NEW TESTAMENT SERVICE

Witness Lee

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

THE NEW TESTAMENT SERVICE

by Witness Lee

ISBN: 978-0-87083-229-1

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FOREWORD

This book is composed of messages given by Brother Witness Lee in the spring of 1970 that were spoken weekly to the church in Los Angeles, California during a time of informal training. His burden in speaking this word at that time was to fellowship with the saints the New Testament principles of our service to the Lord in the church life.

In the chapters that follow we can see that the New Testament service is outside of religion and contrary to human culture, new in time and new in nature, and altogether of and with Christ, having Him as the very center. It is a service that is of the Holy Spirit with the goal to bring forth Christ for the fulfillment of His purpose; it is living, fresh, and without any natural concept or element, having the living, instant guidance of Christ that brings us to Himself. It is a service in the aspects of life and work that is not individual but in coordination in the Body in every aspect, caring for Jesus only and being separated from all earthly involvements.

Those of us who were in the meetings when these messages were given or heard them later on audio tapes can testify of the immense help that was rendered to us in our spiritual service. The fellowship contained in the following pages became the governing principles by which many have learned to serve in the church life. It is a word that is very basic and very much up to date. We are thankful to the Lord that these messages are now in print, and we pray that the New Testament principles of service will become a living and practical reality in all the churches.

Benson Phillips
Irving, Texas
October 1986

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEIVING AND BRINGING FORTH CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:18-23; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Gal. 1:15-16; Rom. 1:9

The opening chapters of the New Testament present a clear picture of the New Testament service, a service that is outside of religion and one that is living, fresh, and up to date, a service with Christ Himself. As we shall see, the goal of such a service is simply to bring forth Christ.

In these pages we will trace the New Testament service in the Gospel of Matthew from its beginning with the conceiving of Christ of the Holy Spirit, to finding Christ by following the heavenly living star, on to testifying of Christ in a living way, and then to the matter of following Christ. Finally, we will consider the matter of life and the matter of work in the New Testament service according to the parables of the ten virgins and of the talents. In all these aspects it is a governing principle in our service in the church life that the New Testament service is a service of coordination in every step to fulfill the Lord's purpose.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE FIRST MENTION

The birth of Jesus Christ is the first instance of the New Testament service. The birth of John the Baptist was something transitional; it occurred between the Old Testament dispensation and the New Testament dispensation. The birth of Jesus, however, was absolutely of the New Testament. In fact, it initiated the New Testament dispensation.

In the Bible a principle is established with the first mention of any matter. The birth of Christ is the first matter mentioned in the entire New Testament, and in this first instance we can discover by the Lord's revelation all the principles and main items of New Testament service. Here is a case of how to serve the Lord in the New Testament, and in this case are all the principles. We will see that the birth of Christ is a unique example of New Testament service.

DIFFERENT FROM THE OLD WAY

The first principle in New Testament service is that this service is absolutely different from the old way of religion. New Testament service has nothing to do with the old way; it is absolutely new. If we would spend time to read the Old Testament carefully, we would be deeply impressed with the service in the Old Testament age. There was a temple with a group of priests and an altar upon which they offered sacrifices. In addition, there were many regulations. However, when we come to the New Testament, everything is quite different. There is no continuation of the Old Testament service. The old is simply terminated, and something new and quite different is brought in.

With the birth of John the Baptist, there was still something related to the temple. This is why the birth of John was not absolutely of the New Testament dispensation. It still had something to do with the Old Testament. The birth of Jesus, however, had nothing to do with the temple. It was absolutely new, different, and other than the Old Testament service. The angel Gabriel did not come to Jerusalem, and he did not even go to Bethlehem. He went to Galilee, a despised province, and to a little town called Nazareth, which was even more despised. He did not go to Jerusalem, to the center of the old religion, but to a small town in a despised region. This is where the Lord began the New Testament service.

IN A SMALL WAY

Whenever the Lord begins some work of the New Testament dispensation, in principle He begins in a small way. We consider the apostle Paul to be a great man, but the name Paul means “little.” Paul was a little one; he was not great in the way many religious leaders are great.

We need to consider a practical application of this principle in our church life today. If some of us would migrate to another city to begin the church life there, we should not try to do something in a great way. That is against the principle. If we could build a wall fourteen feet high, we should not build it fourteen feet and three inches. It is better to build it thirteen feet and ten inches. We should not try to be great, but instead we should keep ourselves small. Any kind of advertisement is against the principle of the New Testament service. The New Testament service did not begin from the big

religious center, Jerusalem. It began from the small town of Nazareth. It is absolutely different from the way of the old religion.

WITH VIRGINS

Furthermore, according to the principle in the New Testament, the service began with a young girl, a virgin. According to the principle of the Old Testament, the women were not counted. In the book of Numbers, the women were not included in the record of the numbering of God's people. Even in the New Testament, when the Lord Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, we are told that there were five thousand men, apart from women and children (Matt. 14:21).

In addition, in the Old Testament, women were not appointed to the priesthood or to the kingship. There were some prophetesses, but prophets and prophetesses were not needed in a normal situation. When the situation of God's people was normal, there were the priesthood and the kingship. Only when things were degraded did God raise up the prophets to recover the priesthood and the kingship. In the normal situation there was no position in the Old Testament service for women.

However, at the beginning of the New Testament service, God did not come to a man but to a woman. God came to a young girl, a virgin. It was not to an experienced person but to someone so new, because God was about to do something new and different. It was so new that it was beyond human experience, human learning, human thinking, and human culture. For a virgin to be with child was absolutely new in the history of the whole human race. In the entire history of man there had never been such a thing. This is something completely against natural law and human culture. The service of the New Testament is something new and contrary to everything old.

We need to consider our own standing in relation to this matter of service. Could you consider yourself a young girl, a virgin? If you say no, then you are through as far as the New Testament service is concerned. New Testament service is only possible with such virgins. This may sound strange, but we all need to be virgins (25:1; 2 Cor. 11:2). We should not consider ourselves men. If we take the standing of a strong man, we have nothing to do with the New Testament service. The basic principle is that the New Testament service begins with a virgin. If you were to ask me who I am, I would say, "Praise the

Lord, by His mercy, I am simply a little virgin." To enter the New Testament service we need to be like a virgin, so simple, knowing nothing. We need to be unloaded, unlearned, and inexperienced. We should not think that because we are aged, are learned, and have the highest culture, we are qualified. No, in that case we would be through. We need to be a virgin, so new, so fresh, and even unlearned.

I am so glad that the angel Gabriel came to the virgin Mary. If he had come to an experienced woman over eighty years of age, he would have had to spend considerably more time because of her knowledge and experience. Such a sister probably would not say that she was a slave of the Lord. However, because she was young and inexperienced, Mary was simple. The older ones may have asked many questions, but the young ones could simply say, "May it happen to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). There is no doctrinal thought to occupy them. The older ones have many doctrinal considerations, many doctrinal questions.

I am so happy that Mary was as simple as she was. She had some knowledge: she said that she had known no man; therefore, how could she conceive? If she had been completely unlearned, she would have said nothing but, "May it happen to me according to your word." She was still somewhat preoccupied by knowledge. We think that knowledge is good, but knowledge is actually a frustration. The New Testament service is absolutely different from knowledge. For a virgin to conceive a child is against the natural concept and against all the knowledge the world can offer. Nevertheless, we praise the Lord that Mary eventually said that she was a slave of the Lord.

NOT A MATTER OF DOING

The Lord did not send an angel to Jerusalem and to the temple, but He sent Gabriel to Nazareth. There he spoke to a young girl, a virgin, not to a man. Furthermore, the Lord did not tell Mary to do anything, but He said that she would conceive and bring forth a son. In the Old Testament service God told the people to do this and not to do that. There were many regulations and requirements. The Old Testament service is a service of doing, but the New Testament service is a service of conceiving and bringing forth Christ. It is not a matter of doing something, but of conceiving Christ and bringing Him forth. Regardless of how much we do or how well we do it, it means nothing. That belongs to the Old Testament service. The New Testament service is to

conceive and bring forth Christ. Christ should be our service. This is absolutely different from the old way.

We all know that whenever a person is saved or a Christian revived, he is eager to do something for the Lord. That, however, is not the New Testament service. That is the Old Testament service. New Testament service is not to do anything for the Lord but to allow the Lord to do something in us. We need to stop our doing so that the Lord may work something into us to be conceived and brought forth. We should forget about our doing. That is the old way. The New Testament service is to stop all our doing and let the Lord do something in us. Then we will conceive and bring forth Christ.

INITIATED BY GOD

Furthermore, the New Testament service is something completely initiated by God. Mary did not expect such a thing to happen. Suddenly the angel appeared—this is a strong proof that it was not initiated by Mary, but by God. If it were something of the old way of religion, there would have been some idea or concept there already, but this was something initiated by God. Therefore, it had nothing to do with the old way of religion. The New Testament service is something new, something up to date, and something as a new start. It has nothing to do with old things and is not initiated by man. In principle, it is initiated by God.

We need to learn to apply all these principles to today's service. Even our visiting of others should not be something initiated by us, but something initiated by the Lord. It should be a surprise to us. We should not visit others in a natural way; our visiting should be something newly and instantly initiated by God. While the people were paying their attention to the priests and the leaders, God went to one little virgin to have a new beginning. We need to learn that the initiative should be of Him and out of Him. This is the New Testament service.

The recovery of the church life is simply the recovery of the New Testament service. The principles have been lost, but the Lord is going to recover them in the local churches. Today many try to learn things in the old way, the traditional way. There are schools for this purpose. Some say that you need to go to these schools to learn how to serve the Lord. This is not the Lord's way. God does not care for all the knowledge and all the tradition. He needs only a

little virgin without any experience or knowledge. This is the first case, the unique case, of New Testament service. Throughout all the centuries, the Lord has been doing things in the same principle. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we will drop the old traditions. We need to learn to be a virgin, even learn to be unlearned.

When the Pharisees were arguing with the Lord Jesus concerning the matter of divorce, He told them that "from the beginning it has not been so" (Matt. 19:8). We need to go back to the beginning. Simply to go to Moses is not sufficient. Moses allowed divorce, but from the beginning it has not been so. For the New Testament service we need to come back to the first case of the New Testament. We think that we need to do something for the Lord, but from the beginning it has not been so.

CONCEIVING CHRIST OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The New Testament service is simply a service of conceiving Christ of the Holy Spirit. It is not something of knowledge, letters, regulations, thinking, imaginations, or dreams, but of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament service is that of conceiving the holy thing of the Holy Spirit. Have you noticed in Luke 1:35 that Christ conceived by Mary is called "the holy thing"? "The holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God." The New Testament service is the very holy thing conceived of the Holy Spirit. To serve the Lord in the New Testament is not a matter of having something conceived of Bible knowledge. It is the holy thing which is conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was the first one to serve the Lord in the New Testament dispensation. Whatever she did and whatever happened to her should be the principle. In a sense, she was a person who really had nothing to do. She was simply a virgin who knew nothing. Suddenly, the power of the Lord came upon her, brooding over her and within her. This is the service of the New Testament. It is not something conceived of knowledge about certain things, and it is not something conceived of the environment or of circumstances. It is something conceived of the Holy Spirit, something which is apparently against nature, culture, and teaching.

How much we need to be unloaded and to become as simple as a young virgin! A virgin like Mary is not strong, experienced, or preoccupied, but so weak, so young, so keen, so fresh, and so open. We all need to learn to say, "I

am a slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word." Then the Lord will send Gabriel to us with good news, and we will be commissioned to conceive something holy of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, we will bring forth One who is the saving power. This is Jesus, the saving One. We will bring forth Emmanuel, who is God with us—not simply in an individual way but in a corporate way. We will bring forth the corporate Emmanuel. This should be something conceived by the Holy Spirit; it could not be conceived in any other way. It is not something initiated by us but something initiated by God.

May the Lord be merciful to us that we may become unlearned like Mary. We need to be so young, so fresh, so inexperienced, and so open to Him. Then we will bring forth Jesus as the Savior, the great One, the King, and Emmanuel. Our service will bring forth the saving power, the greatness of Christ, the kingship of Christ, and the corporate Emmanuel. This is the New Testament service.

CHAPTER TWO

FOUR MAIN PRINCIPLES OF NEW TESTAMENT SERVICE

Scripture Reading: Matt. 1:20b, 23; Gal. 1:11-16; Phil. 3:5-8; 2 Cor. 3:5-6, 8

What we have pointed out in the preceding chapter can be summarized as four main principles of New Testament service. As we mentioned, the first instance in the New Testament, the birth of Jesus Christ, shows us the principles of New Testament service. For our service today we need to learn the principles rather than try to copy the ways recorded there.

ABSOLUTELY OUT OF RELIGION

The first principle is that the New Testament service is absolutely out of religion with all its traditions. This is a main principle that we should not forget. New Testament service has nothing to do with religion. In the birth of Jesus, nothing is related to religion. The apostle Paul spoke of both religion and tradition in Galatians 1:13-14. He was in the Jewish religion and had all the traditions of his forefathers. When he was met by the Lord, however, he was delivered out of religion and was through with all the traditions.

When Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb, there was not one bit of religion or tradition. His birth was something which was absolutely new and completely different from the religious background. Mary was greatly surprised when the archangel Gabriel came to her. No one would expect such a thing to happen. It was absolutely new—new to religion, to culture, to nature, and even to the natural law. It was something contrary to the natural law but revealed by God and conceived of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament service is different from religion and tradition in every detail. Even the place where Jesus was brought up was not a great religious center like Jerusalem but a despised region and a little town. No part of the New Testament service was related to the law, the regulations, or written code, but this service was absolutely something of the Spirit. Furthermore, it was

begun not in a marvelous and great way but in a small way, without any advertisement. Everything was small, humble, and low. According to appearances, it was not honorable for a virgin to be with child. No one would boast of such a thing, but this is the New Testament way.

The Recovery of the Church Life

Today there is much religious service and work carried on in a way that is contrary to the principles of Christ's birth. In the recovery of the church life, however, these principles must be recovered. If we go out to spread the church life in a way that is so marvelous, so noble, a way that causes us to be so boastful, such a way proves that we are wrong and that we are not in the Lord's recovery. The recovery of the church life in every aspect will be in principle the same as the birth of the Lord Jesus.

In a sense, whenever we carry on the New Testament service, that is again the birth of Jesus, for the birth of Christ is simply to bring forth Christ to people. If some of us migrate to another city, there should be a birth of Christ. To migrate in order to spread the church life is to bring forth Christ to the people. This can only be carried out in a new way, not in an old way, not in a traditional, religious way with all its advertisement and propaganda. We should go out in a lowly, humble, and small way.

We may say that the New Testament service is something like the situation of a virgin with child. Sometimes we would even feel ashamed to mention it. Of course, in the eyes of God it is glorious, but in a human sense, it is a shame. When others ask what kind of a work we are doing and what church we go to, it may sometimes be difficult to answer. Apparently, it is not so glorious. That is the case of a virgin with child. Sometimes we may want to tell others that the work we are doing is somewhat like a virgin with child, but the child we are going to deliver is Jesus Christ. There is no glory or honor, but the enemy knows that it is a real glory to God. Man does not know, but the devil knows, and, praise the Lord, we know also! We know what we are doing.

The Need for Virgins

Matthew is really a wonderful book. It begins with the birth of Christ in chapter 1, and it ends with the church going forth to meet Christ in chapter 25. It begins with Christ and ends with the church. It begins with one virgin

bringing forth Christ, and it ends with ten virgins going forth to meet Christ. We all need to be virgins. If we are not virgins, we have nothing to do with Christ, and if we are not virgins, we have nothing to do with the church. To bring forth Christ to others, we need to be virgins. To be the church going forth to meet Christ as the coming Bridegroom, we also need to be virgins. Do we need to be evangelists, pastors, preachers, or ministers with a doctor's degree? No! We all should be virgins going forth to meet Him. It was a virgin who brought Him in, and it will be the virgins who meet Him and bring Him back.

