we have a simple and pure heart toward Christ! This is possible!

Romans 12:2 says, "And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." This verse tells us that God can save our mind to the extent that we are transformed by its renewing and that we can prove the will of God.

Brothers and sisters! Have you ever thought about this? A renewed mind is able to prove the good, well pleasing, and perfect will of God. Many times, this seems to be God's will, and that also seems to be God's will. Many times we take John for Jack and Jack for John. Only a renewed mind can rightly discern God's will. If our mind is not renewed, we cannot prove what the will of God is, and the salvation we gain will not be complete. Not only did God save us to what we are today, God will also save us to the extent of being perfect. We should desire after this. Praise and thank God! This is possible. This can be done.

## V. THOUGHTS

Second Corinthians 10:5-6 says, "As we overthrow reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ. And we are ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." These two verses speak of God being able to save our thoughts unto the obedience of Christ. God can save our thoughts, all our thoughts, unto the obedience of Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Every one of us should ask ourselves, "Can we control our thoughts?" We know that there are many thoughts which we cannot control.

God does not allow us to have confusing and disorderly thoughts; God intends to bring our many thoughts to the obedience of Christ.

Brothers and sisters! Let me ask you, “Have all your thoughts been brought to the obedience of Christ?” We should not have any wandering thoughts, filthy thoughts, or world-craving thoughts. If we still have these thoughts, we have not obtained a full salvation. God’s salvation can bring the thoughts of every believer to the obedience of Christ. This can be done. We can surrender all our thoughts to the Lord, that is, to the obedience of the Lord. This is the salvation which is prepared for us in Christ. Not only does God save us unto eternal life or to heaven, but He also wants to save our whole being, that is, all our thoughts, to the obedience of Christ. Praise and thank God! This can be done. This is possible. He can save us to such an extent.

First Peter 1:13 says, “Therefore girding up the loins of your mind and being sober, set your hope perfectly on the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “The loins of our mind” refer to our thoughts. This verse tells us that God is able to save our loose mind to the extent that it is focused.

I have mentioned before that the Jewish garment was like the garment worn in the Ming Dynasty. It was loose and buttonless. Whenever the people worked, the loins had to be girded up to facilitate movement. Our loose thoughts are like an ungirded loin. But just as a person can gird up his loins, God can save our loose thoughts and bring them into focus.

Many times, though our thoughts are not filthy, they are loose and wandering. We pray a little, and then we find that our mind wanders away. We read the Bible a little, and again our thoughts are lost. It is true that the thoughts may not be bad. But minds set on good or tasteful things, if not done at the proper time, also indicate a looseness of the loins of our mind and lack of concentration. God can save us to such an extent that we can control our thoughts and focus our mind. How loose are our thoughts! If we cannot concentrate in our mind, we have not obtained the complete salvation. If we have not obtained it, we should know that Christ can save us not only to our present state, but He can save us to the state of perfection. Praise and thank God! He can also save our loose thoughts to the extent of being focused. This is possible. This

can be done.

## VI. HEART AND MIND

Philippians 4:6-7 says, “In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every man’s understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.” These two verses say that God can save a person’s heart and thoughts, delivering him from anxiety. To what extent is the Lord’s authority able to save a person? He is able to save a person to the extent that the peace of God guards his heart and thoughts.

The word guard has a special meaning in the original language. The most accurate translation for this word is a special term used in military science. It can be translated as “garrison.” The verse means that the peace of God guards our hearts and thoughts in a way similar to a curfew set up in a locality. During a curfew, the army is empowered to garrison the curfew area, making the area safe and free from danger. God’s peace can guard our hearts and thoughts in the same way as an army guards a locality to keep it peaceful. God can deliver us from all anxiety. The peace of God garrisons our hearts and thoughts.

I have not yet seen many Christians who are without anxieties about something. The majority of them are full of worries. There was a mother who had seven sons. She said, “I worried about each son until he grew up and got saved. There are two who are now in heaven, so I don’t have to worry about them anymore. But I still worry about the remaining five sons.” A brother told her that worrying in this way was a mistake; it was a sin. But she said, “A mother ought to worry for her own children. If she does not worry, that is sin.” The brother pointed out Philippians 4:6-7, but she thought that the anxiety mentioned there did not apply to her kind of worry. According to her, the wife must worry about the husband, the parents must worry about the children, and the businessman must worry about his business. But the Bible says, “In nothing be anxious.” It does mean that we can worry about a few things. It means to not worry about anything.

I have not seen many brothers or sisters who are anxious in nothing. This is

not full salvation. If you worry about your whole family and are anxious about so many things—about this and about—the peace of God is not guarding your heart and thoughts. Such a person cannot testify, saying, "My Lord is the One who bears my burden day by day."

Anxiety is a sin. God can save you from all anxiety. No matter how big or small, heavy or light a thing is, you ought to be anxious for nothing. If you still have not experienced the peace of God keeping your heart and thoughts, the salvation you have obtained is not complete. If you have seen this matter clearly, you will say, "O Lord! I have gained too little of what You have given me." Praise and thank God! He can save us from all worry, to the extent where we are anxious for nothing. His peace is sufficient to guard our hearts and thoughts. This is possible. We must praise Him!

## VII. WILL AND MIND

First Peter 4:1-2 says, "Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin), no longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God." These two verses say that God can save our mind to the extent that we are willing to suffer as Christ did.

Are we afraid of suffering? Yes. We all want to have an easy daily life that is free from suffering. Whenever we have a little difficulty, we ask God to remove it. When we really submit to God and our future becomes difficult and hard, we ask God not to allow the difficulty to come to us. But God can save us to such an extent that we are not afraid of difficulty or hardship, that we arm ourselves with a mind for suffering.