Praise the Lord that we are simply the virgins here. There are many in the local church in Los Angeles who are former missionaries, former pastors, former preachers, former teachers, and former seminary students. Nevertheless, now they are all virgins! Hallelujah! In the New Testament service there should be the freshness of a virgin, with nothing old, religious, or traditional. Everything should be so young, so new, so fresh, so up to date, and so much against culture, human nature, and even the natural law. The New Testament service is entirely contrary to religion. At the time of the birth of Christ, the problem was the Jewish religion, but today it is the Christian religion. We need to see the principles in God's Word in a living way.

We all need to realize that all those serving in the New Testament service should be as virgins. If we consider that we are giant preachers, we are through as far as New Testament service is concerned. Regardless of how much we could do for the Lord, we need to say, "Lord, I would be nothing but a virgin to bring forth Christ." The book of Matthew begins with a virgin and ends with all the virgins. We need to be virgins to bring forth Christ and to bring Him back. Christ does not need great giants today. He needs the virgins to conceive Him and to bring Him forth, and He needs the virgins to bring Him back.

Newness versus Tradition

No matter how good the religion and traditions are, they have nothing to do with New Testament service. This is proved with the case of the apostle Paul. He was beyond many contemporaries in the Jewish religion and was zealous for all the traditions of his forefathers. One day, however, when the New Testament way was revealed to him, all the religion and all the traditions

passed away. They had been something of gain to him, but now they all became a loss.

We should apply these principles to ourselves, not to others. It is very easy for us to remain in religion and tradition. For example, we need to consider why we come to the meetings without functioning. Do you not think that this is according to tradition? With many of us I am afraid that a great part of our Christian life and service is traditional. Sometimes I ask people why they do not praise the Lord, and they answer, "I am not accustomed to such a thing." They are simply in the habit of being quiet. Being quiet is also a tradition. May the Lord be merciful to us. We are under the influence of traditions, although not consciously so. We are influenced by them, and we are accustomed to them.

The way some people read the Bible is simply traditional. They have been reading it in a traditional way for years, yet there is no change in their lives. If they would pray-read the Word, what a difference it would make, and what a change would take place in their lives! Some people do not like pray-reading because it is something new. What is wrong with praying and reading the Bible? This is even better than simply reading the Bible; it is not only reading but pray-reading. What is wrong with praying the Bible and praying about the Bible? We admit that it may be something new, but does that make it wrong? The religious and traditional people, however, do not like anything new; therefore, they do not like pray-reading.

Some friends have even told me that I should not minister anything new because it might offend others. In that case, how could we have the recovery? If we avoid offending people by not speaking about anything new, then we would need to keep all the old things, and the recovery would be gone. Suppose that in the time of Martin Luther someone told him not to speak about anything new because it might offend others. Justification by faith would not have been recovered if he had taken such advice. I am a little man, but recently I received a letter from a place I had never visited, a letter telling me that the leaders in a group there were aware that I teach "new doctrines." That letter did not offend me, but rather it encouraged me to teach more new things, more heavenly new things.

Oh, how much the traditions are a frustration to us! We all need to pray, "O Lord, Amen, deliver us from traditions!" If we would do this for ten days,

many traditions in our Christian life would be exposed. We may even see that the word of grace we offer at the dining table may be simply traditional. If we are in the spirit, we may simply shout, "Hallelujah!" as our word of grace at the table, according to the Lord's leading. We should not be set in a way that has become old.

If we come under the heavenly light, we will see how many things we need to let go of. All the old things, the outdated things, the religious and traditional things, will be put aside, and we will be living, active, and aggressive. Our sharing with others, both with unbelievers and believers, will be quite different. It will be something of the Spirit and not something of dead letters.

I am so thankful to the Lord for the meetings here in Los Angeles, but I am still praying that the Lord will grant us something new and newer. We need to be daily renewed. We need newer things. If we would be more in the spirit, the Lord would be brought forth in a new and different way.

NO HUMAN EFFORT, HUMAN STRENGTH, OR HUMAN WORK

The second principle in the case of the birth of Jesus is that there is no human effort, human strength, human doing, or human working. The Lord did not ask Mary to do anything. In the New Testament service there is no need of our effort or strength, our doing or our working. What the Lord needs is our cooperation. We need to learn to say, "I am a slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word." Mary was not asked to work. She was only told that something would be wrought into her. There is no need for us to do something for the Lord, but there is the need for the Lord to work something into us. Are we willing to cooperate with the Lord?

On the day of Pentecost, nothing, strictly speaking, was initiated by the apostles. That was a work done by the Lord Himself as the One who was wrought into the apostles. In Antioch Paul's work among so many churches was not initiated by him. It was begun by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament service all human effort, strength, work, and doing need to be terminated and abolished. We should realize that we are simply slaves of the Lord. We cannot do anything, and we should have no intention of doing

anything. Let the Lord initiate the work and finish the work. We are slaves to render Him our cooperation.

Humanity can do nothing but be a means for God to bring forth Christ. This is a basic principle, and we should apply this principle to all the things we do. We should not think that God needs our effort—this concept should be condemned. We should condemn what the Lord condemns and simply open ourselves to be available to Him. Praise the Lord, that is good enough! In the New Testament service there is no doing, only enjoying. If we take the way of doing, we lose the enjoyment. The proper way is for Him to do the work, and we enjoy His doing.

CONCEIVED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The third principle is that the New Testament service must be something conceived of the Holy Spirit. This is a very important matter, and this is why I say again and again that teaching does not help. The New Testament service is not something conceived of teaching, tradition, or religion, but something conceived of the Holy Spirit. It is not of letters but of the Spirit. When the Spirit comes in to do something in us, then we see that it is altogether different from what we have learned. Teaching does not work; the service is something of the Spirit. What we need to do is to keep an open contact with the Holy Spirit.

We should not go to the Lord only to ask Him by what way we should do a certain thing. To do something only according to what the Lord has said may be merely a matter of religion. Our need today is not a matter of merely keeping the Lord's word but a matter of keeping His presence. Many years ago I tried to learn to know the Lord's way. Eventually, however, I have learned that the main thing is to have the presence of the Lord Himself, not merely to know His way.

The New Testament service is a matter of staying in the presence of the Lord, not a matter of learning a certain way. The brothers who are migrating to other cities should not think that because they have experienced the Lord so much in Los Angeles, they should do things in other places according to Los Angeles. If so, Los Angeles should be condemned. Los Angeles has learned only one way: to always be in the presence of the Lord. It is not a matter of a way; it is a matter of His presence. There is no way but to have His

presence. It is not of letters but of the Spirit. Only to have the Word in the letter is a dead way, but to have the person is a living way. Only to have the way is something of the letters, but to have the Lord's presence is something of the Spirit. What we need today is not merely to learn a way but to always be in the Lord's presence. Everything in the New Testament service should be conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Mary asked the question, "How will this be?" The answer was, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." That is good enough. To have the Holy Spirit with us is all we need. In the Acts and Epistles all the activities of the apostles and early saints were of the Spirit. There was nothing of letters or mere teachings. What was there was something of the Spirit. Praise the Lord, we all need to learn this one principle: the New Testament service is not a matter of the mere teachings that we have but a matter of the presence of the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

TO BRING FORTH CHRIST

The fourth principle seen in the birth of the Lord is the bringing forth of Christ. To conceive something of the Holy Spirit requires the repudiation of all our efforts and doings. However, to bring forth Christ requires us to give up our aims, our goals, our intentions, and our enterprises. Some dear saints are simply occupied with their mission work. Their aim is to carry out the work of the mission, instead of to bring forth Christ. They may argue that they are preaching Christ to others, yet Christ Himself is not their goal. We all need to learn that the bringing forth of Christ should be our only aim and intention. "That which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus...And they shall call His name Emmanuel" (Matt. 1:20-21, 23). To do this we need to give up all our work, our aims, our goals, and our desires.

The New Testament service is eventually to bring forth Christ—this should be the final goal. It is to bring forth Christ as Jesus, the saving One, and as Emmanuel, God with us. We have seen that the book of Matthew begins with a virgin and ends with ten virgins; this book also begins with the individual Emmanuel and ends with the corporate Emmanuel. In chapter 1 we see Emmanuel, God with us, and in chapter 28, the last verse, the Lord says, "Behold, I am with you all the days." The proper church life in a locality is the saving power of Christ, and God with us manifested in a corporate way. This

can only be brought forth by the New Testament service. When others come into such a church life, they will immediately sense the saving power of Jesus and the presence of God. This is the proper church life, and this is the bringing forth of Christ through our service.

CHAPTER THREE

JOSEPH'S SIDE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 2:1-7; Matt. 2:11, 13-15, 19-23; Luke 3:23, 31b; 1:31-33; Matt. 1:16, 6b, 12; Jer. 22:30; 23:5

In the two preceding chapters we have seen four main points related to New Testament service. Such service should be absolutely different from religion, and there should be nothing of human effort. It should be conceived of the Holy Spirit, and it should bring forth Christ. The birth of Christ means the bringing forth of Christ.

COORDINATION AND GUIDANCE

In the preceding chapters we have seen only Mary's side of the birth of Christ, but there is another aspect—the side of Joseph. Mary's side reveals to us four main points of New Testament service. With Joseph there are, in addition, two main aspects in bringing forth Christ—the aspects of coordination and guidance. In the New Testament service we need coordination, and we also need guidance. These two things could not be divided or separated.

Mary conceived Christ, but she needed the cooperation from Joseph's side. In other words, Mary needed Joseph's coordination. It would have been extremely difficult for Mary to go on without Joseph. Without him she had no protection, and there were enemies attempting to kill the child conceived by her. Therefore, Mary needed the cooperation and coordination of Joseph in order to obtain protection and receive guidance as to what she should do and where she should go.

Not many of those who study the Bible have realized the need of coordination on Joseph's side for the birth of Jesus. However, in the New Testament service, coordination is always required. New Testament service is not an individual matter. It is a service of the Body and therefore a service of coordination.

THE NEED FOR JOSEPH

If you have read the two preceding chapters on the New Testament service, you now may be ready simply to be a virgin, so single and simple to conceive Christ of the Holy Spirit and bring Him forth. This may be so, but you still need Joseph. You should not think that you are so adequately prepared that you need nothing more. Regardless of how wonderful you are, you still need Joseph. The Lord may grant you the favor of conceiving Christ, but the Lord will not grant you the leading and guidance so that you will know where to go and what to do. For this, you need the coordination of Joseph.

Mary conceived Christ, but where was she to deliver Him? She was a resident of Nazareth, but Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. How could this be? As a young virgin living in Nazareth, how could she go to Bethlehem to deliver her child? The prophecy must be fulfilled that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem. Of course, the prophecy that Christ should be called a Nazarene was easily fulfilled, because Mary was living in Nazareth. However, to have Christ born in Bethlehem was not so easy.

I say again, regardless of how wonderful Mary was, she still needed Joseph. Mary was in Nazareth, but the delivery had to be in Bethlehem. How could she accomplish this? The only way was by coordination. It is so interesting to see that after the conceiving of Jesus, everything concerning the birth of Jesus was related to Joseph. Caesar made a decree that all the subjects of the Roman Empire must be registered according to their families. This occurred in order to provide for the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, and it was accomplished through coordination. Without coordination Mary could not have gone to Bethlehem. Joseph was of the house of David, and the house of David had to be registered at Bethlehem. Therefore, because Mary was related to Joseph, both Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be registered according to their house and family. Then, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that the child should be delivered, and Christ was born at Bethlehem. Christ was conceived by Mary in Nazareth, but He was delivered at Bethlehem according to prophecy. How was this accomplished? It could only have been done through Joseph's coordination.

THE LORD'S LEADING

The angel of the Lord appeared to Mary concerning the conceiving of Jesus. However, when it was necessary to move from the land of Israel to Egypt, the angel did not come to Mary, but to Joseph. You may be indeed wonderful, but

you are wonderful only for conceiving, not for moving. The leading and guidance of the Lord's move does not come through you, but through another to whom you are related. If you would know the Lord's will regarding your move and the things you need to do, you need Joseph. The conceiving was by Mary, but the leading was not given to Mary, but to Joseph. This is wonderful!

You may be today's Mary, but you nevertheless need the coordination of Joseph. You may be absolutely out of religion and so much in the Holy Spirit to bring forth Christ, but if you do not have Joseph, you still do not know what to do, and you do not have the Lord's leading. For the Lord's leading, you need Joseph. The leading came to Joseph, not only for going down to Egypt but also for coming out of Egypt to return to the land of Israel. Mary was not considered in this matter. The angel appeared to Joseph.

When Joseph was bringing Mary and the child back to the land of Israel, he feared that the child might still be persecuted in the district of Judea. While he considered the matter, he received guidance from the Lord to turn from Judea to Galilee and settle in the city of Nazareth. This also fulfilled the prophecy in the Old Testament. All the prophecy concerning Christ being born in Bethlehem, His going down to Egypt and being called out of Egypt, and His being called a Nazarene depended upon the coordination of Joseph. Of course, to conceive Christ and to bring Him forth was the function of Mary. Nevertheless, to fulfill the prophecy of the Lord, which means to fulfill the Lord's purpose, required the coordination of Joseph.

LIFE AND REALITY—POSITION AND MOVE

We all need to learn how to apply the principle revealed in this case. There are many cases in the church life which, in principle, are like this example. Mary was on the side of life and reality, and Joseph was on the side of position and move. The life and the reality of conceiving Jesus were with Mary. Joseph did not have these, but Joseph had the position as the head, and Mary needed to submit to him. Joseph had no reality to conceive Jesus, but Mary did not have the position to move. We need the reality in life, and we also need the position and move.

Now let us apply this principle to the church life. Suppose some brothers are going to clean the meeting hall, a job that requires the skill these brothers have. However, these brothers are not the leading ones in this service group.

The leading one is a brother who knows nothing about cleaning. He simply does not know how to clean the floors, the windows, the ceiling, or any other part of the hall, and he really does not know why the church put him into such a position. When it is time to do the cleaning, all the brothers who have the skill need to come to this brother who knows nothing about cleaning to ask what they should do. He does not have the skill, but he has the position, a position those who have the skill do not have.

The problem is that all the Marys think they do not need the Josephs. They think they can conceive, but Joseph cannot do anything; therefore, they ignore him. If this is the case, the church life is immediately killed, and Christ cannot be brought forth. The cleaning of the hall then will be a problem. They may do a good work, but nothing of Christ will be conceived and brought forth. There is the real need of coordination.

Perhaps a certain brother knows how to bring people to the Lord. He has the knowledge and ability to preach the gospel. However, he needs to know where he should go to preach and what he should do to carry out his burden. He needs to go to Joseph. Surely Joseph is not as qualified as he is. This brother has the ability to preach, but here is a brother who cannot preach, yet God gave him as a Joseph to the gifted brother to be over him and to guide him. If they coordinate together, Christ will be brought forth in the gospel for the building up of the church. The question is whether the gifted brother will take such a one as his Joseph. Today's problem is that the able persons are not willing to submit to those who are not as able in certain aspects as they are.

THE NEED OF ALL THE MEMBERS

Do you think that all the elders in a local church are all-inclusively sufficient? In the church there are many things to be accomplished. Those who have been with us in Los Angeles for some time realize now that the church life is not so simple. Today we have so many serving with us in many different service groups, yet there are still some aspects and areas of service which have not been taken care of. How could four or five elders be all-inclusively sufficient? They cannot do everything. If I were one of the elders, there would be many things that I could not do. For instance, if we were going to have a love feast, I would not know how to cook. You should not think that as an elder I can preach, I can teach, I can visit others, and I can do

the cleaning work. No one is all-inclusively sufficient. There is the need of coordination with all the members of the Body.

Suppose there is a sister who excels in cooking, and the church is preparing to serve a meal to some guests. Not one of the elders knows anything about cooking, but this sister knows all about it. What should she do? She has the cooking ability, but she does not have the cooking guidance. She does not know what day to do the cooking or how many to cook for. She has the reality and the life of cooking, but she does not have the position and guidance for cooking. She needs the elders to be Josephs to her.

I believe that by these few simple illustrations we can understand how we need to apply this principle in everything. Here is a brother who takes the lead in the work of the children's meeting in the church. Do you think he is all-sufficient and able to execute all the aspects of the children's work? It is impossible. I believe that if he were asked to care for the little ones in the nursery, he could not do it. However, some of the sisters are fully qualified in this matter. There is the need for coordination.

Today there are many gifted ones who can be compared to a Mary without a Joseph. They could even be compared to divorced women, because they think that they have the ability, the ministry, the gift, and the function, and that they need no one to lead them or coordinate with them. It even seems that they are wives who need no husbands. This is the situation among too many Christians today. Such a situation is somewhat like a broken home, but the church life is surely not a broken home. The "wife" in the church life may be quite capable; yet she is willing to submit to those who are not so capable but who have the position. This is basic. This principle is not only for our families but also for the church. We need all the Marys, and we need all the Josephs. We need the qualified, able Marys, and we also need the Josephs in their proper position. We need someone who has the ability, and we also need someone who has the position. Without the able ones, there is no life, and without those in position, there is no direction or guidance. Without Mary, there is no way for Joseph to conceive Jesus, and without Joseph, Mary does not know what to do or where to go, even though she has already conceived Jesus.

We thank the Lord that many of the blessings that have been brought into the church life have come simply through the proper coordination. There are

many things that I cannot do, not only in this country but also in my homeland. It has only been through proper coordination that the blessing has been brought in. We need to realize that we need coordination regardless of how much we are able to do or what kind of position we have. This is the Lord's wisdom in the New Testament service.

By what way could we have the Body life and the proper church life? There is no other way but by Mary and Joseph coordinating together. There is the need of Mary in the aspect of the reality of life, and there is also the need of Joseph in the aspect of the position and move. When we put these two together, we have the bringing forth of Christ. Then God's purpose will be fulfilled.

In the church life we need the proper coordination with so many Marys and so many Josephs. It is a sad situation when the Marys will not take the Josephs, and the Josephs will not take the Marys. We need both to have a proper bringing forth of Jesus. The Bible says that the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way. It is only in this way that we could bring forth Christ, that is, by the proper coordination of Mary and Joseph.

GUIDANCE: OUTSIDE THE REALM OF THE MIND

Now we need to go on from coordination to the matter of guidance. It is so clear that guidance came out of the coordination. A virgin with a child is certainly not becoming, and Joseph intended to send Mary away secretly (Matt. 1:19). However, while he pondered these things, he had a dream.

Some of the translations render this word "trance" instead of "dream." It was not an ordinary dream but more like a vision or a trance. While Joseph was pondering these things, he received a vision from the Lord. Then he was led to take Mary as his wife. Who brought Mary to Bethlehem? Who brought Mary with the child to Egypt? Who brought them back to the land of Israel? Who brought the child with the mother to settle in Nazareth? Joseph! All of these moves were with Joseph, and all the guidance came through Joseph.

We also need to see in this picture how submissive Mary was. She was so much graced with the Lord's mercy, yet she was so humble and submissive to Joseph in everything. She had the ability to conceive, but she did not receive

any leading from the Lord concerning the necessary moves. The leading to move came only to Joseph.

If we would be a Joseph to receive the leading, we need to be outside the realm of our mentality. Joseph intended to send Mary away, and while he pondered these things, he saw something as a vision that had nothing to do with his mentality, something outside the realm of his mentality. We need to learn not to analyze so much in the realm of our mentality. Then we may receive the leading to do something that is absolutely against our natural way of thinking.

I really appreciate Joseph. Suppose the angel of the Lord were to come to you and tell you to take Mary, who has a child in her womb, as your wife. Would you take her? You would probably tell the Lord that this was against nature and would damage your reputation in society. Then you would tell Mary that you simply could not take her to be your wife. If this was the case, you could never be a Joseph. To be a Joseph, we need to be delivered from reasoning in the realm of our natural mentality. In the church life, many times when we follow the leading of the Lord, it may seem that we lose our good name, and we may be completely misunderstood.

When we consider all the steps of the Lord's leading with Joseph, we need to realize that not one step was easy for Joseph to take. Mary had a child in her womb, yet Joseph was asked by the Lord to take her as his future wife. Do you think this was easy to do? It appears that both Mary and Joseph were poor people, living in a despised district and a small town. Then a decree came that they all must be registered in their hometown. Today this may be easy, but in those days it was not so easy, especially for poor people. However, the Lord had sovereignly moved in the heart of Caesar to issue such a decree. Therefore, it was necessary for Joseph to go to the hometown of his relatives and to take with him his future wife who had a child in her womb. Of course, they would ask Joseph who she was and when they were married. Then Joseph would have to tell them that they were not married yet. Just consider the situation. Not one step was easy to take.

Then after Jesus was born, another leading from the Lord came that Joseph should take the child and his mother to Egypt. No doubt Joseph thought he had traveled enough, but now he must go far away to Egypt. We need to remember that they were poor, and this was a long, hard journey. Joseph may

have wondered how long they were to stay in Egypt. The Lord simply told them to go and stay. They might be there a month, and they might be there a year or longer. It is difficult to move when you do not know how long you will stay in the place to which you are moving. This was a real test for Joseph, but he did as he was told.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

It may have been only a short time after they arrived in Egypt that the angel appeared to Joseph again and told him to go back to the place from which he had moved. If I were Joseph, I would think that the Lord was quite troublesome. He had barely settled in Egypt, and now the Lord was asking him to return to Israel. He did not even say to what city in Israel they should return. This no doubt was hard for Joseph, but this is the way of the Lord's leading.

The Lord tells us one step at a time, never two steps. When He wants us to take the second step, He will tell us. We should not ask about the second step, but simply go ahead and take the first. We want to know not only the second step but even the steps in eternity. We want to know everything. The Lord, however, told Joseph only one step at a time.

Therefore, Joseph returned to the land of Israel. Then, hearing that the son of Herod had come into power, he was afraid. At that point he received another vision from the Lord that he should go to Nazareth. Step by step, Mary received the leading of the Lord through the coordination of Joseph. Eventually, everything was fulfilled which had been prophesied in the Old Testament. The child was born in Bethlehem. He was brought down into Egypt and brought back out of Egypt to the land of Israel. Then He settled with His parents at Nazareth. All of these steps were necessary for the fulfilling of the Lord's purpose.

We all need to learn the lesson of coordination. Whether we are a Mary or a Joseph, we need one another. Mary and Joseph need to work together to bring forth Christ in an adequate and perfect way to fulfill God's purpose. This is the way of New Testament service. The New Testament service in the church life is a service of coordination in every step to fulfill the Lord's purpose. We all need to learn this lesson if we are to be useful in the Lord's recovery. It is really something to see Mary and Joseph working together in

such a wonderful coordination. This is the reason for the Lord's leading in every step of their move. We all need to apply this governing principle to our service in the church life.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEW TESTAMENT SERVICE

TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:23; 2:39b, 42-43, 46, 48-49; John 2:3-4; 19:26-27; 1:45-46; 7:41-42; Matt. 13:55-57a; 12:46-50; 2 Cor. 5:16; Isa. 53:2-3; Num. 27:8; 1 Chron. 3:5; Jer. 22:28-30

The New Testament service is simply to bring forth Christ. In the beginning of the New Testament, there is the wonderful case of Mary and Joseph, showing us that the matter of bringing forth Christ can only be accomplished through coordination.

THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST

The genealogy of Christ is a record showing us how Christ is brought forth. The coordination to accomplish the bringing forth of Christ can be seen in the two genealogies of Christ, one in Matthew and the other in Luke. These two genealogies, however, are different. How could one person have two different genealogies? This seems impossible, but our Lord Jesus Christ is a wonderful person. He has two genealogies because one is of Joseph, and the other is of Mary. These two sides coordinated together to bring forth Christ.

Concerning these two genealogies, Bible teachers have varying opinions. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that one of these genealogies is of Joseph, and the other of Mary. Because of all the prophecies concerning the birth of Christ, many matters are involved. Therefore, genealogies on both sides are required to fulfill all the prophecies.

"ACCORDING TO LAW"

It is not easy to understand these two genealogies. We have an expository note written on the first seventeen verses of Matthew 1, published in Chinese in 1936. It is a booklet of thirty-four pages on the genealogy in those verses, pointing out that the genealogy in Luke is no doubt that of Mary's father and has something to do with Numbers 27. This chapter tells us that according to the law, when an Israelite dies without a son, his daughter becomes the heir.

Then, after the daughter marries, according to law, her husband becomes the legal heir of her father. He is really the son-in-law.

Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was the son of Joseph, "so it was thought." However, the phrase *so it was thought* is not a literal translation. The Greek word here means "according to law." The Concordant Literal Translation translates Luke 3:23 in this way. As far as I know, this is the only translation that translates this phrase literally, and it even refers to Numbers 27:8. Even this law given by Moses was a preparation for the birth of Jesus.

If we read the record of the genealogy in Luke, we see that it starts with God and ends with Jesus. God eventually becomes incarnated as Jesus through the means of all these people. When God can get through the proper human beings, He becomes incarnated as Jesus. Jesus is God incarnated. He is Emmanuel, God with man. This is the incarnated God, God mingled with man. In Jesus there is God as well as man, and man as well as God.

Matthew's genealogy begins with Abraham. In Genesis 22:18a God promised that Christ would be the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This promise is fulfilled in Galatians 3:16 and 14. Following Abraham, there are Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, and eventually, Jesse and David. It is after David in the genealogy that there are many complications. Matthew's genealogy follows the line of one of David's sons, but Luke follows that of another. First Chronicles 3:5 tells us that Nathan and Solomon were born of the same parents, David and Bath-sheba. Bath-sheba had four sons by David: Nathan was the third, and Solomon was the fourth. The genealogy in Matthew follows the line of Solomon to Christ, whereas the one in Luke follows the line of Nathan to Christ.

In the line of Nathan, the genealogy in Luke eventually comes to Heli, who was Mary's father and Joseph's father-in-law. Luke 3:23 says that Joseph was the son of Heli, "so it was thought." This means that he was reckoned his son according to the law. It may have been that Heli died without a son, and therefore his daughter's husband, Joseph, became his son according to law. Actually, Joseph was a son in life to Jacob who was a descendant of Solomon, as recorded in Matthew (1:16, 7).

THE SEED OF DAVID

The Bible does not say that Christ is the descendant of Solomon, but it says that He is the seed of Abraham, the seed of Isaac, the seed of Jacob, the seed of Jesse, and the seed of David. Why does the Bible not say that Christ is the descendant of Solomon? It is because Jeconiah was the descendant of Solomon (Matt. 1:7-11), and Jeremiah 22:28-30 says that no descendant of this cursed man could ever inherit the throne of David. The line of the throne of David through Jeconiah was cut off, and Joseph was a descendant of Jeconiah (Matt. 1:12-16). Therefore, in a sense, no one born of Joseph had any right to inherit the royal throne.

However, it is more than clear that Jesus was not born of Joseph. He was born of Mary, and Mary was one of the descendants of David through Nathan (Luke 3:23-31), not through Solomon. Christ is the seed of David but not the seed of Jeconiah; therefore, the curse that fell on Jeconiah has nothing to do with the Lord Jesus. Jesus was the son of Joseph not in life but reckoned according to the law. He was the son of Mary in life, and He was the son of Joseph in position. Mary was on the life side, and Joseph was on the positional side. Though anyone born of Joseph was cut off from the royal throne, yet apparently he was still the legal successor to the throne of David. It was the sovereignty of God that caused Mary to be married to Joseph. Jesus was born of Mary, and Mary was married to Joseph. Therefore, in position Jesus was the son of the legal heir of the throne of David, and in life He was the proper descendant of David. How marvelous! This is the wonderful thing that God can do when there is proper coordination!

NO OTHER WAY BUT THE WAY OF COORDINATION

We need to see that our coordination can accomplish many wonderful things in the church. There is no other way to produce the church life but the way of coordination. If there is proper coordination, there will be the proper bringing forth of Christ in a marvelous way. The fulfillment of all the prophecies regarding the birth of Christ was fully accomplished through coordination. How could Christ be the seed of a woman and yet still be the son of David? How could He be the son of Mary in life and yet be the legal heir to the throne in position? How could all this be fulfilled? Only by coordination. Neither Mary nor Joseph was qualified individually to fulfill all these prophecies. There was the need for coordination.

No one can tell what wonderful things can be worked out through the coordination of the members of the church. No matter how impossible things may seem, when they are brought into the coordination of the church, they become possible. The prophecies concerning the birth of Jesus could not be fulfilled only with Mary, or only with Joseph. When the two of them coordinated together, however, there was the bringing forth of Jesus. Jesus was brought forth by the way of coordination. The case of the birth of Jesus is the first mention of service in the New Testament. Therefore, if we mean business to serve the Lord in the New Testament way, there is no other way but the way of coordination.

God became incarnated as Jesus by the coordination of human beings cooperating with God. Coordination is needed among those who are cooperating with God. If we would cooperate with God in coordination, we may be assured that this kind of coordination will bring forth Christ to others. There is no other way for us to bring forth Christ but by the way of coordination.

Coordination was necessary for the conceiving, for the delivery, and for the protection of Christ. After the child was born, Mary was not as useful as Joseph for the child's protection. She was useful only under the headship of Joseph in coordination. Every matter concerning the bringing forth of Christ came by the way of coordination.

LEARNING TO TAKE OUR HANDS OFF

We need to go on to see a further matter, another principle of the New Testament service. After Christ has been brought forth and raised up by us, we need to learn to take our hands off. It is wonderful to bring forth Christ, but when Jesus became twelve years of age, a problem arose. Before this time He was fully under the hands of Mary and Joseph. When Jesus was twelve, however, something happened. Suddenly He did something without either their permission or their knowledge. One day when they were leaving Jerusalem, they could not find Him. After three days of fruitless searching, they returned to Jerusalem and, going to the temple, they found Jesus sitting there. It seemed that He was not their son, and they were not His parents. It seemed that He was someone else. Mary said, "Your father and I, being greatly distressed, have been seeking You." Jesus answered, "Did you not

know that I must be in the things of My Father?" (Luke 2:48-49). By this Jesus was saying that His Father was God, not Joseph.

What does this mean? There was a similar occurrence when the Lord Jesus began His ministry in Cana by changing the water into wine. In this first sign there is the principle of denying the relationship in the flesh. At a wedding the wine ran out, and Mary spoke to Jesus, implying that He should do something. The Lord Jesus answered in a particular way to show that her position had changed and He did not consider her His mother, that He was no longer under her influence: "Woman, what do I have in this that concerns you?" (John 2:4). This was at the beginning of His ministry. Then, at the end, when He was on the cross, He told His mother not to look on Him as her son (19:26-27). He was not to be considered her son any longer.

What does all this mean? We need to bring forth Christ and to raise Him up. We should not merely conceive Christ, deliver Christ, and protect Christ; we need also to raise up Christ. Once Christ has been raised up by us, however, we need to learn to take our hands off. This is a main point in the New Testament service. Mary paid the highest price to bring forth Christ. Joseph also paid a price to coordinate with her in this matter. Eventually, what they brought forth was a real treasure to them. Jesus became so precious because He had been brought forth at such a great cost. Nevertheless, when Jesus became twelve years of age, they had to take their hands off.

How can we apply this principle to our New Testament service? Suppose the apostle Paul came to Los Angeles and established the church. In a sense, the church would be brought forth through his ministry. If this were done according to the way of some today, eventually the church in Los Angeles would become a Pauline church. Paul would say that it was his church, and it would be difficult for him to keep his hands off this church. We may do a good work for the Lord, but eventually we need to take our hands off that good work. In my entire Christian life, I have seen very few who were willing to take their hands off the work they had raised up for the Lord. This is a difficult lesson to learn in the New Testament service.

For instance, we have a brother here who has poured out his heart and his whole being for the children's work in these past few years. I do believe that something has been brought forth and raised up. However, once this children's work has been built up, this brother should keep his hands off. That

is the time for him to go. When something wonderful has been raised up and built up through you, the Lord will say that this is the time for you to take your hands off.

We have some brothers here who are burdened to migrate to Chicago for the church life there. No doubt they will bring forth something of Christ there in Chicago, and after a number of years, something of Christ will be raised up. That will be the time for them to keep their hands off. That will be the time for them to go, not to stay. The same principle applies for those who are migrating to Seattle. I have full assurance that these brothers will do a wonderful work in Seattle for the bringing forth of Christ and for the building up of the church. Nevertheless, I need to point out that once something is built up, the Lord will say that it is time for them to go. There is no more Mary and no more Joseph.