What is our armor? Herein is the best armor: a mind to suffer just like Christ's. Whenever you submit to God, man may tell of difficulties and may set ways to deal with you. But by thinking of the suffering of Christ in the flesh and resolving to do the same, you are armed. Now you are able to say, "The Lord came to suffer. Suffering was not only His portion but also His duty. Suffering was His business. He wished to suffer." You can overcome all things if you arm yourself with such a mind. Not only will you not be afraid of suffering, you will

welcome suffering. Not only will you not turn away from suffering, you will let suffering come looking for you. If you fear and shrink back whenever you think of suffering, your salvation is not complete. God can save you to the extent that you can have a mind to suffer. If you have a mind to suffer, you are living the rest of your time in the will of God. Praise and thank God! This is possible! He can save you to such an extent.

## VIII. SPEAKING

James 1:26-27 says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this one's religion is vain. This is pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." James 3:8-10 also says, "But the tongue no one among men is able to tame; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made according to the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things, my brothers, ought not to be so." These two passages talk about the tongue which no man can tame. But God can save an untamed tongue to the extent that it becomes a tongue that can be bridled by us.

I met a person who said, "James said clearly that no man can tame the tongue. Therefore, it is excusable for Christians to be unable to tame their own tongues." But we need to know that James 3:10 plainly says, "These things, my brothers, ought not to be so." Moses could not enter Canaan for one reason: he said a quick word. The words Moses spoke were unbecoming of a learner. Not only do we need a learner's ear, but we need a learner's tongue as well. Only then will we know how to speak. God can save not only our heart, mind, and thoughts to a full extent, but He can also save our tongue to a perfect extent. If we cannot bridle our own tongue, I say again, we are not fully saved. Praise and thank God! He can save our tongue to a perfect extent. This can be done. It is possible.

## IX. THE LUST OF THE BODY

Romans 8:12 says, "So then, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh to live according to the flesh." This verse says that God can save us to the extent that we

can overcome the demand of the fleshly nature and be released from the demand of the fleshly lusts.

Here, I want to mention specifically three things concerning man's body. Generally speaking, the functions of our body are in three areas: first, the area of nourishment for man's sustenance; second, the area of reproduction for man's continuation; and third, the area of defense for man's protection. Before man's fall, these three things were proper; sin was not in them. But after man sinned and inherited a sinful nature, these three things became the carrier of sins.

Because of the need for nourishment, the world tempts us with eating and drinking. The very first temptation that man faced was regarding food. As the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil tempted Eve that day, the enjoyment of eating and drinking has become a sin of the flesh for us today. We should never underestimate the matter of eating and drinking, because many fleshly believers have failed because of this. The fleshly Corinthians caused many brothers to stumble because of eating (1 Cor. 8). For this reason the elders and deacons of the churches in those days had to be those who had overcome in the matter of eating and drinking (1 Tim. 3:3, 8).

Second, after man's fall, reproduction became a matter of lust to man. In the Bible, the body and lust are particularly related. Even in the garden of Eden, the sin of indulgence in eating immediately aroused lust and shame. Paul also related these two things together (1 Cor. 6:13, 15); he also considered drunkenness and defilement to be related (vv. 9-10).

Another area is man's self-defense. After sin assumed authority, the power of the body stepped up its strength in order to survive, and anything that threatens its peace and comfort becomes its enemy. Man's temper with the resultant anger and strife all arise from the flesh and are sins of the flesh. From the matter of self-defense, countless sins are produced directly or indirectly. This is because of the presence of an inward motivation of sin. For the sake of preserving one's profit, existence, reputation, opinion, and a thousand other things related to oneself, many of the darkest sins in the world are committed.

If we analyzed all the sins in the world one by one, we would see that, generally speaking, they are all related to the above three things. A fleshly

Christian is one who is controlled by any one or all of the above three things.

But Paul said that we are not debtors to the flesh, not at all. Every one of us does not have to live according to the flesh. Christ can save us from the demands of the fleshly nature and fleshly lust. What is lust? As human beings, we have two needs. First, we have the natural physical need. Second, because of this natural need, a craving is produced, and we try by devious means to satisfy this natural need. This second craving is lust. Our Lord Christ, however, can save us from this lust.

The Lord can save each one of us to the extent that we are free from this lust. Moreover, the Lord can save each one of us to the point that we can overcome the natural demand. Do not be mistaken. The Lord is not saving us so that we have no natural need; He is only saving us so that we can overcome it. The Bible does not tell us that the flesh will disappear. It only tells us that we are not debtors to the flesh; we are only free from its demands. For if we are debtors, we still have to pay back. But if we are no longer debtors, we have power over ourselves.

For example, if a person is hungry, he has to eat; this is man's natural need. But if he has no money to buy food, and he wants to use some illegal means, that is, he wants to steal to buy food to satisfy this natural need, he is in reality satisfying the demand of the lust of his flesh. When man has a natural need, he can only satisfy it according to the way of the Bible. When you are hungry, and if you have money, you can buy food to eat. This is not sin. All the natural needs can be attended to according to the teaching of God. Anything more than this is the demand of lust. When we say that God can save us so that we can overcome the natural need and be free from the demand of lust, we mean that if we are hungry and without money, we can overcome the demand of hunger and refuse any illegal means of satisfaction. Hunger is inevitable, but we can be free from the demand of lust.

Not only in food, but also in reproduction and self-defense, the principle is the same. We can only take care of the natural needs; anything more than this is sin. It is not sin for us to have natural needs, but we are not debtors to the flesh—there is no need for us to pay back anything. In these two aspects, God can save us to be free from the demand of lust and overcome the natural needs.

Not being a debtor to the flesh is not limited to only these things. Even when we are sick, we are still not debtors to the flesh. Though we may be slightly fragile mentally, we need not lose our temper. Though we may have physical problems that bring about psychological problems, we can also overcome them. God's Word says that we are not debtors to the flesh. Is God unable to save a Christian because he is handicapped in a certain area? Certainly not. We are not debtors to the flesh.