When Jesus went forth to minister, Mary and Joseph were not with Him; yet sometimes some of His family followed Him. I do believe that to a certain extent they had learned their lesson. They followed Jesus, but they did not dare tell Him they were there. On one occasion, however, some went to the Lord and told Him that His mother and brothers were present. Then Jesus asked, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" (Matt. 12:48). If I were Mary, I would really be offended to think that I had paid such a price to bring Him forth, and now He was publicly asking in my presence who His mother is. Mary needed to learn to keep her hands off.

In my native land I spent much time and strength working for the Lord. Something solid was built up and established. It was wonderful. However, the Lord caused me to take my hands off. He did many things to force me out of that place, and I went to Shanghai. Praise the Lord, something was accomplished again, even more wonderful. Then suddenly the Lord told me to go again, and I left the mainland of China. I had to leave everything that had been brought forth and raised up. From the mainland I went to Taiwan, and the work began there. Praise the Lord, again something wonderful was brought forth. Then the Lord brought me to America. No matter what had been raised up through me, I had to learn to keep my hands off.

We all need to keep our hands away from what we have brought forth and built up for the Lord. However, it is not so easy. We need to learn to serve the Lord to bring forth Christ in a solid way, but not one bit should be in our

hands. It is not easy to work and yet not keep this work in our hands, and it is even harder to work and leave the work in the hands of others. We should serve the Lord, and we should cooperate with the Lord at any cost. However, once the work is done, we need to keep our hands off. All the mothers know that after a child has been delivered and raised up, the most difficult thing for the mother is for her to keep her hands off of that one. Nevertheless, in the New Testament service there is such a basic need.

THE SMALL AND LOWLY JESUS

Another point is this: The real issue of the New Testament service is, in principle, lowly and small. Mary and Joseph did not bring forth a big Christ. The Christ who was brought forth by them was likened to a tender plant, not a tall cedar tree. He is also likened to a root out of dry ground. There is no attracting form, no majesty, in Him (Isa. 53:2). He is the small, lowly Jesus.

Jesus was born in a kingly city, Bethlehem, but He was raised in Nazareth. Therefore, He was both a man of Bethlehem and a man of Nazareth. The religious people had all the Bible knowledge. They knew that no prophet had ever come out of Galilee, and they thought that nothing good could issue from Nazareth. They were right regarding the Bible, but they missed Christ. (This is why I say that Bible knowledge can frustrate us from knowing Christ.) If what is brought forth by us for the Lord is great, we should question whether something is wrong. Whatever is brought forth by the New Testament service should be small and lowly. We should not try to be great and to do a great work. We should not try to produce something marvelous and magnificent. That is wrong. Mary and Joseph did not bring forth such a One. The Jesus brought forth by them was a little One.

People's eyes are always on big things. Everyone thought that Christ should be great and should be born in the kingly city as a great king. Nevertheless, the Lord is sovereign, and I would even say that He is sometimes sovereign in a subtle way. The Lord used Caesar to issue an order for the first census. In this way the mother of Jesus was brought to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. Immediately after His birth, Mary and Joseph left with Him because of persecution. Eventually, they came back to Nazareth in a rather secret way. Only those who had a heavenly vision would have known what had happened.

Scriptural knowledge alone is not enough. By our natural understanding of the Scriptures, we cannot know Jesus. The issue of the fruit brought forth by the New Testament service should have a particular aspect that, in a sense, offends others and makes it difficult for them to understand. Who is this Jesus? How could He be the Christ? Could Christ come out of Nazareth? Is He not the son of the carpenter? We know the Bible, we know the carpenter's family, and it may seem that we know everything. However, this kind of knowledge misses Christ. Many times people have told me what they know concerning different points in the Bible. Nevertheless, I said to myself, "You know all the Scriptures, but it seems that you have missed Christ." There were those who knew the parents, the brothers, and the sisters, but they simply did not know Jesus.

We should keep in mind that the New Testament work is to bring forth something lowly and small, without form and without outward beauty. In a sense, it will be without dignity, and it may offend and cause misunderstanding. Outwardly Jesus is small, but inwardly He is full of God! Hallelujah! Many good, sound, and fundamental Christians have come to our meetings and have seen only the outward appearance. The outward appearance of our meetings may not have been what they expected, but surely our meetings are full of God! We need to let go of what we expect according to tradition and bring forth something that, although it may be lowly in outward appearance, is inwardly full of God. This is the way of the New Testament service.

CHAPTER FIVE

BY THE LIVING GUIDANCE OF THE HEAVENLY STAR

Scripture Reading: Matt. 2:1-12; John 1:45-47a; 7:40-42, 52; Matt. 13:55-56; 22:43; 2 Cor. 5:16

THE PRINCIPLE OF COORDINATION

We have seen very clearly that the New Testament service is simply to bring forth Christ. Whatever we do today in the New Testament service should bring forth Christ to others. The first case of bringing forth Christ to others is the birth of Jesus. In this case we see the basic principle of the coordination of Mary with Joseph. For such a coordination in the New Testament service, we all need to be either a Mary or a Joseph. We may bring forth Christ in life, yet we may not have the position; therefore, we need others to position us. Without seeing this matter, we cannot bring forth Christ to others.

In these days many brothers and sisters have been migrating to other cities to spread the church life. When we go to another city, we should keep in mind that we need such a coordination, the coordination in life and the coordination in position. We need to worship God for His sovereignty in bringing Mary to Joseph and preparing Joseph for Mary, in order that, in such a coordination, Christ might be brought forth to the human race. By this coordination many promises of the Old Testament regarding Christ have been fulfilled. He was born of a virgin, He was the seed of the woman, He was the seed of Abraham, He was the seed of Isaac, He was the seed of Jacob, He was the seed of Judah, He was the Branch, He was the sprout of Jesse, He was the son of David, He was born in Bethlehem, He fled to Egypt, He came back to the land of Israel, and He settled in Nazareth to be called a Nazarene. All these promises and prophecies were fulfilled by this one coordination.

How can we fulfill God's purpose on the earth today? There is no other way but by coordination. Whether we are a Mary or a Joseph, we need to coordinate together to bring forth Christ to man.

NOTHING IN OUR HANDS

At the age of twelve, the Lord changed the situation with His family. Before this time He was under the hand of Mary and Joseph, who had become accustomed to caring for Him. However, when He was twelve, the Lord indicated that Mary and Joseph should keep their hands off. (Twelve is a number meaning completeness.) In addition, when He began His ministry, at the time of the first miracle in Cana, the Lord did not call Mary His mother, but He called her, "Woman" (John 2:4). It was hard for Mary to learn this lesson.

At another time when the Lord was ministering, Mary and her other sons came secretly. Someone told the Lord that His mother was there, and the Lord immediately indicated that Mary was not His mother and that her sons were not His brothers. Only those who do the will of His Father are His mother and His brothers (Matt. 12:46-50). In the following chapter, Matthew 13, the people said that they all knew His father, His mother, and all His brothers and sisters (vv. 55-56). This may indicate that the family of the Lord Jesus more or less followed Him and would not give up until He was put on the cross.

This account is not merely a story but a lesson for us to learn. When we are faithful to the Lord to bring forth Christ, it is really difficult for us to keep our hands off what we have brought forth. You may be used by the Lord to raise up a church, but eventually that church may become your favorite child. Nevertheless, when that church has come to maturity, you need to keep your hands off. This is the lesson, and it is not so easy. How easy it is to refer to something as "my church" and "my work." It is rather difficult for any one of us to keep our hands off the work that we have accomplished for the Lord. After learning the lesson of coordination, this is the next lesson we need to learn. We need to keep our hands off the work; otherwise, it will be damaged.

From the beginning to the end, Mary needed to learn this one lesson. We should not think it is easy to keep our hands off the work that the Lord has accomplished through us. When we help some saints to grow in life and eventually they have matured, will we be able to keep our hands off? It is not easy, but we all need to learn this lesson. This is the New Testament way to serve the Lord. In coordination we all should be faithful; in accomplishment we all need to keep our hands off. The apostle Paul accomplished much work

in building up so many local churches, but eventually he was imprisoned. Whether he was willing or not, his hands were kept off the local churches he had raised up.

FINDING CHRIST BY THE LIVING STAR

There is the need for someone to bring forth Christ, and there is also the need for someone to find Christ and to worship Him as the magi did. In the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph brought forth Christ by coordination. However, there were also the magi to confirm the birth of Jesus and to worship Him. Here we have another case, and this case establishes more principles for the New Testament service. The magi were guided by the heavenly star to find the living Christ. We need to remember that the first mentioning of any matter in the Bible has tremendous significance. Therefore, we need to consider carefully the account in Matthew 2 of the magi finding Christ, that we too in this present day may be numbered among those who truly find the living Christ.

THE BIBLE—A BOOK OF LIFE

Before we come to the case in point, let me mention a few pertinent things. When we were young, many of us attended Sunday schools and in that setting were presented with the Bible as a book of stories. Undoubtedly, no other book is such a good story book as the Bible. I can still remember listening to my mother recount the story of Joseph in our home. Many Christians make the Bible a story book, and some, especially the great teachers and speakers, make it a book of teachings. Whereas some make the Gospel of Matthew a book of stories, there are teachers who make it a book of teachings, dispensations, and doctrine concerning the kingdom. We need to consider ourselves and how we should take the Bible. The entire Bible is a book of life; on every page of this book there is life. Therefore, we should take it as life and as the life supply.

Let me illustrate. When the Sadducees attempted to debate with the Lord Jesus concerning resurrection, they took a portion of the Old Testament and said, “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” (Matt. 22:24). Then they proceeded to tell how seven brothers had the same wife and eventually all died. Those foolish Sadducees thought they were clever.

They asked the Lord Jesus, “In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven?” (v. 28). The Lord Jesus also chose a portion of Scripture and answered, “Have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (vv. 31-32). Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be resurrected. In the very title of God, the Lord Jesus pointed out the life—not the story, not the teaching, but the life.

Another example is found in the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. In that chapter we have a story of God’s creation—but actually that is not a story. Indeed, some great teachers have set forth doctrines from this chapter. For our part, we need to forget both the story and the teachings; we should concentrate on the life. In Genesis 1 what we need to see is life. The same applies to Matthew 1. In that chapter regarding the genealogy and conceiving of Christ, we do have a story and a certain amount of teaching. Nevertheless, we should not care for the story or the teaching; we should care for life. Some Christians may take the Gospel of John as a book of life, but we should also take the Gospel of Matthew and, in fact, every book in the Bible, as life and as the life supply.

LIVING REVELATION

Now we come to the case in Matthew 2, the matter of finding Christ. This is the second case in the New Testament service, and in this case the first point is the matter of the living guidance to find Christ and to serve Him. In the Lord’s service we need guidance that is living, with nothing merely according to Bible knowledge. Please do not be offended by such a statement; as we consider this case of finding Christ, I believe you will see what I mean.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. There is no doubt about this—it is a fact of history. The strange thing, however, is this: far away from the so-called Holy Land, far away from the genuine religion, far away from the temple, far away from the Jewish religious center, far away from the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and all the religious people, was a star showing something of Christ in a heathen land. It did not appear to the Jews, but to the Gentiles, the heathen. Again and again people have been told that they must find Christ and know Christ by the Bible. However, the first case of finding Christ in the Scriptures was not by the Bible. The magi did not have any Bible knowledge—they did not even have a Bible.

Merely to hold the Bible in our hand and read Micah 5:2, which indicates that Christ will be born in Bethlehem, does not work. We may say after we have read it that we have it, but we may not have seen it. We may have it, but nothing has happened to us. Those chief priests and scribes knew the Bible so well, but the Lord did not go to them. He went far away to a heathen land to reveal this matter to some pagans, not through the Scriptures but through something which human hands cannot touch—a heavenly star.

We may have the Bible, yet we may miss the star. To hold the book in our hand is easy, but to wait and look unto the star is rather difficult. We simply do not know when and where the star will appear. We may study the Scriptures and obtain a degree in those studies, and we may learn all that the Bible has to say about Christ, but we simply cannot determine when the star will come. The book was with the Jewish people, the religious people, but the star appeared to the heathen. Have you seen this? We may think that the star should have appeared to those priests praying in the temple, but it appeared to some pagans far away from the temple.

Oh, we all need to see this star! It is not a matter of holding the Bible but a matter of seeing the star. What is the star? The star is the living revelation, the living vision, not the dead knowledge of the Scriptures in the letter, not the dead knowledge of Micah 5:2. What we need today is not merely Bible knowledge but the heavenly vision, the instant vision, the living vision, the vision that human concepts cannot teach.

Let me check with you. What do you have? Do you have the Scripture verses, or do you have the star? Do you have the scriptural knowledge, or do you have the heavenly star? Do you have the teachings concerning an old way, or do you have the up-to-date, instant vision? Today many have the Bible in their hands, but they have not seen the star. Merely to have the Bible in our hands may be a deadening thing, but to see the star is a living experience. To find and serve Christ according to the principle shown to us in Matthew 2 was not according to the Old Testament Scriptures. To know Christ today is something living, not according to the knowledge of the Bible in dead letters but according to the living, heavenly star.

In this case the Lord went away from religion, even from the scriptural religion. Wherever and whenever we set up a religion, the Lord may simply go elsewhere. We cannot circumscribe, confine, or restrict the Lord with our

religion. We need to learn in the church life never to set up a religion. We should not insist that this method or that way is right. If we do that, the Lord may say, “It may be right for you, but I do not care for it. If you were not so right, I would be with you; but because you are so right, I will go to those who are wrong.” When we insist that we are right and others are wrong, the Lord may leave us and go to the ones who are wrong. The Pharisees claimed to be so fundamental, so sound, and so scriptural; yet it was as if the Lord Jesus said, “All right, you are so sound, but I will have nothing to do with you; I will go to the tax collectors and sinners. I will not only go to see them, but I will feast with them.”

Numbers 24:17 says, “There shall come forth a Star out of Jacob,” but this star did not appear to any of the people of Jacob. The star out of Jacob appeared to the pagans.

THE MAGI’S MISTAKE

Now consider what the magi did: They saw the heavenly star and they followed it, but they made a great mistake. They received the vision, but they soon turned to their human concept and exercised their natural understanding. They realized that this star signified the King of the Jews; therefore, they reasoned that they should go to Jerusalem and inquire of those who would have knowledge of such matters. Their going, as we know, caused much trouble. I do believe that if they had not turned to their natural concept, but continually looked away to the star in the sky, the star would have gone before them all the time, leading them directly to the place where Jesus was. They need not have gone to Jerusalem. They were thoroughly wrong and caused many young and innocent lives to be taken. The Jewish religious leaders had the knowledge, and the magi had the vision. Nevertheless, those who received the vision made a great mistake and, apart from divine intervention, would have caused the loss of the little child Jesus.

When the magi arrived in Jerusalem, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him (Matt. 2:3). Herod, yes, but why Jerusalem? Were those in Jerusalem not for Christ? Why was all Jerusalem troubled at the birth of the One for whom they were waiting? This is religion. I am afraid that many who are seemingly for the Lord’s return will be troubled by His coming.

Then Herod called the chief priests and scribes of the people together and inquired of them where the Christ was to be born (v. 4). The scribes were those among the people who had doctor's degrees in theology. Immediately, they answered, "Bethlehem." They gave him the right book, the right chapter, and the right verse. They quoted Micah 5:2, but did any one of them go to Bethlehem? Not one! They were troubled by the news, but no one cared to go and see what had happened.

LIVING GUIDANCE

Then the magi left Jerusalem, and, "Behold, the star which they saw at its rising led them...When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Matt. 2:9-10). When the magi came into religion, they missed the star; but when they left religion, the star appeared to them. They could not find living guidance in Jerusalem. They did not receive the heavenly vision in religion; they had to leave. When they departed from Jerusalem, behold, the star went before them. In principle, it is the same today.

Micah 5:2 was the holy writing, the Holy Scripture, prophesying that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. However, by that verse alone you could not find Jesus. You would know in what city Jesus was to be born, but you would not know on what street or in what house. I do not believe that the postman today could deliver a letter addressed to a John Smith, Los Angeles, California. Even if you have the knowledge of the Scriptures, you still need the instant, up-to-date, living star to lead you to the very street and the very house where Jesus is. You may have the Bible knowledge, but you still need the living guidance. The Scriptures can never replace that. It is easy to accumulate scriptural knowledge, but if you would have living guidance, you need to live in an intimate relationship with the Lord; you need to be one with Him.

The Word says that the star "led them until it came and stood over the place where the child was" (Matt. 2:9). The heavenly star led the magi to the very spot. This is all we need. I do believe that if they had no knowledge whatever of Micah 5:2 but simply followed the star, they could have arrived at that place. How can we find Christ and serve Him? Not merely by Bible knowledge but by the living star. Not one found Christ merely according to Bible knowledge; those who followed the heavenly star found Him and worshipped Him.

Do we need the knowledge of the Scriptures? Of course we do. It helps, but there is a condition: the living, instant guidance, the guidance of this very moment to lead us to the very spot where Jesus is, is indispensable. Without this living guidance we may know the Bible, but we may not be able to arrive where Jesus is. It is the living guidance that brings us to Jesus so that we may worship Him and offer our gifts to Him.

ANOTHER WAY

The magi saw Christ, and they worshipped Him. Then we read in the Bible some significant words—they were divinely instructed in a dream not to return to Herod; therefore, they departed "by another way" to their country (Matt. 2:12). I like this term *another way*. After we have seen the living Christ, we will take another way; we will not go the same way we came. In fact, we should have come this way in the first place. We came the wrong way; now the Lord has adjusted us so that we will go on by the right way. We should not go back through Jerusalem. We need to forget about Jerusalem. We should not go back to religion; we need to take another way. By our former way we cannot meet Jesus; but, Hallelujah, there is another way! In Los Angeles there is another way. In San Francisco there is another way. In the United States there is another way. Praise the Lord! If we have not seen Christ, we may go back to religion. However, if we have seen Christ, we need to take another way.

PHILIP AND NATHANAEL

Based upon the same principle, let us look at the case of Nathanael in John 1. Philip found Jesus and came to Nathanael and told him that he had found Christ, that he had found the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth (v. 45). You may say that Philip gave the right information, and you may also say that it was wrong. Philip called Him "the son of Joseph"—is this right? If you say that Jesus is the son of Joseph, I will say that He is not the son of Joseph—He was born of Mary. However, if you say that He is not the son of Joseph, I will say that He is. What would you say? Thank the Lord for Philip. Philip was really good and so simple. He did not argue. He simply answered, "Come and see." In other words, he could have said, "I do not know if I gave you the right information or not—simply come and see. I do not know what to say; I do not know what is right or wrong. Come and see."

Nathanael was a godly person. He asked, “Can anything good be from Nazareth?” In a sense, Nathanael was right. He learned from the Bible that Christ should come from Bethlehem, not from Nazareth. God told His people in His holy writings that Christ would be born in Bethlehem, and all His people received this knowledge. Here, however, may the Lord allow me to use a word which is not inherently good; in this matter God did something in what we may call a somewhat “sneaky” way. Christ was conceived not in Bethlehem but in Nazareth. During Mary’s pregnancy, He was brought to Bethlehem for a short time, not in an ordinary way but in an extraordinary way. God sovereignly worked. He used Caesar Augustus of the Roman Empire to issue an order for a census, an order requiring that Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem. Immediately upon their arrival in Bethlehem, Jesus was born. A short time later He was brought away from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then brought out of Egypt to settle in Nazareth and grow up there. Therefore, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures by being born in Bethlehem, but we may say that it was done somewhat in a “sneaky” way. If you knew only the letter of the Scriptures, you could miss His birth altogether. God has a way of circumventing clever people. Jesus was truly born in Bethlehem, but He was also Jesus of Nazareth.

We should not simply trust in the letter of the Word as something apart from the Lord Himself. If we do, we will miss something. We need the Word, but we also need God’s presence. God is not so simple. Not only was there the prophecy in the Old Testament; there was also the sovereignty of God, and the sovereignty of God in a sense may seem to be rather “sneaky.” God is not so open, so public, so greatly advertised. It was in a hidden way that the little child Jesus was brought in. If we are so legal, so scripturally legal, God in our case may be rather “sneaky.” We need to be on the alert. We should not say, “I know the Bible; I know what the Bible says in this matter and in that.” If we say this, we may be fooled by our knowledge.

The scribes knew the Scriptures in a thorough way, but their knowledge profited them nothing. We need to be in the presence of God all the time. Surely I am not one who despises the Scriptures; I honor and respect them to the uttermost. However, we need to be careful because the Scriptures are the Scriptures, but they are not God Himself. The Scriptures are God’s holy writings, but we nevertheless need God’s holy presence. If we have His presence, we will know when He is in Bethlehem, when He goes away, when

He comes back, and where He is raised up. We need to follow the Lord in this way.

What the Lord has been doing throughout history, toward the worldly and religious people, has been hidden and "sneaky." It is really difficult to explain it to people. If you ask who Jesus is, outwardly speaking, He is simply a man; He is Jesus of Nazareth. "Can anything good be from Nazareth?" It is really so. There is no glory, no boast, no display. Philip really gave Nathanael the best answer: "Come and see."

NICODEMUS AND THE PHARISEES

In John 7 there is another case of finding Christ. Christ was doing some marvelous things, and the people were saying, "This is truly the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Does then the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes out of the seed of David and from Bethlehem?" (vv. 40-42). Yes, the Scripture does say that; the people were one hundred percent right. Nevertheless, they missed the mark by being right. If they did not know the Bible so well, I believe it would have been easy for them to grasp the Christ. They were frustrated by their Bible knowledge. Yes, He was born in Bethlehem, but He was raised in Nazareth. Such a situation confounds the natural understanding. If we merely hold the Bible in our hand, we may miss Christ. We need to follow the living Christ.

Then Nicodemus, who had come to know Christ somewhat, began to argue with the Pharisees, but they protested, "Search and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee" (v. 52). They were right; not even the least prophet came out of Galilee. What would you say? We should not say, "Search and see," but "Come and see." If we search and see, we may miss the mark; we may miss Christ. Christ was right there; yet they said, "Search and see." There is also the possibility in today's situation that Christians would miss Christ in a similar way. We may give our attention to the Scriptures and say, "Has not the Scripture said?" Nevertheless, we may miss Christ. Here is the Bible, and here is Christ. We should not be those who care for the Bible but fail to care for Christ Himself.

Oh, it is possible to be so right, but wrongly right! We may be right, but we are only partly right; eventually we may not be right, for we may miss the mark. The Lord acts in a "sneaky" way to those who feel that they are so right.

He does it purposely: He does not want us to have only the knowledge and then go to sleep. He wants us to be alert at all times lest by knowing the Bible only in that way we lose His presence. Oh, it is possible to lose the presence of the Lord simply by knowing the Bible only in the letter! I would rather lose the knowledge of the Bible and keep the presence of the Lord. We should not think that, as long as we are scriptural, we are all right. Regardless of how scriptural we may be, if we lose the presence of the Lord, we are wrong. May the Lord be merciful to us. Knowledge alone does not work. It did not work with the scribes, the chief priests, and the Pharisees, and it will not work for us.

What is the New Testament way to find the Lord and serve Him? It is continually to keep His presence, His hidden presence. He prophesied that He would come out of Bethlehem, but He came out of Nazareth. We should give up our searching, for God can never be understood by searching. I am not searching; I am seeing, I am enjoying. Many things I do not understand and I do not care to understand, but I am enjoying. The Lord's presence is hidden. Isaiah 45:15 tells us that He is a hidden God. He is a God who hides Himself. We need to learn to praise Him, to see Him, to trace Him, and to find Him, but we should not try to understand Him. We are not qualified to understand Him; we are only qualified to enjoy Him. Therefore, we should encourage others to "come and see."

ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

Those who come to see should not see Christ according to the flesh. When Jesus came into His own country, the people said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matt. 13:55-56). It seemed that they knew everything, but this was the knowledge of Jesus according to the flesh. In Matthew 22:43 we read that David in spirit called Him Lord. We should not follow those people in the flesh but follow David in the spirit.

Now let us apply this practically to the present situation. If you would come to see the local church—for example, the church in Los Angeles—that is good. However, you should not see it according to the flesh. If you see it according to the flesh, you will say that there are many peculiar people.

We should not know any man according to the flesh but should know one another according to the spirit. Once we knew Christ according to the flesh and considered Him the little man of Nazareth, but now we know Him no longer in this way (2 Cor. 5:16). We know Him according to the spirit; in spirit we call Him “Lord.” We should forget about the outward things, forget about the flesh; we need to see the church not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

If you beheld the tabernacle in the Old Testament outwardly, you could only see the outer porpoise skins (Exo. 36:19). There is no beauty with porpoise skin; it is quite mean and common. What, however, was within the tabernacle? There was gold, there was silver, and there were the precious stones; there was the beauty of the precious things. Would you rather see the church outwardly or inwardly? Outwardly speaking, the church is clothed with porpoise skins—there is no beauty, but there is toughness and even perhaps wildness. Within, however, there is something of glory. Within, there is Jesus; within, we have Christ. Hallelujah!

How can we find Christ and serve Him according to the New Testament? By the Bible? Yes, we need the Bible, but we also need to see the living star.

CHAPTER SIX

BY THE MORNING STAR IN OUR HEARTS AND BY BECOMING STARS IN THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Num. 24:17; Matt. 2:2, 9-10; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16b-17a; 1:16a, 20; 2:1; 3:1; Dan. 12:3; Jude 12-13; Matt. 13:43a

THE STAR THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

The matter of the star is not only in the book of Matthew. All the main things of the Bible, as a rule, begin in the Old Testament and go right through the New Testament to the end of the Bible. With this matter of the star there is no exception. It is mentioned and revealed first in Numbers 24:17: "There shall come forth a Star out of Jacob." According to the context of this verse, this Star that comes out of Jacob is Christ. Christ comes as the Star. Then immediately in the very opening of the New Testament, we have the star again. The magi said, "We saw His star at its rising" (Matt. 2:2). They did not say, "We saw a star," or, "We saw the star," but, "We saw His star." No doubt this is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Numbers 24. The Star prophesied in the Old Testament has now come and was shown to these magi. We have seen clearly that the revealing of this star was outside of religion. The Lord God does not care for religion; anything that becomes religious, He will pass by.

THE STAR IN THE CHURCHES

The star in Matthew 2 is only the beginning of this matter in the New Testament. If we go to the last book, the book of Revelation, we see two things concerning this matter. The first is that the Lord Jesus is the star, not the evening star but the morning star; second, we see that all the messengers of the churches are stars. Here we should realize that the messengers are not the heavenly beings but the spiritual people who take the spiritual responsibility in the church—they are the stars. In this book we have Christ as the morning star and those faithful followers of Christ in the churches as the stars. Now where is the star? It is so clear that the star today is in the church.

At the beginning of the New Testament the star was outside of religion, but at the end of the New Testament the star is within the church. Have you seen

these two ends of the New Testament? If you would see the star today, there is no need for you to look to the sky; there is no need for you to do as those magi did. Today the star is in the church and among the churches. The Root and the Offspring of David, the Son of God as well as the Son of Man, Jesus Christ as the morning star, is walking today among the local churches. Where then should you come to see the star? You should come to the local churches.

If we are for religion, we are through as far as the star is concerned. However, if we are in the genuine local church, praise the Lord, the star is here. So many of us have proved this by our experience: when we were in religion, we simply had the sense of being in darkness, but when the Lord brought us into the local churches, Hallelujah, we saw the star, the brightness of the star. The heavenly star today is in the local churches.

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS BEING STARS

Not only is Christ Himself the star, but also His followers, the shining ones in the churches, are stars. In Acts and the Epistles the leading ones were called elders, but in the last book of the Bible they are the stars. Now it is not a matter of title or position but a matter of shining. All the leading ones of the local churches should be shining stars.

What does it mean to be a star? Daniel 12:3 gives the answer: "Those who have insight will shine like the shining of the heavenly expanse, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars, forever and ever." The stars are those who shine in darkness and turn people from the wrong way to the right way. Now, during the church age, is the time of night. Therefore, we need the shining of the stars. None of the leading ones in the local churches should claim their position; they should not say, "I am one of the elders; you must recognize me." If they say this, they are in darkness. We need brothers and sisters who shine; we need the shining stars. It is by the shining in today's darkness that people receive the guidance and are turned from the wrong way to the right way. Anything that is wrong is unrighteousness; whatever is right is righteousness. Those who turn many to righteousness are the stars that shine forever and ever.

In the beginning of the New Testament there was mention of only one star in the heavens, but at the end of the New Testament there are seven stars in

seven local churches. In every local church there is a star; in every local church there is something shining, leading people to the right way.

About forty years ago, I was turned from the wrong way to the right way by this star in the local church. So many dear ones today can also testify to this fact; they can say, "Hallelujah, I have seen the star in the local church. It was the star in the church that turned me to the right way."

How do we have the New Testament service? It is simply by following the star. And where is the star? Praise the Lord that today we are not in the age of Matthew 1 and 2 but in the age of the book of Revelation, in the local churches. Today the star is in the local churches. The Bible ends with this word: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" (Rev. 22:16-17). Today the star is with the Spirit and with the bride. Where the Spirit is, there is the star; where the bride is, where the church is, there is the star.

HOW TO BECOME STARS

In the Bible we see how we may not only follow the star but even become one of the stars. There are two ways: first, by the Bible, and second, by the Spirit.

By the Prophetic Word

Second Peter 1:19 gives us the first secret: "We have the prophetic word made more firm, to which you do well to give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." We have the prophetic word, the Bible. However, the prophetic word is not the star; the Bible is not the star. Then what should we do? This verse says that since we have the prophetic word, we need to give heed to it, we need to pay full attention to it, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.

The word used for *star* here can be translated into English as "phosphorous." This star is something as phosphorous, bringing light in the darkness. The darker the situation is, the brighter the phosphorous shines. The Bible should not simply be words in black and white; it should not be dead letters. We should give heed to the words of the Bible until something as phosphorous rises within us—that is, Christ as the morning star.

If we deal with the Word livingly and properly, it surely will turn into the living Christ. This is the turning point—the Word needs to be turned into Christ; the written word needs to be turned into the living word. We can never separate Christ from the living word. We should give heed to the prophetic word until it rises within us as Christ, as the phosphorous, as the day breaking through the darkness.

To have the Bible in our hands is one thing; to give heed to the word until the morning star rises in our heart is another. To have the knowledge of the Bible is one thing, but to have a shining star rising in our spirit is another. To take the way of studying the Bible in a seminary means nothing. What we need today is to take the Word into us, to give heed to the living word until something within rises and shines in our heart. Then we will have the star, and then we will be a star. This is not merely the knowledge about Christ but Christ Himself as the living star.

If there are believers on this earth who love the divine Word, I believe we should be numbered among them. We love the Word, but not in the way of dead letters. We love the Word by giving heed to it until something within is dawning and rising in our heart—not the knowledge, not the written code, but the breaking through of day, the rising of the shining star.

What does this mean in practical experience? Sometimes we may take the Bible, read it, and feel that we receive nothing. Other times, however, when we open our heart and give heed to this prophetic word, something within is shining, rising, dawning, breaking through. While we are pray-reading the verses of the Bible, there is a sense deep within of enlightening, of shining, and this shining creates a love toward the Lord Jesus. We feel that He is so lovable. We could say, “O Lord Jesus, I love You; I do not have words to express how lovely You are!” Many times by this shining we are beside ourselves with love to the Lord Jesus. That is Jesus coming to us as the dawning day, as the morning star rising in our hearts. I am not speaking of something I have learned from others, and I am not boasting; this is my experience. Many times when I was with this holy Word, something has risen within me like the daybreak. Oh, it is wonderful! The situation may not be bright, the surroundings may be full of darkness, but something within is enlightening, shining, filling with glory.

In the days of the magi, the seeing of the star was a miraculous occurrence, but today to see the morning star is only normal and should be our regular experience. Day by day we need to have the morning star rising in our heart. We should not merely read the Bible and not even merely pray-read the Bible; we need to give heed to the prophetic word until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our heart. We need to go on until we reach this point.