Brothers and sisters! Have you ever been ensnared by some troubles in your body? Are you trapped by some problem of eating or drinking? Know for sure that Christ's salvation can match all the circumstances and difficulties. As much as your difficulty abounds, God's salvation also abounds. If a Christian starves for one day, two days, or even three days, do you need to tell him that he need not steal to satisfy his hunger? Suppose he says that he is hungry and that he is obligated to steal. Can he say that? Oh! There is no need for anyone to be obligated to sin. God can save each one of us so that we do not live according to the flesh. Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." Brothers and sisters! Before God I can say this: "God, I thank You! All that is in my old man is crucified with Him." No matter what it is—envy, pride, filthy thoughts, a confused mind, worries, or the flesh—Christ can save us from all of these things. Praise and thank the Lord!

## X. MEMBERS OF THE BODY

Romans 6:13 says, "Neither present your members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God." Verse 19 also says, "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification." These two verses say that God can save our members to the extent of being sanctified.

Our members were slaves to sin, slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, but how about now? Have we been freed from the sins of every

member of our body? Does every member yield itself to be the slave of righteousness? If we have not yielded our members as slaves to righteousness, we are still the slaves of sin, and the salvation which we have received is not complete. The salvation Christ renders is a salvation that saves us to the extent that we yield all the members of our body as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification. This is possible; this can be done. We praise and thank Him!

## XI. I

Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." We are very familiar with this verse. Many of us can even recite it. This verse says that God is saving us not only to the extent of being crucified with Christ, but also to the extent of having Christ living in us right now.

The word here is not that we should be like Christ or that we should imitate Christ. It says that Christ has become me. Now it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. God saved Paul to such an extent; He will also save us to the same extent.

Brothers and sisters! If we still do not have Christ living in us, the salvation we have received is not complete. Praise and thank God! He saves us to the extent that for us to live is Christ. This is possible. This can be attained by every Christian.

Brothers and sisters! We need to pay attention to one thing: the full salvation which God has prepared for us must be received in full and obtained in full. I do not believe in perfection in sinlessness, perfection in eradication of sin; but I believe in the perfection to which God can save me. I believe that the cross is not an eradication of me, but a substitution of me through the Lord's death. God is not uprooting my sin or evil; rather, He is giving me a Christ who lives in me. Formerly, it was Christ who died for me on the cross. Now it is He who lives for me within. Before it was the substitutionary death; now it is the substitutionary living. The extent of my receiving salvation is the extent of God's salvation to me. We do not have to remain in any temper, worry, filthiness, or lust.

God can save us and set us free from all of these things. He will deliver us not only from what is bad but also will impart what is good into us.

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Now we can see how great God's salvation is and how great the extent of our salvation is! It is as if we have selected some merchandise. Now we must ask, "How do we obtain it?" We know that a price must be paid. Concerning this, there are several conditions which we will talk about next time. But today I will just ask you to do one thing: believe in God's Word. God's Word says that He can save us to such an extent. If we believe it, we will have it. We ought to believe that this is possible. The biggest problem lies in the fact that we do not believe in what the Bible says. God will fulfill according to our faith. If we do not believe in it, we will not have it.

This is a most solemn matter! God has spoken His word! Now if we say that we can do it, then we can do it. But if we say that we cannot do it, then we cannot do it. We must believe in God's Word; only then can God accomplish what we believe.

Mr. Andrew Murray was a very deep person in the Lord. I purposely studied the notes of his sermons. Each time he mentioned the victorious life, the sanctifying life, or the resting life, he always listed some conditions. There was a common condition that he mentioned each time: "one must believe that it is possible." Indeed if you think it is impossible, God will have no way to fulfill it for you. If you believe in what God has said and that He will do it in you, you will see His accomplishment of what He has said in you.

Brothers and sisters! What do you think of your own Christian life? If you confess that your present situation comes short in so many ways, are you ready to see God's full salvation fulfilled in you? If you are, you should right now believe that this is possible and that this can be done; you must also allow God to accomplish His work in you.

# MESSAGE FOUR

## THE OVERCOMING LIFE

## •Outline


**I. The Life Of Christ On Earth**

**II. The Christian Life Described In The Bible**

**III. When Did Christ Come To Live In Us?**

**IV. How To Let Christ Live His Life Out Of Us**

- **The First Thing to Do Is Surrender**
- **The Second Thing to Do Is Believe**


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We saw last Lord's Day that it is possible for the life of every Christian to reach the stage of perfection. (See "The Extent of the Believer's Salvation.") It is possible for every Christian to have a pure conscience and a clean heart, and it is possible for him to be anxious in nothing. It is possible for him to be pure in his mind and focused in his thoughts. It is possible for him to be fully obedient to God and to fully honor and love God. It is possible for him to overcome the particular constitution of his physical being and present his members as weapons of righteousness to God unto sanctification. Every Christian should be able to reach the stage where he can say that he is crucified with Christ and that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who is living in him. This is entirely possible and attainable. Today I will speak to you about another matter: the way to obtain the overcoming life.

## I. THE LIFE OF CHRIST ON EARTH

We know that when Christ was living on earth, He submitted fully to God; He did not love the world at all and did not speak or act according to His own

will at all. He never allowed Himself to be overcome by temptations, and He never once sinned. He was submissive to God unto death. This is the life of Christ.

How about us? Have we fully submitted ourselves to God? No. Have we fully rejected the self-will? No. Are we fully sinless? No. Are we fully free from the love of the world? We may not love the world outwardly, but in our heart, we still love it secretly. Who among us is never moved by temptations? Not one. How shocking this is! According to the Bible, a Christian should be one who is fully subject to God, one who is completely free from the love of the world, one who does not go along with his self-will at all, one who does not sin at all, and one who is never once agitated by temptations. Yet, brothers and sisters, you will say that this is impossible. I say that this is impossible also. Some of us have been Christians for at least one or two years. Most of us have been Christians for three, four, or even five years. During these few years, what have we achieved? Many times we repent, regret, and even weep. But where is victory?

We know the standard of being a Christian according to the Bible. We should not go along with ourselves at all; we have to be as righteous as God is, and we should seek after the kingdom single-heartedly. But what are we like? We often sin. Our hearts are defiled. We still lose our tempers. We still secretly love the world, and we are controlled by our lusts. We do not love to read the Bible or pray. Sometimes we even think that it is better not to be a Christian at all.

The Bible says that we should, but we say that we cannot. We should do what we should. But we cannot do what we cannot. Can we say that God's truth should be lowered a little? Can we say that it does not matter that much if we sin once? Or will we say that it is all right for some to love God, submit to Him, deny themselves, and be holy, but that such a standard is not for us, but only for a special class of people?

Brothers and sisters, we have to see that even though we ourselves cannot do it, there is One who can do it. This One is Christ. We ought to be perfect, but we are not. However, Christ has achieved this; He has attained this perfection. This tells us three things:

(1) The standard of living that God has ordained is something to which

every Christian can attain.

(2) We cannot attain to it.

(3) Throughout history, only One has attained it—Christ.

Do we believe that we cannot do it? Yes. Do we believe that Christ can do it? Yes. We should do it, but we cannot. We all admit that Christ is perfect. What then shall we say? A standard of living that is according to God can only be lived out by God. Not only is this true in the case of God, who is higher than us; it is also true in the case of lives that are lower than ours. We must have the same life before we can have the same living. Take the example of a bird. One must have the bird's life before he can have the bird's living. Take again the example of a beast. One must be a beast before he can live the life of a beast. Only God can live the life of God. Christ is God; therefore, only Christ can live the life of God.

## II. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE

Philippians 1:21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ." Does it say here that we should live like Christ? No. Does it say that we should imitate Christ? No. Does it say that we should take Christ as our pattern and follow Christ? No. It says, "To live is Christ." Imitating is absolutely useless. Doing good is also absolutely useless. Even if we can study the Bible, pray, conduct a good life, and have a proper pursuit, when our life is a wrong life, we will have a wrong living. We may aspire, weep, repent, and say to God, "O God, I truly desire to obey You." This is surely good. But there is one thing wrong: our life is wrong.

God ordained not only that Christ should die for us on Golgotha, but that He should become our life. Brothers and sisters, please be clear about one thing. God has not asked us to be Christians in such a painful way. God has never asked us to be Christians in the way that a monkey is taught to wear clothes, eat food, or exercise like a man. It would be a great pain for a monkey to try to be a man. It would be much more comfortable for the monkey to be a monkey than for the monkey to try to be a man. God has not dealt with us in this way.

When we read the Bible for five minutes, we may not find any taste to it; we may be more interested in reading other books. When we pray, we may receive nothing. Yet if we do not pray, our conscience condemns us. It is difficult for us to

not love the world; yet we have no peace to love the world. In this way, we find it difficult to be a Christian and impossible to live the life of God. What wretched men we are! It is better that we feel wretched because this means that we are still on the way. If we do not feel any wretchedness at all, I feel sorry because this means that we have left the proper path.

Many times though we see that the temptation of the world is fierce, we cannot say anything against it because, within us, we feel somewhat swayed ourselves and cannot quite condemn those in the world for being swayed. Many times we see men giving themselves to God, turning their face to God and their back to the world, and submitting to God, and we think, "How wonderful it would be if I could be like them!" But when we try to practice it, we discover what a suffering it is to us. Brothers and sisters, it would indeed be a great suffering if God were to require us to be such a Christian. If the standard is so high, how can we make it? It is a cruel thing to ask a five-year-old child to bear a four-hundred-pound weight. It would be even crueler to ask this child to bear a thirteen-thousand-pound weight. It is a greater suffering to ask a Christian to try to live the life of God than it is to ask the five-year-old child to lift a four-hundred or fifteen-thousand-pound weight.

Many times we think we can try; we try to endure some sufferings and cravings. But the result is one sin after another. We have hardly finished regretting before the thing which we regret comes back to us again. Our tears have hardly dried before the thing that brought us to tears comes back again. Brothers and sisters, it would be wonderful if we would believe that we cannot do what we try. God does not want us to try. The Bible tells us that the life that we have received from God is not one that fails and asks for repentance, only to fail again and repent again. It is a life in which "to live is Christ." It is also a life in which the Lord Jesus lives Himself out of us.

Mary gave the Lord a body, and the Lord was able to express the life of God out of it. In the same way, we should give ourselves to the Lord and should receive this Christ into us so that He can live His life out of us and we can live as He lives.

Brothers and sisters, please be clear: being holy, denying the self, and loving

the Lord single-heartedly are not things that a Christian should try to do, or are they things that a Christian can imitate. God has prepared Christ for us. This is the full salvation. God ordained Christ in two ways. On the one hand, Christ kept the law for us. On the other hand, He is within us causing us to keep the law of God. On the one hand, He has died for us. On the other hand, He is living within us. He accomplished salvation on Golgotha, and He is now accomplishing in us what Golgotha has accomplished. On Golgotha, He justified us. Now He is living within us to make us justified. Not only has He obeyed God, but He is also causing us to obey God within us. Not only has He done something for us, but He is doing something within us.

Here we can see the importance of resurrection. Paul said, "And if Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). He did not say that the record of sin still remained because the record of sin was removed when Christ died. But if Christ has not resurrected, we are still in our sins; what we have is only a half-salvation. When we preach the gospel, we often use the illustration that our transgressions are like debts which have been incurred. Christ is like a rich friend. When He died, He paid the debt for us. This is right, and this is the gospel. Unfortunately, this is only half of the salvation. It is true that the Lord Jesus has paid our debt. But we have to ask if paying the debt was the only thing that He did. Does it mean that we will never incur more debt? Christ has paid the debt, but does that mean that I may still owe money in the future? It is true that my friend has paid my past debts. But if I borrow again and my friend has to help me again, does this not mean that I have received only a half-salvation? Although my friend has paid for me, I still continue to owe. Although Christ has died for me, I still continue in sin. Is this God's salvation?

God's salvation caused the Lord Jesus to die for me on Golgotha, and it also causes Him to live within me. He has paid all the debts for us, and He is living within us so that we do not need to borrow anymore. God does not stop at saving us from hell and into heaven. He is saving us to the extent that Christ becomes our life. If we have only received a half-salvation, we will still suffer and not have the joy of salvation. Jesus Christ is our life. God has never said that a Christian should do this and that. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ." Paul was able not

only to suffer others' beatings and persecutions, but also to pass through many dangers and be imprisoned in Jerusalem and sent to Rome, because Christ was living in him. He was not like Christ or imitating Christ; rather, Christ lived in him. Without this he could not have gone through these things. A monkey cannot become a man. In the same way a Christian cannot become Christ by imitation.