Today, therefore, the star comes from the living word. I am so happy that in this verse we have the word and the morning star together. First, we have the word; second, by giving heed to the prophetic word, we have the morning star rising in our heart. If we will simply go along continually with this inner, rising star, we will consistently be in the Spirit. This is the New Testament service.

By the Spirit

In 2 Peter we have the prophetic word, but in Revelation we have the seven Spirits. Revelation 3:1 says, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." The hand of Jesus holds not only the seven stars but also the seven Spirits. This means that the seven Spirits are one with the seven stars, and the seven stars are one with the seven Spirits. If we have the living word as the morning star rising within us and we are one with the seven Spirits, eventually we will become the stars. We not only have the star shining within us, but by looking to the star and following in the Spirit, we become the stars.

EVERYONE A SHINING STAR

The Lord said unto Abraham, "I will surely bless you and will greatly multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17). We Christians, the genuine believers, are the real children of Abraham. We are the stars of the heavens. The Jewish people, the physical descendants, are like the sand which is on the seashore. We all should be the stars. Not only the leaders in the local churches but all of us should be stars. If we read Revelation 2 and 3 again in this light, we will realize that eventually all those in the local churches should be the stars. What the Lord wrote to the seven messengers was what He wrote to the whole church. It is not a matter of teaching, knowledge, title, or position; it is a matter of shining. We need to be the shining stars so that people may find

Christ through us. Where is Christ? Come and see. Simply follow the star. And where is the star? Hallelujah, the star is in the local churches. Brothers and sisters, are we really shining? We need to shine in our homes, on our jobs, in our neighborhoods, in the schools, on the campuses. We do not need to teach people so much, and we do not need to do so much preaching. What we need is the shining. The local churches should be full of shining stars.

Let me illustrate a little more and apply what we have been saying. When you go to certain believers or even to one of the great teachers, in some cases you may sense that they are lacking in clarity and transparency. You may sense that with them there is no window, there is no light, and they are opaque. Those persons may have the knowledge of the Bible, but the more they talk with you, the more you feel imprisoned. In other cases, however, perhaps not frequently, you may come to a little brother, and when he speaks with you, he may simply say, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" Nevertheless, by those few words something gets into you. The more he speaks with you, the more you sense that all the clouds have vanished and something is shining. Why? Because this dear little brother is a shining star. There is no tag attached to him, saying, "I am a heavenly star," but when you meet him, you simply have the sense of shining.

I believe that many of you know of Brother Watchman Nee. When he was young, he received the greatest help from a sister by the name of Miss M. E. Barber. She was very much devoted to the Lord. Brother Nee told me several times, "When I went to see Miss Barber, many times while I was waiting in her living room, I had the sense that I was in the presence of the Lord." What is this? This is the star of the church. Perhaps when you come to such a person, he could not say much, and he could not answer your question. He may say, "I am not clear." However, though he says he is not clear, you have the sense that you are under the shining. It is not a matter of teaching or instruction. His word may not be clear, but he himself is transparent, and when you are in his presence, you have the sense not only that he is transparent, but that you are made clear.

Let me give you another example. Suppose you come to a brother seeking counsel and advice regarding the matter of marriage. This brother may give you a number of points concerning conditions, requirements, considerations, and instructions. However, the more he speaks, the more you sense that though he has much knowledge, he is opaque. The more he speaks, the more

you are in darkness. Another brother, however, may answer that he simply does not know the answer, but while he is speaking, you sense that he is crystal clear. No word can express it, but while you are with him, you begin to be clear, and you know what to do about your marriage. Though this brother tells you nothing, you are enlightened. What is this? This is the presence of the morning star in this brother, making him also a shining star.

I hope that we all could be such stars. Though we may know little of the teachings, though we cannot give people so many instructions, yet when they come to us, they will be enlightened. There is no need to argue with others; be sure that when you argue, you will keep people away. The enlightening does not depend on how much you can say or reason, but upon what you are.

If you are a shining star, who can escape your shining? This is entirely beyond human expression and explanation. It is a matter of the presence of the Lord. If we give heed to the prophetic word, we will have the star rising within us. Then if we are faithful simply to follow the inner, rising star, we will be fully in the Spirit, and eventually we will be the stars in the local churches, not in an objective way but in a very subjective way. Praise the Lord that by His grace we all can be the stars.

Matthew 13:43 tells us, "Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Today, during the time of the night, we need to function as the stars; but in the coming age of the kingdom, those who shine now as the stars will shine forth like the sun. Now we are the shining stars, but in that day we will be like the sun.

WANDERING STARS

There is also a negative aspect to the stars—the wandering stars. Jude 12 and 13 tell us, "These are the hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves; waterless clouds being carried off by winds; autumn trees without fruit, having died twice, rooted up...wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness is kept for eternity." We should be the stars but not the wandering stars. These are the false leading ones. So many Christians today are not stars; some, however, are stars, but they are wandering stars. There are religious leaders and teachers today who are in this category.

Do you know what a wandering star is? I do not know astronomy, but I can tell you a little. A proper star has a certain position and fixed orbit. It continues in its course steadfastly. However, there are some stars with no fixed position or orbit; they are wandering stars. It seems that some Christians are stars; it seems that they are shining, but their shining is a deception. They are stars, but they are not the steadfast stars. If you follow them, you will be misled; eventually, you will not know where to go. They themselves are wandering: They have no ground; they have no standing; they have no certain way to go on with the Lord. Today they say one thing, and tomorrow they will say something different; they are wandering. We need to be careful. We cannot find Jesus by following a wandering star.

How can we recognize the wandering stars? There are some signs. They are autumn trees without fruit; they are waterless clouds. We need to look for the fruit. The Lord Jesus said that we may know a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:16-20). If we follow the wandering stars, eventually our portion will be the same as theirs—the gloom of darkness that has been kept for them for eternity.

We need to follow the shining stars, those with a definite standing and a certain course. These are the stable stars, the steadfast ones. If anyone comes to us without a definite standing and a certain course, we should avoid him. The proper standing is the local church, and the right course is to go on in the Spirit in the local church. We should not be a wandering star, and we should not follow a wandering star. We need to take the proper standing and keep ourselves in the right course. If we are wandering, we are wasting our time. If you intend to go to a certain place, you need to get out your map, get on the right road and in the right lane, and as you drive you will reach your destination.

I am not speaking these things lightly. We are aware of today's confusion. Oh, the dead things! Oh, the frustrations, the distractions of the wandering ones! Anyone who keeps us from the genuine local church and from meeting on the ground of oneness with the Lord's people is a wandering star. The true stars are those who turn many to righteousness, those who do not lead people astray, but turn them to the right way. Today the way for you and me and for everyone else to find Christ is to see the living star. Hallelujah! Today the star is not far from us—it is with the local churches. Among all the local churches there are some living stars. You simply need to contact them; you need to keep company with them. They will lead you to the place where Jesus is.

May the Lord be merciful to us so that we may always be kept in the right way to serve the Lord, to worship Him, and to offer our love to Him. May the Lord make us all like those magi, following the star to find Christ. Today the living star and the living stars are in the local churches. Let us follow them, and let us each be one of them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TESTIFYING FOR CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:13-17, 57-63, 80; Matt. 3:1-12; 4:12; 11:2-6, 11, 18; 14:3-12; 21:25

In the preceding chapters we have covered two cases in the book of Matthew. The first case is that of conceiving Christ and bringing Him forth, as seen in Mary and Joseph, and the second is the case of the heathen magi finding Christ. How can we find Christ? It is simply by following the heavenly star, as we have seen in the last chapter.

Now we come to the third case in the book of Matthew, that of testifying for Christ. The first case was found in Matthew 1, the second in Matthew 2, and now the third case is found in Matthew 3. These three cases show us how to have the New Testament service. In later chapters we will see the fourth case, the case of following Christ.

The case of testifying for Christ is the case of John the Baptist. In the entire universe, among all mankind, John the Baptist was the first one to personally testify of Christ. He did not prophesy about Christ; he testified of Christ. No one before him had this privilege. Again we have the principle of first mention.

OUTSIDE OF RELIGION

Mary, with the coordination of Joseph, was the one to conceive Christ and bring Him forth. The heathen magi were the first ones to find Christ, and John the Baptist was the first one to testify of Christ. Later we will see that Peter and John were the first ones to follow Christ. The interesting point, however, is this: all four of these first cases occurred outside of religion.

Some may say that John the Baptist differed from the others because he was born in religion. His father was a priest, and he received the vision concerning John in the temple. This seems to be something of a religious background. However, the New Testament tells us that from the time John was conceived in his mother's womb, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The

revelation concerning his birth was given to his father in the temple, but John himself was filled with the Holy Spirit from the very beginning. This has nothing to do with religion. The first thing mentioned regarding John is that he was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth.

After John was born, according to custom, he was circumcised and named after his father, Zachariah. This was according to the old way of religion. John's mother, however, said that he was not to be named according to the traditional way, the old way, because she had received a revelation that his name was to be John. According to my knowledge, John was a new name, a name not found in the Old Testament. When the others called the child by the name of his father, John's mother said, "No." I like this word. From this time on, tradition should be over. Religion is ended with John's father. Zachariah is an old name. From the time of this one on, something new should come forth. Therefore, his name should be John.

According to Jewish custom, what the mother says means little. Therefore, they asked the father to make the decision. As you know, from the time of the vision concerning John's birth, Zachariah had been unable to speak because of his unbelief. The father asked for a tablet and wrote "John" (Luke 1:20, 59-63). In this way, from the very beginning with John the Baptist, religion was over. Even his name was new. He was not named according to the Old Testament, but in a new way. His name was not Zachariah but John.

Furthermore, not only his name but also his living was completely outside of religion. Luke 1:80 tells us that he became strong in spirit. This verse does not say that he was strong in learning, or strong in the mind or in the body, but strong in spirit. In addition, he lived not in close association with the temple but in the wilderness. Everything about John was contrary to his background as the son of a typical priest. He should have served in the temple as a priest, but he did not serve in this way. He came forth to minister in the wilderness. He was outside of Jerusalem, outside of the temple, and outside of religion.

Furthermore, the Gospels tell us that he wore a garment of camel's hair, even though Leviticus 11 tells us that camels are unclean. Nevertheless, John wore such a garment. He was outside of religion, and his way was different from the way of religion. He did not wear the priestly robe, and he did not eat

the priestly food. Instead, he ate locusts and wild honey. In a certain sense, everything about him could be considered “wild.”

John did not offer any offerings or sacrifices on the altar. There was no altar, there was no temple, and there were no gifts. Whatever he was and whatever he did were altogether different from religion. He did not retain one bit of the religious system. He abandoned the whole thing.

OUTSIDE OF CULTURE

John’s way of living not only offended religion, but it also offended culture. He was not only outside of religion but also outside of culture. It seemed that there was no culture at all with him. He ate wild honey and locusts, and he remained in the wilderness. What kind of person is this? He offended the religious people, and he also offended the cultured ones.

We all need to realize that, if we would give a strong testimony for Christ, we need to be completely outside of religion and outside of tradition. I am afraid that we are still too refined and too cultured. No doubt we are a people with a high culture. If we remain in our culture, however, we are through as far as Christ is concerned. All the strong witnesses of Christ need to be “wild,” according to the principle of John the Baptist, and they need to give up religion and culture as well.

Some may tell us today that if we would testify for Christ, we need to have much education with many degrees. However, John the Baptist, who was the first witness, the first martyr of Christ, kept nothing of religion and nothing of culture. By wearing camel’s hair and eating locusts and wild honey, he was no doubt considered “wild”; he was fully outside of religion and outside of culture. When we read the history of the church from the first century to today, we see that whoever remained in culture and religion was through with Christ. To be the living witnesses of Christ, we need to be outside of religion and outside of culture, and we may find that we offend the religious ones and the cultured ones.

A CHANGE OF CONCEPT

What did John do when he came forth to minister? Did he teach the Ten Commandments? Did he teach one of the five books of Moses? No. The first word that came out of his mouth was “Repent.” This word in Greek means to

have a change of mind. It means to have a change in life. We need to change our mind and change our concept. John did not teach from any book of the Bible, he did not teach any commandment, and he did not teach any part of the law. The first word he uttered was "Change!" We need to have a change in our concept.

NO SCRIPTURAL GROUND

Some have argued with me by saying that the coming of John the Baptist was prophesied in the Old Testament. There is no doubt about this. Isaiah said that John was the voice of one who cries in the wilderness (40:3). Nevertheless, where can you find any prophecy concerning John's baptism? In the entire Old Testament you cannot find such a prophecy, for the baptism of John was something entirely new. In fact, there was no scriptural ground for it. Therefore, many would even say that it was unscriptural!

The Lord Jesus was very wise when the Pharisees questioned Him regarding His authority. He did not answer but instead turned the question to them. He asked them if the baptism of John was from heaven or from men. This was a very wise question, for there was no scriptural ground for John's baptism. The Pharisees were troubled. If there was scriptural ground, the Pharisees surely would not have any argument. Yet they dared not say that John's baptism was from men lest they risk being stoned, for the multitude recognized John as a prophet. Neither could they say that it was from heaven, because the Lord would then ask them why they did not believe it. To them it seemed that the best way was to follow the liar, Satan, and tell a lie. They told the Lord Jesus that they did not know. The Lord answered them by saying that He would not tell them either. In effect, He said, "I know that you know, but you will not tell Me; therefore, I will not tell you either." Praise the Lord, the Lord is really the Lord.

John the Baptist did something for which he had no scriptural ground, something "unscriptural." To the religious people, it may seem that this is not at all right. He did not take care of the law; he simply told people to change their mind and their concept. If they would do so, he would bury them. That was all. The way he lived, the way he talked, and the way he acted surely offended religion and culture. For this reason the religious ones rejected him and condemned him, and the political ones put him into prison, where he was eventually beheaded. In principle, this is the destiny of the witnesses of Christ.

In a sense, it is our destiny to offend people. If we are outside of religion, we will surely offend the religious world. If we do not care for culture, we will offend the cultured world. In that case, in principle our destiny will be the same as John's.

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS COMING TO US

What is the New Testament way to serve? The New Testament service is something entirely outside of religion and contrary to human culture. John did not teach much; he told people to repent because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near. He did not preach concerning going to heaven; he told the people that the kingdom of the heavens was coming. It is not a matter of our going to heaven but a matter of the kingdom of the heavens coming to us. Some today tell people to be prepared to go to heaven. John, however, did not say such a thing. John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). John indicated that the kingdom of the heavens was coming to the earth. God is not so interested in man going to heaven; He is more interested in His kingdom coming on earth.

Many today are occupied with the concept of going to heaven, but God is interested in coming to earth. John did not say, "Repent and be forgiven of your sins that you might go to heaven." He indicated that we should repent, change our mind, change our concept, because the kingdom of the heavens is coming. It is not a matter of our going to heaven but a matter of something from heaven coming to us on the earth. That something from heaven is the heavenly rule, the heavenly reign, the heavenly regulation and restriction.

We all need to listen to John's words again. We need to repent, we need to change our mind, we need to turn from religion to the Lord. We need to turn from the mere Bible knowledge, from the teachings, the doctrines of letters, to the Lord Himself. The people in John's day needed to turn to the Lord from the law, the temple, the altar, the offerings, and all the religious things. If at John's time the people needed to turn, how much more we need to turn today! John told them to turn to the Lord for the kingdom of the heavens, which is the heavenly ruling. If at that time there was the need of heavenly ruling, how much more is such a ruling needed today!

We cannot teach people to turn. The only way we can help them is to be different from religion and worldly culture. Then we can encourage others to

repent, to change, and to turn from so many things. We need to turn from everything else to the Lord's heavenly kingdom. It is not a matter of morality or behavior. It is entirely a matter of the heavenly ruling. John did very little teaching; he simply told people to change, to turn, to get themselves ready for the kingdom of the heavens and for Christ. We cannot separate Christ from the kingdom of the heavens. In a sense, Christ is the reality of the kingdom. When John says, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near," he is saying that we need to repent because Christ is here. We need to be ready for Christ. If we have Christ, we are in the heavenly sphere and under the heavenly ruling.

THE WAY TO TESTIFY OF CHRIST

John the Baptist was the first one who testified of Christ. Through him we see that the New Testament way for our service is to testify of Christ outside of religion. We need to be outside of religion and culture; then we will be able to help others to turn and be changed so that they may be prepared for the coming of Christ.