Philippians 2:12-13 says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." In Philippians 1:21 we see Paul's personal experience. In these two verses, we are told that every Christian can have the same experience.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." When many people read this verse, they think that salvation is something that they should work out. For this reason they make up their mind to rise up early, to study the Bible, and to become zealous to testify to others. Yet they find that they cannot succeed. They have forgotten the words in verse 13: "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." Since the word "for" is in verse 13, it means that verse 13 is the "cause," while the working out of salvation in verse 12 is only the "effect."

Our activities in our daily life consist of only two things: (1) the willing, which is an inward resolving, and (2) the working, which is the outward conduct. The totality of our living is of these two things, the inward resolving and the outward working. Both the willing and the working are the result of God's operating within us. Here it does not say that we ought to will and work. Rather, it says that it is God who operates within us to the extent that we can will and work. To operate is to work. It is God who works within us to the point that we can will and work. The reason we can work out something is because God has worked within. Without the working within, there can never be the working out.

Many times we say to God, "O God, I want to obey You fully. Yet it is so hard! I want to not love the world. Yet it is so hard! I want to not go along with myself. Yet it is so hard!" Here is a way of salvation. God can work within you to the extent that you can fully obey God; He can work within you to the extent that you do not love the world and do not go along with yourself. Although you cannot do it within, God can work to the extent that you can. What is perfect salvation? It is

not for a Christian to remove a sin today and an evil tomorrow. Perfect salvation is to receive the perfect Christ. When we have Christ, we have the perfect salvation. The most difficult Christian to help is one who does not turn his eyes to Christ! What he sees is only his own goodness or his own evil! He pays attention to his certain sins, certain bondages from certain people, and certain attractions from certain things. He condemns himself, feels sorry for himself, and attempts to overcome all his problems. Yet he commits a great mistake. God has not intended for him to overcome these things one by one or perform good works item by item. God wants him to receive a perfect Christ.

Suppose a child loves fruit. When he wants pears, he goes to the orchard to buy some pears. If he wants oranges or bananas the next day, he will go and buy oranges or bananas. Later he finds out that his father owns the orchard and that his father has given the orchard to him. From that time on, his eating will be different. All the fruit belongs to him. As Christians, we want to perform this thing today and accomplish that thing tomorrow. We want patience today and love tomorrow; we are like the child who wants pears today and oranges tomorrow. But God wants us to receive a perfect Christ. The whole orchard is ours. If we buy separately, there will be times of lack and there will be a need to buy again and again.

I am not saying that you do not have to be patient or to love. You should be patient, and you should love. But if you are practicing these things item by item, you will find that you cannot practice them. If you do this, you will find out that day after day, you will love the world more, you will become more proud, and you will go along with yourself more. You have to realize that the whole orchard is yours. God wants us to have one common goal, which is to gain the one perfect Christ. He can operate within us to the extent that we can will and work for the accomplishment of His good pleasure.

We may have heard of the truth concerning Christ living His life within us. But let me ask today, “Do you have this experience?” Many times, we know something. Yet we only want to try it out. The result is failure.

First Corinthians 1:30 says, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

If we read this verse slowly, we will see that when we were saved, God made Christ our righteousness and our sanctification. Therefore, if anyone were to ask what sanctification is, our answer should be that Christ is sanctification. What is victory? It is just Christ. What is patience? It is just Christ. What is humility? It is just Christ. If we can answer this way, we will be victorious. Our whole being is fleshly and nothing but corruption. But Christ is sanctification; He is our sanctification. No one has sanctification or victory in himself. There is only one way; we must say to God, "O God! I receive Your Son!"

## III. WHEN DID CHRIST COME TO LIVE IN US?

The overcoming life is only found in Christ. But when did Christ come to live in us? It was at the time that we were saved. At that time we received Christ, for "He who has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:12). "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name" (John 1:12). At the time we believe, we receive Christ. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, "Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?" Who are the ones who are not disapproved? "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Have we come to the Lord? Yes, we have. If we have come to the Lord, we will by no means be cast out. What then do we have? We have Jesus Christ in us. Therefore, if anyone says that we do not have Christ within us, even though we have believed in the Lord, and that we ought to receive the word of Christ, he is making a great mistake. If we are not saved, we should receive Christ, and if we are saved, Christ is already living in us.

## IV. HOW TO LET CHRIST LIVE HIS LIFE OUT OF US

Now we know that only Christ can overcome. We also know that Christ is living within us. We know moreover that when we believe, we have Christ. Yet day after day we remain the same and nothing is changed. What should we do so that we can let Christ live His life out of us? There are two ways or, one may say, two conditions.

### The First Thing to Do Is Surrender

It is true that Christ is in us. But if we do not allow Him to work, He will not

work. We must submit ourselves to God. What is to surrender? Surrendering is to not promise God that we will do His will and do good; it is to not covenant with God to do what we cannot do. Surrendering is to let our hands go from our life. It is putting into God's hand our good, evil, merits, shortcomings, our past, future, problems, life, and ourselves, and single-heartedly allowing Him to work.

If you do not let your hands go, God cannot live His life out of you. Suppose you are giving a book to someone. If your hand does not let go of the book, the other person cannot have your book. When you come to God, you should tell Him, "I am giving You all that I have, including my good, evil, what I want, what I do not want, what I will, what I will not, what I can do, and what I cannot do." Are you willing to do this? If you are not willing to do even this, God will not be able to do anything. Are you willing to hand over the "you" that has failed? You have to be responsible for this step. Today God only asks you to do one thing: hand over yourself, the sinner, to Him.

Surrendering is not an act in which God asks you to do what you cannot do. It is just handing over everything including your good, evil, merits, and shortcomings. I have read the story of a young man who said that he was willing to do everything except one thing: he was definitely not willing to preach to Catholics. Brothers and sisters, are we willing to hand over this heart of unwillingness?

There are two kinds of surrender. One is to surrender to God for Him to use us, while the other is to surrender to God for Him to work on us. Many people think that to surrender to God is just to allow Him to use us. Brothers and sisters, God is asking us to do one thing: to henceforth hand ourselves over to Him. This is the meaning of dying to the self. This is the meaning of being delivered from the flesh. You have to hand over yourself. Are you willing to do this? If you are willing, you will succeed.

It is very difficult to take your hands away from the people and things that you love. I can tell you frankly that it is very difficult to do this. The thing that will cost the greatest price to give up will be the thing which you hold most tenaciously. For example, you may realize that you fail most often in the matter of friendship. But in this very matter, it is very difficult to say that you give to God

all your friends, good or bad, and ask for God's deliverance in the matter. Take another example: suppose you pray about the sickness of one whom you know nothing about. It is very easy to believe that God will help him. If no one is going to help him or heal him, it will not bother you. But if it is your parents or your husband or wife that is sick, it will not be easy to commit them to God. If no one will help them or heal them, you will fear that they may die. This shows that the more you love someone, the more difficult it is for your hands to give them up.

Today God is not asking you to do any good works. He is only asking you to commit everything you have to Him. You have enough failures to make your heart tremble. I had one sin which, until a few months ago, I was not able to overcome. I did not have any faith to commit it to God. It was like this once, twice, three times, four times, and even many times. Finally, I decided to commit it to God just like that. Today, you do not have to care about anything else. All I want to ask you is if you are willing to commit yourself completely to God's hand. Whether it be concerning a person, the world, some sin, or some matters that you cannot give up, all you have to do is to be willing to say to God, "I commit to You what I am reluctant to give up. Please work in me to the extent that I am willing to give up." I am not afraid of your reluctance to give up someone. I am not afraid even if you are a hundred times weaker than you are. I am not afraid that you would commit more sins than you do now. I am only afraid that you are not willing to commit yourself to God's working. Are you willing to commit to God your loved ones, your sins, your problems, and the things that are displeasing to God? It is all right even if you have a thousand or ten thousand weaknesses or failures. The question is whether or not you are willing to tell God, "I commit everything to You."

Surrendering is not taking a bitter pill; it is not suffering to death. Surrendering is just allowing God to work within you until you become willing.

Surrendering does not require you to do what you are not able to do. It is just putting yourself in the hand of God and allowing God to work, to the extent that you become willing to obey God and give up everything. If you are willing, God will have a way. God does not worry about how many sins you have or how evil a person you are. God is only concerned that your heart be in His hands.

In short, surrendering is a submission of our will; it is committing ourselves into the hand of God and allowing Him to work to the extent that God can accomplish His pleasure.

## The Second Thing to Do Is Believe

After we have surrendered ourselves, we must believe that God can deliver us from our love, our reluctance, and our inabilities. Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." To commit is to surrender. To trust is to believe, and the result is that He will bring it to pass. We can do nothing in ourselves. When we commit our ways to God, we believe that the Lord living within us will bring them to pass.

Can we say that we have overcome? Hallelujah! I can say that I have overcome, because the Bible tells me so. How pitiful that our faith is not as great as a grain of mustard seed. It is not even as great as a speck of dust! If we had faith, God would have worked already. God exercised only His mouth when He created the heavens and the earth; when He said let there be light, there was light. When we have faith, God will work, for He is willing to accomplish His own work.

A few weeks ago, a brother came to talk with me. He told me that he had three to four kinds of sins that he could not overcome. At times he even wanted to kill himself. I asked him, "Do you believe that Christ can save you from your sins?" He answered, "Yes, I believe." But immediately after saying this, he said, "Yet I have committed these sins again and again. I have overcome all other sins, but these few sins still remain." I read Romans 8:1 with him, which says, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." I then said to him, "The Bible gives one condition for being saved—to be in Christ Jesus. Are you in Christ Jesus?" He replied, "Yes, I am." Then I said, "All right, then see what the Bible says: `For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death'" (v. 2). He said, "The Bible says that I have been freed from the law of sin and of death." I then asked, "Are you free?" He replied, "I dare not say." I said, "Where is your faith?"

I am not afraid of men's weakness, corruption, or sin. But I am afraid of one

type of person: one who does not believe in God's Word. How precious are the words "has freed me!" God's Word says that we have been freed. It does not say that we shall be free. Do we believe it?

Christ has died for you. When you believe in Him, you have eternal life. What evidence do you have for this? Is it not merely because the Bible has said it? In the same way, today the Bible says, "The law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death." Therefore, I am already freed, and I am already delivered from the law of sin and death. Even if there are a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand sins, I am free from them all. I am free even from the spiritual death which I have inherited from Adam.

Brothers and sisters, do you believe in this word? Do you believe that you are free from the law of sin and death? The Bible says that you are free. If you believe it, you will say, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! God's Word says that I am free from the law of sin and of death!" Do you have some sin or unclean thoughts that you cannot overcome? If you do, you should know that there is a gospel for you today. The law of the Spirit of life has freed you in Christ Jesus from such sin.

Brothers and sisters, we must see that to surrender and to believe are two interrelated matters. When we put the two together, we will have the victory. Otherwise, we will have failure. It is impossible to overcome merely by believing without committing one's life to God in exchange for Christ's life. Although we obtained everything at the time of regeneration, unless we exercise our will to commit ourselves to God and allow Christ to live, God will never force us. However, if we merely surrender without believing, such surrendering is but a kind of dead work, because we have merely provided God the chance to work, without providing Him the chance to come in.

We have to first lift up our heads to tell God that we are committing everything into His hand, and, second, we have to believe that God has accomplished everything according to His Word.