In John's testimony for Christ he even touched upon the matter of the Body of Christ (John 3:28-30). He was outside of religion, and he was in the hand of the Spirit. There was nothing traditional, nothing according to the old way, with him. Everything was new and even strange. In a certain sense, everything seemed "wild." Do you think that it was proper or nice to baptize people? To put people into water is not so nice or so proper; rather, it is an uncultured act. Even the way John baptized people might be considered "wild." To put well-dressed ladies into water and bury them there is quite awkward. In a sense, to baptize people messes them up. For this reason some have tried to make the matter of baptism more cultured by using a little bowl with some water in it. Whatever John did, however, was completely against the cultured mind. We need to realize that whatever he did was of the Holy Spirit. He was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb, and as he grew, he became strong in spirit. He did not do things according to his forefathers' religion but according to the Holy Spirit. This is the way to testify of Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Scripture Reading: Matt. 3:1-2, 8-12; John 1:6-7, 19-20, 29-36; 3:25-30

We have seen that there are four cases of New Testament service in the book of Matthew: the case of conceiving and bringing forth Christ, the case of finding Christ, the case of testifying for Christ, and the case of following Christ. All these main activities concerning Christ are outside of religion. Mary conceived and brought forth Christ outside of Judaism, and the heathen magi found Christ outside of Judaism. In addition, John the Baptist bore witness and testified of Christ outside of Judaism, and Peter, James, and John with the other disciples followed Christ in a way that was also outside of religion.

DIFFERENT FOR CHRIST

Now we need to see something further regarding the testimony of John the Baptist. We have seen that he was outside of religion and that he was not bound by anything of religion or culture. He did not care for religion or culture, but this does not mean that he was fighting against religion and culture. He did not care for religion because he realized that religion is a substitute for Christ, and he did not care for culture because he realized that culture is a preoccupation to the people who were made for Christ. He was outside of religion for Christ, and he had nothing to do with religion because it keeps people away from Christ. He was not for culture because culture is an enemy to Christ. He was not different from religion and culture merely for the sake of being different, but he was different for Christ's sake. We should not be different from religion and culture because we are dissatisfied with them—we should be different because we are filled up with Christ.

JOHN AS ONE WITH A POSITIVE TESTIMONY

Now we come to the positive points concerning John's testimony. Everything we have seen thus far concerning John has been in a negative sense. He was born into a priestly, religious family, yet he did not care for that heritage. He was born into the religious center, the temple, but he was not for that center. He was born into a religious education, but he did not care for

that education. In addition, he was born into something of human culture, but he did not care for that culture either. Up to this point, it may seem that he was negative toward everything. He was negative toward his home, his family, the temple, Jerusalem, the Jewish religion, and the Jewish culture. Nevertheless, Christ is not negative; He is positive, and we also should be positive, not negative.

On the positive side, there are many more points mentioned concerning John the Baptist. There are six main points of the positive testimony that he bore for Christ. Of course, we need to realize that both religion and culture are substitutes for Christ and enemies of Christ. Therefore, we abandon them for Him.

To abandon religion and culture for Christ is not at all the same as giving up religion and culture without a purpose. Some of the young people have told me about the life they had when they became dissatisfied with human culture and gave it up. Their stories made my heart ache. Surely we would not be different in that way—that was being different with no purpose. We need to be different for Christ. Many young people today have been ruined and corrupted by that kind of wrong concept. We should not be against human culture for the sake of being against human culture. Rather, we should be against human culture for Christ because we realize that it is a substitute for Christ. These young people have been created by God for Christ, not merely to be against culture. Our being different should not be without purpose, but it should be for Christ.

REPENT

The first main point of the positive testimony John bore for Christ is that we need to repent; we all need a change in our mind and in our concept. Not only is repentance related to sin, but it is also a matter of changing our mind and our concept. We need to realize that not only the sinful things are against God, but even the good things, the best things, the most refined things, are against God. The sinful things are against God openly, but the good things are against God in a more subtle way. Whether we are in the sinful things or in the good things, we are nevertheless away from God and against God. Whatever we do, whatever we are, and whatever we intend to do are altogether in opposition to God.

According to the human concept, repentance is simply a matter of morality. However, in the heavenly concept, it is altogether a matter of God. Why do we need to repent? Because we are away from God. Whether we are moral or evil, good or bad, refined or uncultured, we are all away from God. Look at today's situation. Not only are the bank robbers away from God, but even many of the professors in the universities are also away from God—in fact, they may be even more against God. The bank robbers are against God openly, but the professors may be against God in a more subtle way. Everything that man does in himself is against God, regardless of whether it is good or evil. Even if we are trying our best to help human society, that effort is also something that is against God. Not only is robbing others against God, but even our helping of others may be against God. Therefore, what do we need? We need to repent. We need to have a change of our mind and of our concept.

Not only the unreligious people need to change their mind; the religious ones also need a change of concept. Both the religious and the unreligious people are void of God; they are turned away from God Himself. All of them need to repent, to change their mind and their concept. Even our gospel preaching and our teaching of the Bible will be away from God if we care for our preaching, our teaching, our ministry, and our work, but we do not care for God Himself. In that case, all these things become a preoccupation to us. Because they are a substitute for God Himself, surely they are a rival to God. Our God is a jealous God. Even the best things that take His place are something against Him and become an enemy to Him. We need to be careful. Even our spiritual seeking can be a substitute for the Lord if we care more for our spiritual seeking than for Christ. It is possible for our spiritual seeking to replace Christ so that we love our spiritual seeking much more than we love Christ Himself.

All this shows how much we need to repent. We all need to have a change in our concept. We all need to turn away from all things other than Christ and return unto Him. Satan is subtle. He utilizes all the best things to distract us from Christ. He allows us to pick up anything as long as it is a substitute for Christ. Satan would rejoice in our spiritual seeking as long as our spiritual seeking takes the place of Christ. He would rejoice in our Bible teaching as long as our teaching takes the place of Christ. This is why we all need to repent. We all need to turn away from everything that is other than Christ and turn back to Him.

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

The second point of John's positive testimony for Christ is the kingdom of the heavens. The real meaning of the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly ruling, the heavenly governing. Today many young people have become rebellious and lawless. They are not under any ruling, neither under their parents' ruling nor under the ruling of their schools. Actually, they are under the ruling of their lusts. I could not have imagined that such a thing could have happened among the young people of this country, but I do know that the one who has caused all this is Satan, the enemy of God.

Not only the young people but also the older generation are rebellious in the eyes of God. Neither are under the heavenly ruling of God. The younger generation and the older generation are both rebellious, and neither is under God's ruling. Why are there so many divorces today? Simply because the husband and wife are not under God's ruling. Why does a husband exchange words with his wife, and why does a wife exchange words with her husband? Simply because neither is under the heavenly ruling of God.

Suppose a sister has a habit of exchanging words with her husband. How can we help her? The common way is to teach her that she must learn to submit according to Ephesians 5. However, if we merely try to teach her in this way, it may be that we ourselves have not come under the heavenly ruling of God. If we are under the heavenly ruling, we will have the spirit and the life to help this sister realize that it is not a matter of exchanging words but a matter of being ruled by God. It is a matter of putting ourselves under the heavenly ruling. "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). If we help others with the concept of being good rather than evil, we fail to bring them under the heavenly ruling. What people need today is to be brought under God's heavenly ruling. What matters is not how good we are or how well we behave ourselves in our family, but whether or not we are under God's ruling. My one concern is whether or not you are under God's ruling. If not, whatever you do means nothing.

Many times young people have asked me why they could not do a certain thing, even though no one had told them not to do it. However, it is not a matter of why we cannot do certain things, but altogether a matter of whether or not we are under the ruling of the heavens. If we are under the heavenly

ruling, we will have the spirit and the life, and then we will be able to minister this life to others so that they may also be brought under the heavenly ruling.

I do not like to see the young people take part in certain things, nor do I like to see them dress the way many young people do today. However, I do not like to adjust them either. If the church has the life under the heavenly ruling, and this life is ministered to the young people, they will change without anyone adjusting them. I do not believe anyone under the heavenly ruling will take part in any of the evil things or the worldly things today. You do not need to ask me what you should do or how you should dress, but you need to be under the heavenly ruling.

The kingdom of the heavens today is within us, and the heavenly ruling today is nothing but Christ. He is the ruling, the reigning One within us. We need to go to Him. We all need to have such a turn, a turn to the heavenly ruling One within. There is no need to adjust ourselves; we simply need to turn to Christ, who is the heavenly ruling One within. Then we will know where we are.

THE PROPER POSITION

The first two points concerning John's testimony for Christ give us the proper position. We need to be in the position of continually turning to the Lord, and we need to be in the position of being under the heavenly ruling—we cannot afford to be careless about these two matters. We need to look to the Lord in order that He would cause us to be serious. We need to turn to the Lord, change our concept, and be under the heavenly ruling. There should be a divine government within us, governing, ruling, and reigning within. This is the proper position for us.

The next four points of John's message are all related to Christ: Christ is the Son of God, Christ is the Lamb of God, Christ is the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and Christ is also the Bridegroom. However, if we would partake of Christ in these four aspects, we need a proper position. This is the position of those who have turned themselves to be under the heavenly ruling. Some have said that it does not work for them to call on the Lord. For those who do not have the proper position, of course, calling on the Lord does not work. We need to be in the right position, the position of being turned to the Lord under the heavenly ruling. If we will simply turn to the Lord and be under His

heavenly reign, we will see that it really works for us to call on His name. John first of all tells us that we need to be in the right position. We need to repent, and we need to be in the heavenly kingdom. Then we have the position to enjoy Christ in the remaining four aspects.

THE SON OF GOD

After testifying that we need to be in the right position, John's first point concerning Christ is that He is the Son of God (John 1:34). To testify that Christ is the Son of Man is easy, but to testify that He is the Son of God is not so easy. Immediately, others will begin to ask questions: Is not this man the son of a carpenter? Do we not know His mother, His brothers, and His sisters? Did He not come from Nazareth? It seems that He is merely a man; how could He be the Son of God? Nevertheless, John the Baptist testified that He is the Son of God. This should be the first point in the preaching of the gospel. When we preach the gospel, we need to tell people that Christ is the Son of God, and the Son of God means the expression of God, the manifestation of God. Christ is God manifested, God expressed.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Then John testified that this Christ who is the Son of God is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (v. 29). He is the redeeming One, the Redeemer. When we come to the Lord's table, our only standing to participate is His redeeming blood. Because we are sinful, the redeeming blood of Christ must be our standing. We should never take this standing of the Lord's redemption in a light way. We need to realize that we are the redeemed ones. The Lamb of God has taken away all our sins. He is our Redeemer.

THE ONE WHO BAPTIZES IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

John's third point regarding Christ is that He is the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. This means that He is the One who puts us into the Holy Spirit. He takes away our sins, and He also puts us into the Holy Spirit. He is the Lamb, and He is also the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. Today there is much confusion concerning the matter of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. [Editor's note: Living Stream Ministry has published a very helpful booklet on this subject, entitled *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit*.] We need to forget all the teachings we have received in the past concerning this matter. There is only one thing

that we need to know: Christ has accomplished everything. He has accomplished redemption on the cross, taking away our sins. We all believe this. However, He has also accomplished something more. He has baptized all His saints in the Holy Spirit already. If we believe in Christ as our Savior, our believing is a strong proof that we are God's people. If so, we are included in those whom Christ has baptized in the Holy Spirit.

If we would believe in Christ, we need to believe in these two things: His redemption and His baptism in the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Redeemer, and He is also the Baptizer. He does not redeem us in the past and then baptize us in the future. Both were accomplished in the past. Do we really believe that Christ died for us? I am sure we all do. Then do we also believe that He has baptized us in the Holy Spirit? Yes, we do. He has accomplished everything. However, there is a problem because some will still ask us whether or not we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The answer to this question is in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body."

Do we believe that Christ has taken away our sins? Yes, we believe by faith. By faith we say, "Hallelujah! My sins have been taken away." It is the same with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We take it by faith. We need to realize the baptism in the Holy Spirit just as we realize redemption. The Bible says that we all have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:22; 9:14). Many times we have praised the Lord for the sprinkling of the blood. However, we need to consider how we are sprinkled by the blood of the Lord Jesus. Do we pray for three days, and then something comes from the heavens to sprinkle us with the Lord's blood? No, not at all. We simply read in the Word that we have been sprinkled with the Lord's blood, and we take this matter by faith. Nevertheless, many people today talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit as if we need to fast and pray until something comes out of heaven in order that we might be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is not the way of faith.

The sprinkling of the Lord's blood today is an accomplished fact. It is a matter of faith. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is also an accomplished fact, and it is also a matter of faith. It is not a matter of feeling but simply a matter of faith. First Corinthians 12:13 says that we were all baptized, or we have all been baptized, in the Spirit. We say Amen to the Word and take it by faith. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an accomplished fact, just as redemption is an accomplished fact.

The church should henceforth testify for Christ that He is not only the Lamb of God but also the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. He is not only the Redeemer but also the Baptizer. As the Redeemer He has accomplished redemption, and as the Baptizer He has accomplished the baptism in the Holy Spirit. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"—we have said this many times. However, we need to say also, "Behold, the Baptizer, who has baptized God's people and put them into the Holy Spirit!" To share redemption we need living faith. In the same principle, to realize His baptism in the Holy Spirit, we also need living faith.

THE BRIDEGROOM

The last point which John testified for Christ is that He is the Bridegroom (John 3:29). This is something related to the church. John was clear concerning who the Lord was, but John's disciples were not clear. They became quite concerned when they saw that more and more people went to Jesus instead of to John; therefore, they came and told John what was happening. It was their feeling that the people should come to John. Nevertheless, John told them, "I said, I am not the Christ...He who has the bride is the bridegroom...He must increase, but I must decrease" (vv. 28-30). What John was saying to his disciples was that Jesus is the Christ. Not only should others go to Jesus, but his own disciples should go to Him also. It was as if John was saying, "Do not come to me. I am not the Christ; He is. I am not the Bridegroom; He is. I must decrease, but He must increase to have the bride, which is the church."

When John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease," this means that Christ must have the church as His increase. The church is the increase of Christ. The bride is the increase of the Bridegroom. We all must decrease in order that Christ might increase to have the church. Today it is as if many would not allow Christ to have the church. If we keep our work for the Lord in our own hands as our own increase, we will not allow Christ to have the increase. However, He who has the bride is the Bridegroom. The church must be for Christ.

DECREASED TO NOTHING

The ultimate issue of John's ministry was the increase of Christ, but John was decreased to nothing. Throughout the centuries all the genuine servants

raised up by the Lord have eventually been put away. The apostle Paul labored abundantly. His ministry was indeed wonderful, but eventually he was put into prison and then martyred. He was simply cut off. Christ received the increase, but the apostle Paul was decreased to nothing.

All of us today know the name of Brother Watchman Nee. His ministry has been very much blessed by the Lord. Nevertheless, where is he now? He has been in prison for over eighteen years. From his ministry Christ has the increase. Watchman Nee was simply decreased to nothing, and Christ has increased quite much. This is completely different from the way of those who glory over their own ministry. If the Christian workers receive the increase themselves, Christ is forced to decrease. This is wrong. The more we work for the Lord, the more we will be put away, and even the sooner we may be put away.

Suppose there are two brothers here who are planning to migrate to Chicago to spread the church life. They need to be willing to be put away after something has been brought forth in Chicago. We all need to learn the lesson of being decreased. Our work should not be our increase but Christ's. Our work must be His increase and our decrease.

We need to consider what happened to John the Baptist after he said that he must decrease and Christ must increase. First he was put into prison, and then he was tested. In Matthew 11 he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He was really the Coming One. John was somewhat challenging Jesus by saying, in effect, "If You are the Coming One, why do You not rescue me from prison?" Neither the disciples of John nor the disciples of Jesus knew the intent of John's inquiry. John's question was, "Are You the Coming One, or should we expect another?" (v. 3). No one else understood, but the Lord Jesus understood. Therefore He answered, "Go, report to John the things that you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; and the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel announced to them; and blessed is he who is not stumbled because of Me" (vv. 4-6).