Christ has borne all the conflict for us. The government is now upon His shoulder. We should believe in Him this way, day after day. Faith is continual, while surrender is instant; it is a once-and-for-all act. Although some may surrender gradually and slowly, it is unnecessary to do this. We can commit

everything to God in an instant and stop all our work from that point on. If we have committed, we should then believe that God will cause Christ to live out His holiness and victory from within us. Our former salvation saved us from the punishment of hell. Our present salvation saves us from the power of sin. There is no need to do anything else. All we have to do is commit and believe. I hope that every one of us can testify that we are victorious.

Brothers and sisters, there is only the need to believe. If we do not believe, nothing will work. If we believe, we will see changes. God has spoken, and we only need to praise and thank Him! We only need to believe in a "cold-blooded" way and ignore our feelings. God has said it, and it is so. We have never seen heaven and hell, but we believe there is heaven and hell because God's Word says so. If we can believe, that is good enough; there is no need for further evidence. There is only one evidence—the Word of God. We need no other evidence. I do not have to see if there is any change in me; I only need to believe that whatever God has spoken will count. If we believe, we will see change. If we do not believe, we will not see change.

Once I spoke to a brother about Romans 8:2. I asked if he believed in it. He said he believed. I asked him further, "What will you do if you wake up tomorrow and sin again? If you still sin, what are you going to do?" He did not know what to say. Brothers and sisters, the greatest danger lies in the first temptation. Satan will say that to surrender and believe are vain, that we have sinned again, that we have not changed at all, and that we are the same as we were! But brothers and sisters, we have to repeat again and again, faith is long-lived. If it is short-lived, it is not faith. Of all the lives in the world, faith is the most long-lived. Temptations may come. But if God says that we will overcome, we will surely overcome, and the temptations will fail. The way we deal with the first temptation proves if we have the faith or not.

The Lord Jesus told the disciples, "Let us go over to the other side" (Mark 4:35). Later, a windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was beginning to fill up. The disciples woke Jesus and said, "Teacher, does it not matter to You that we are perishing?" (v. 38). The Lord woke up, rebuked the wind and the waves, and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Then the

Lord rebuked the disciples: “How is it that you do not have faith?” (v. 40). Since the Lord commanded them to go over to the other side, they were surely able to go over to the other side. Even if the windstorm had become fiercer, it would not have stopped them from going over to the other side. Brothers and sisters, the most important thing is to believe in God’s Word. If God has said it, that is enough. We do not have to worry about anything else.

## MESSAGE FIVE

# THE END OF THE AGE AND THE KINGDOM

We deeply believe that we have come to the end of the age. We know that after the age of the church is the age of the kingdom. We have said in other places that God's eyes are turned to the kingdom and concentrated on the kingdom. If we understand correctly, we deeply believe that in His eternal purpose He is earnestly trying to bring in the kingdom. The church is for the kingdom.

After servants of God see the position the kingdom occupies in God's eternal purpose, how willing are we to see the kingdom come quickly, and how eager are we to see all of God's children working with God to bring in this kingdom quickly! By receiving more new light, we become even more zealous for God's kingdom. The one verse that we have received is Matthew 24:14, which says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

Here we see the relationship between the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom and the coming of the end. It is hard to understand all that this verse says, and in the past, among God's children, many contentions have arisen from this verse. I do not wish to debate about anything here, for we can never arrive at the same understanding anyway. However, we can speak about the clear light that we have received.

"The end" refers to the end of this age. Strictly speaking, according to the study of prophecy, it refers to great trial. This short period of great trial, "the great tribulation," will end our present age. The age of the Holy Spirit, the age of the church, the age of grace, and the age of the gospel are the various names given to this age. The age designated by these names will be terminated by "the great tribulation," which is "the end."

Before we go on, we have to know that the rapture is not determined at "the end" time, for believers can be raptured at any time. The great tribulation has to

do with this age, but the great tribulation is not directly related to the church.

The church is responsible for working together with God to bring in His kingdom. At the same time, God's kingdom will only appear physically at the end time. For this reason, the church has to pay attention to the end time. The end has to come before the kingdom can come. Hence, in order for the kingdom to come, the end must first come. The end itself is not related to the church, but it has much to do with the work of the church.

The Lord Jesus said that only after the gospel of the kingdom has been preached will the end of this age come. In other words, the gospel of the kingdom must spread before the kingdom can come. The Lord Jesus is speaking of the condition that is necessary for this age to end quickly and the kingdom to come. He is also prophesying of the situation towards the end of this age and the coming of the kingdom. Indeed, if this age is to end, God's children must testify afresh for the gospel of the kingdom. At the end of this age, we must see the revival of the gospel of the kingdom.

The recent decades can be considered as a period of revival in the teaching concerning the kingdom. In particular, during the past few years, the Lord has turned His children in China to pay attention to the matter of God's kingdom. This is the best sign.

But what is God's kingdom, and what is the gospel of the kingdom? Our common understanding is that the kingdom is the time when Christ and the church reign. Actually, there is a deeper significance than this.

Many people want to make a distinction between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace. Actually this is not all that necessary. If our readers think that there should be such a distinction, we can say that the gospel of grace is particularly for the sinners, while the gospel of the kingdom is particularly to deal with the demons. The gospel of grace refers to sin and blessing, while the gospel of the kingdom refers to the oppression of Satan.

There are many ideas today about the kingdom. Let us look at what the Lord Jesus said: "But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). The kingdom means many things, but what the Lord says here is the most important meaning.

The kingdom has a great deal to do with Hades. The Lord Jesus said that the kingdom is the casting out of the demons, that is, the activity of the Spirit of God in casting out the demons. This is the proper meaning of the kingdom. One big lack in the present-day Bible expositions is the negligence concerning Hades. The church, in its position, work, thought, and speaking, has often forgotten that its unique enemy is Satan. It does not realize that God has chosen the church for the purpose of opposing Satan and bringing in the kingdom of God. This is why the first time the church is mentioned in the New Testament, it is linked with Hades (see Matthew 16).

The time of the kingdom will be for a thousand years. What does this one thousand years have to do with Satan? The first few verses in Revelation 20 tell us that this will be the time when Satan himself will be bound in the abyss (vv. 1-3). This will be the time when Satan is disgraced the most.

"Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3). Those who have not sinned need not be judged. Only those who have sinned need be judged. In the future the church will judge the angels who have sinned. These angels who have sinned joined Satan to rebel against God. They are the principalities and powers today, the princes of the kingdom in Daniel 10:13. God said that we will judge them. When will we judge them? We will judge them when Christ comes again to set up His kingdom (Rev. 20:4).

This is the kingdom. The kingdom is the time when Satan is in the abyss. The kingdom is the time when the principalities and powers are judged. The power of Hades will be destroyed at the time of the kingdom. At the time of the kingdom, the "sons" under Satan's hand, who are the beast and the "spirit," the false prophet, will be thrown into the lake of fire. All the other countless evil spirits will be driven out of the world and will be imprisoned. Satan himself will be openly put to shame and spend one thousand years in a life of darkness in the abyss. That will be the time of disintegration for the household of Satan. It will be the time of the kingdom. It will also be the time for God's children to be vindicated, the time when the cross of God will gain the total victory. It will be the time when God's purpose concerning Satan, which was purposed in eternity past, will be fulfilled. It will be the time for Isaiah 14 to be fulfilled. That will be

the time of the kingdom. In this kingdom Satan will have no more power.

The gospel of the kingdom of heaven is nothing but God (who rules in heaven today) ruling the earth and completely casting away the ruler of this present world together with his messengers and evil spirits, so that man (i.e., Christ and the church) can rule on God's behalf.

The gospel of the kingdom of heaven is aimed particularly toward the power of darkness. When the Lord Jesus first preached the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, all His works were aimed at dealing with the power of darkness. "The Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). He healed the sick and cast out the demons. The casting out of the demons is surely an annulling of the power of darkness. But what about healing the sick? The apostle gave us a footnote to healing: "Healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). If we study the Gospels carefully, we will see that throughout His life, the Lord Jesus was destroying the work of the devil. Hence, His work in this world produced more effect on the demons than on men.

The Lord Jesus said that at the end time, some of His children will rise up to bear this testimony. We thank the Lord that during the past few years, quite a number of God's children have risen up to wage war against Satan. Spiritual warfare is no longer just a term; it has become a reality that is experienced by many believers. Truly we are at the end of this age.

Brothers, if we want to see God's kingdom come, so that God's rule is manifested in this world, and the devil and his government cast out, we have to stand up to testify for the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. In other words, we have to bear testimony to the victory of the cross of Christ. We should declare that Christ has judged the prince of this world, that He is fully victorious, that the kingdom, glory, and power are all His, and that Satan, who has no further place in this present age, is occupying it illegally. Everyone who has accepted the Lord Jesus has been delivered from the power of darkness and has entered the kingdom of His beloved. We should preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, the gospel of the casting out of the demons, the gospel of the defeat of Satan, and the gospel of the destruction of Hades. This kind of testimony will bring this age to a close. This age is the age of the church because the church appears only in

this age. But at the same time, the Bible calls this age "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 12:39), an "unbelieving and perverted generation" (17:17), and "a crooked and perverted generation" (Phil. 2:15). God's purpose is to draw this age to an end. God desires that the end of this age come quickly so that His kingdom can follow. However, God's children have a duty to perform. God's children should work together with God to bring this age to a close. Prayer is one way, but testimony is also indispensable. Dear ones, we should stand up in an unprecedented way for the kingliness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we should testify in an unprecedented way for His government. The kingdom of Antichrist will come before the kingdom of Christ. We should testify for the kingdom of Christ before the coming of the kingdom of Antichrist. We should bring this age to its end.

This is not a new gospel, but one that has been neglected by the church. The apostles preached this gospel—Acts 14:22 and 28:23 testify to this. Furthermore, after the Lord Jesus resurrected, He preached this topic to them. If we want to be the true successors to the apostles, we have to bear the testimony that the apostles bore. The church has forgotten about the victory, majesty, and kingship of Christ. Those who dare to testify that "only Christ is the king" and that "Satan is not the king" are the ones who are truly preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

Brothers, we should not be ones who have fallen behind in this age! There is only one gospel today which matches this age. We are not saying that we should not preach anything else; we are merely saying that God wants us to pay special attention to this. We must catch up with all that God has ordained for this age. God's emphasis in this age is the expatriation of Satan and the triumph of His Son. If we are not one with God in this matter and do not pay attention to what God pays attention to, we are not accomplishing God's eternal will, no matter how much work we have done. We are too far off from God's best! What we need today are Christians who match this age. God needs to gain a group of people who will sympathize with Him, who will work with Him, who will bring this age to a close, and who will bring God's kingdom in. If Christians think that their highest responsibility in this world is to save souls (which is a glorious work, and

we have no intention to despise it), and they merely save souls for the sake of saving souls, they have not accomplished God's highest goal. They have to realize that they have a greater responsibility in this world than saving souls, which is to bring this age to an end and to usher in God's kingdom. Their greatest responsibility lies in the destruction of God's enemy together with all the powers of darkness. They must see that all their work should have this as their final goal. Prayer is not for prayer alone; it is to inflict a loss on Satan. Saving souls is not for saving souls alone; it is for the infliction of loss on Satan. Whatever we do, it is done with a view to inflict a loss on Satan. We do not despise the work of saving souls; but we should not lose sight of the kingdom in saving souls. Those who always put God's kingdom before them—that which touches God's will and His enemy—are the most useful workers in the hands of God.

Why will the end come when God's children testify for the kingdom of heaven in this way? Here again we see the cooperation between God and man. God desires that the end come. But unless God's children work together with Him to oppose this age and insist on the coming of God's age (the kingdom), God would rather delay. When His children truly hate the condition of this age and truly seek for His termination of this age and His giving of the kingdom, He will rise up to work. When God's children rise up to testify for the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, they will want what God wants and hate what God hates; their will will become one with God's will, and God will rise up to work. We should never think that the end will come by itself. If we reject God's will, it is possible to hinder His will. God is waiting for those who are one with Him and who will work with Him so that He can bring this age to an end. Who is willing to participate in such a great work?

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