The Lord was telling John that He did many miraculous things, yet He would do nothing for John. "Blessed is he who is not stumbled because of Me." The Lord was telling John to be careful and not to be stumbled. What John asked, no one understood but Jesus. When Jesus answered, no one

understood but John. All the others were messengers, sending and bringing the messages back and forth. They simply could not understand what these two were talking about. Jesus understood what John meant, and John understood what Jesus meant. Therefore, John, in a sense, could have said, “Lord, I understand. You must increase, and I must decrease.” A little later, John was beheaded.

This is the Lord’s way to serve. We need to tell people to repent for the kingdom of the heavens and to be under the heavenly ruling. We need to testify also that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, and the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, eventually He becomes the Bridegroom, and whatever we have worked out will become His bride, the church, which is His increase. He must increase, and we must decrease. Are you willing to serve the Lord in this way? This is the way to have the church. We should not labor with some expectation of a reward at our retirement, for the church will reward us with a decrease. He must increase, and we must decrease.

CHAPTER NINE

FOLLOWING CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Matt. 4:12-22; 5:1-2, 13-16; Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Thes. 3:10; Gal. 6:1

Following the case of John the Baptist is the fourth case in Matthew, the case of the disciples following Christ. The arrangement of the chapters in Matthew is not according to historical sequence but according to doctrine. Matthew put all the facts together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for a definite purpose, not according to chronological order.

THE FOURTH CASE, THE DISCIPLES FOLLOWING CHRIST

If we study the four Gospels carefully, we will see that Peter was not the first one who came to Jesus. According to John 1, Andrew came to the Lord first and then brought his brother Simon. However, in Matthew 4 the Lord comes to Peter first, because Matthew is not giving the historical order; rather, he is arranging his Gospel according to a certain teaching. In chapter 1 we see the case of conceiving and bringing forth Christ. Chapter 2 records the case of finding Christ, and chapter 3 tells of the testifying for Christ. Then the fourth case, the following of Christ, is in chapter 4. After the conceiving and bringing forth of Christ comes the finding of Christ. After the finding of Christ, there is the testifying for Christ. After the testifying for Christ, there is the following of Christ.

REJECTED BY RELIGION AND CULTURE

Because Matthew is a book that has been written according to doctrinal arrangement, we need to understand this book in such a way. After John the Baptist was put into prison, Jesus withdrew into Galilee (4:12). What does this mean? This simply means that John's testimony of Jesus coming from God was rejected by religion and the political circle. John the Baptist was first rejected by the Jewish religion and then martyred by those in the political circle. Thus, religion and politics rejected the testimony of Christ. This means that Christ was rejected by religion and human culture on this earth.

Therefore, He withdrew. He departed from Jerusalem, the temple, the Jewish religion, and the political center to Galilee of the Gentiles (v. 15).

Hence, if we would follow Jesus, we need to know where He is. We cannot follow Him if we are not in the same place He is. He is not in Jerusalem, the temple, or the political circle. Where is He? He is in Galilee of the Gentiles, a place despised by the Jewish people.

A GREAT LIGHT

When Jesus departed from Jerusalem to Galilee of the Gentiles, the Bible says that He was a great light rising up in darkness. At His birth He was a little star, but at the beginning of His ministry He became a great light. Just as the star did not appear to those in the Jewish religion, neither did the great light. He did not appear to those in Jerusalem, He did not appear to those in the temple, but He appeared to those in Galilee of the Gentiles. This Jesus whom we should follow does not appear to those in religion or in the cultured world, but He appears to those in a place despised by the people, Galilee of the Gentiles.

TWO BY TWO

While He was appearing as the great light, He came to two brothers, Peter and Andrew, as they were fishing. Immediately, He called them to follow Him. "Come after Me," He said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (v. 19). Again we should remember that this is a book that is arranged in a doctrinal order. It does not say that Jesus appeared to one brother, but that He appeared to two. First of all, we need to realize that we cannot follow Jesus by ourselves. We need others to be our companions. As I look back on my Christian life, I realize how much I have been under the Lord's mercy. I have always been with others. According to the principle, we do not follow Jesus by ourselves; we need company. After the Lord called Peter and Andrew, He called another two brothers, James and John. The principle of the Body is two by two, not one by one. To follow Jesus is a matter of the Body. It is not an individual matter but a corporate matter.

MENDING

When the Lord appeared to James and John, they were not fishing but mending their nets. The word *mending* is a good translation, but it is not as

good as the original text. This word is the same as that used in Ephesians 4:12 for *perfecting* the saints. Then in 1 Corinthians 1:10 this word is translated "attuned," the only difference being that one is in the active voice and the other in the passive.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:10 this word is translated "complete," that we may "complete the things that are lacking in your faith." It would be correct to translate this verse in this way: that we may "mend up the deficiencies in your faith." We do have some deficiencies in our faith, and these deficiencies need mending. Then Galatians 6:1 says, "If a man is overtaken in some offense, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, looking to yourself lest you also be tempted." *Restore* is the same word.

It is difficult for this Greek word to be translated into any other language. All of these different words have been used to translate this one word: *to prepare, to mend, to equip, to perfect, to complete, to fix, to join together,* and *to restore.*

All this means that James and John were not necessarily mending their nets because they were broken. They may have been broken, but it does not mean exactly that. It means that they were fixing or equipping their nets. They were adding something to the nets to perfect them. They were perfecting the nets, equipping them, and adding something to make the nets more complete.

TWO KINDS OF MINISTRIES

Why did Matthew mention these four persons in giving us a record of those whom Jesus had called to follow Him? If we read John 1, we will see that there were others who were also called by Jesus to follow Him; yet Matthew mentions only these: Peter and Andrew, and James and John. The reason is that Matthew is giving us the purpose for following Jesus. It is not for going to heaven, as we may have been taught in the past. To follow Jesus is for either of these two kinds of ministries: to fish for men or to mend the nets.

The first kind of ministry is to fish for men—this means to bring men into the kingdom of God. The second ministry is to mend men. The first ministry is to bring them in, and the second ministry is to build them up, to prepare them, to fix them, to equip them, and to make them more complete.

In these two groups of brothers, Peter is mentioned first, and John is mentioned last. If we read the New Testament, we will see that Peter was the first in the New Testament ministry and that John was the last. Peter began the ministry by bringing people in. He opened the door for the Jewish people to come in, and he also opened the door for the Gentiles to come in. He brought in all kinds of people; he was a real fisher.

Peter, however, was not a mender. John mended both in his Gospel and in the last book of the Bible. The book of Acts is a fishing book, whereas the book of Revelation is a mending book. God's building, the New Jerusalem, is in the book of Revelation. Peter brought people in, and John built them up by mending. We have seen that mending includes fixing, equipping, framing together, perfecting, restoring, and completing. When we speak of the mending ministry, we include all these meanings.

To follow the Lord is simply for these two ministries. The Lord Jesus called Peter and Andrew to participate in the fishing ministry. Then following this, the Lord called James and John to take care of the mending ministry. The fishing ministry is to bring people in, and the mending ministry is to fix, frame together, perfect, prepare, complete, add to, adjust, equip, make suitable, and attune in order that we all might be built up together with others. To follow Jesus is for these two ministries. We need to remember that these two ministries are outside of religion.

THE FIRST FOLLOWERS

After John the Baptist was put into prison, Jesus did not call anyone to follow Him from the temple but went instead to Galilee to call some from the sea. We need to realize that while Peter and Andrew were fishing and James and John were mending, there were many priests praying in the temple. No doubt, if we were the Lord seeking someone to follow us, we would all go to the praying group. Jesus, however, did not go to the temple. He withdrew from religion and went to the Sea of Galilee. No one there was praying; those by the sea were either fishing or mending. They did not have Jerusalem; they had the sea. They did not have a temple; they had a boat. They did not have an altar; they merely had a net. This is contrary to the religious concept. Jesus did not go anywhere near the temple, but He caught a good number of people by the sea. We all need to change our mind, to change our concept. Jesus did not call anyone to follow Him for offering sacrifices to God, but He called

some fishers to fish for men, and some menders for the mending ministry. All of this is different from our concept.

The principle here is very important. The Lord Jesus did not begin His ministry from the temple. He did not begin His ministry from Jerusalem, but from Galilee, and even from the Sea of Galilee. He did not begin His ministry by calling the priests, the religious ones, the learned ones, the refined ones. He began His ministry by calling some rough, unlearned, and uneducated fishermen. Would you do such a thing if you were Jesus? We would not, but He did.

Are you refined? Are you learned? We may be, but we need to see that His first followers were not the learned but the unlearned. They were not the refined but the unhewn, without education or attainment in schooling.

THE GENUINE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Why are we following Jesus? It should be either for fishing or for mending. We need to realize that this is a case showing us the first principles. We all should be either Peter and Andrew or James and John. Otherwise, according to the principle, we are not a genuine follower of Jesus. To be a proper follower of Jesus we need to be either a fisher or a mender. This means that we should either bring people in or build them up. The Lord has not called us for going to heaven, but He has called us to be either a fisher or a mender. It is by following Him as a fisher or a mender that we are in the New Testament service. If I am called to be a fisher, I should be fishing all the time to bring people in. If I have been called to be a mender, I need to learn how to build people up, how to perfect the saints, and how to add something of Christ to them so that they might be in harmony in the Body. We all need to be fishers or menders.

The Lord is doing a work to build up His New Jerusalem—this is His ultimate intention, and this is what He cares for. He calls people to follow Him simply for the completion of His building. For the completion of His building, He needs to have fishers to bring in the materials and menders to build up the materials into a building. We need to forget all the concepts we have received in the past. Did Jesus ask Peter to follow Him for any reason except that He might make him a fisher of men? We all need to see the Lord's

purpose in calling us to follow Him. It is either to participate in the fishing ministry or to take part in the mending ministry.

Recently the Lord has brought a number of people into the church in Los Angeles from all directions and from many kinds of backgrounds and cultures. We do have a real mixture, and because of this there are many problems. Those who have come are genuine brothers and sisters, yet they have many problems. They need the mending ministry. In these days the fishing ministry has been more prevailing than the mending ministry. However, this does not mean that we do not need the fishing ministry. We need it all the more.

We prayed that the Lord would bring in more Ezras with more groups of people, and the Lord has answered our prayers. Now we urgently need some menders to attune these young ones and make them suitable for the church life. We need the menders to attune them, to prepare them, to feed them, to bring them up, and to add something more of Christ to them. We should not consider that this is a matter only for the elders to take care of. There are only a few elders. We need the menders to mend them and to complete them for the church life. Then we will have all the materials built into the building.

Today we all need to be on the Sea of Galilee. None of us should still be in the temple. We should not be temple-people but sea-people, either fishing or mending. Here in Los Angeles we have a huge Sea of Galilee with many fish. We need to fish them in and build them up; therefore, we need many fishers and menders. We all need to take this matter to the Lord. We should either be a fisher or a mender. If the Lord calls us to be a fisher, we should be a fisher. If He calls us to be a mender, we need to be equipped to be a mender. Then we can equip others. The Lord needs to mend us so that we can mend others. The Lord called only fishers and menders to follow Him—there were no others. If we are not willing to be a fisher or a mender, we cannot follow the Lord in the New Testament service.

THE ATTRACTING LIGHT

When the Lord appeared in Galilee, outwardly He was a little Nazarene, but inwardly He was a great light shining, and this great light became an attraction. Do you remember how Peter and John followed Jesus? They immediately gave up their boats and their father and followed Him. They simply followed Him. For us to be a fisher of men and a mender, the Lord's

building should be of first importance in our lives, more important than our jobs or our education. They gave up their job and their father to care for God's interest first. This is quite clear. They followed Jesus because He had an attracting power. He was a great light shining upon Peter and John, attracting them to Himself. After Peter heard the call of the Lord, he immediately left his job and followed Him. The shining of the great light caused all the disciples to follow Him.

SALT AND LIGHT

Then the Lord Jesus took the disciples up to the mountain and spoke to them what many call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7). There was a multitude there with all the disciples, but the Lord addressed Himself mainly to the disciples. He told them that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13-14). Those who had been attracted by the great light became the light. They became the light by following the great light. In addition, they were the salt also. Salt is used to kill the corrupting germs of this earth. Salt is for ridding the earth of its corruption, and light is for the enlightening of those in darkness.

If we would be fishers and menders, we need to be the salt and the light to kill the germs of today's earth and to enlighten those in today's darkness. If we lose our taste as the salt, then we will become a powerless fisher, unable to bring people in. We need to be "salty," so full of the taste of salt, that we may be good fishers. Furthermore, if we are still in darkness and have not been enlightened, it is rather difficult for us to fish or to mend. To be fishers and menders, we need to be enlightened and even to be the light.

How can we be the salt to kill the corrupting germs and the light to enlighten those in today's darkness? There is no other way but by being identified with Christ. He is the life-giving Spirit, and He is the One who puts us into the Spirit. To be the salt and the light we need to be put into the Spirit. Outwardly, we are mere human beings, but inwardly, we have the life-giving Spirit, and we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. If we repent and enter into the kingdom of the heavens, we will declare that Christ is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and the Bridegroom, and we will be one with Him in the Spirit. Then we will be the salt, killing all the germs, and the light to enlighten those around us who are in darkness. We

will be the real fishers and menders who are the proper and genuine followers of the Lord.

THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF THESE TWO MINISTRIES

The last book of John's ministry is the book of Revelation, and that book is the ultimate consummation of God's building. Peter was the first apostle in the New Testament service, and John was the last one recorded in the New Testament. In Acts the materials are being brought in, and in Revelation a city is built up. These two, the fishing and the mending, are the main ministries in the New Testament service in following the Lord Jesus.

However, the fact that there are two ministries does not mean that if you are a fisher, you should not be a mender. Peter was a fisher, but he nevertheless said something in his Epistles about the building. His word concerning the building up of the spiritual house in 1 Peter 2 is very clear. Furthermore, although John's ministry was the building, he was the writer of one of the Gospels, and his Gospel also speaks about reaping the harvest (4:35-38). Reaping the harvest is comparable to fishing in the matter of bringing people in.

Sometimes we need to do the fishing, and sometimes we need to do the mending. We should bring people in, and we need to build them up. In too many cases, however, the matter of fishing is given full attention, and there is very little mending, if any. Without the mending, a lot of materials may be brought in, but there will be no building. Either the materials will be scattered, or they may be piled up. To be piled up is one thing, but to be built up is another. A heap of material is quite different from a building. To pile material up requires no mending, but to build up that material requires much mending, perfecting, equipping, and attuning. Therefore, in the church we need first the fishing ministry and then the mending ministry.

These four Galileans saw the great light at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. It was this great light shining upon them that attracted them. It was also this great light that shined into them and made them the light. Eventually, all the followers of this great light became the light, because the great light had been wrought into them.

This is the way to follow the Lord Jesus in the New Testament service. It is not by working for Him that we follow Him. We need to be attracted by His shining, and we need to be transformed by His shining so that we become the light. Then we can be fishers and menders.

The New Jerusalem will be the ultimate issue of these two kinds of ministries. This is the Lord's intention, and this is what the Lord is doing today. It should be like this, and we need to be in this flow. We need to have the great light wrought into us so that we become the light, sharing either in the fishing ministry or in the mending ministry.

CHAPTER TEN

FOUR NEW THINGS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 9:10, 14-17; Luke 5:29, 33-39

After the fourth case concerning the following of Christ in Matthew, there is what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, which covers chapters 5, 6, and 7. Then in chapter 8 the Lord Jesus came down from the mountain, and there were more who followed Him. It is in chapter 9 that Matthew the tax collector, who was also called Levi, was called to follow the Lord.

A GREAT RECEPTION

After being called, Matthew prepared a great reception and invited the Lord along with many tax collectors and sinners. However, Matthew himself did not say that it was a great reception. Luke is the one who recorded these words. Matthew said simply that the Lord Jesus reclined at table with the tax collectors and sinners. This principle is right. We should not say too much concerning what we do ourselves. Luke, however, may have thought Matthew was a little too humble; he called it a great reception.

It was at this reception that the religious ones were offended again. "As He was reclining at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined together with Jesus and His disciples...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" (Matt. 9:10, 14-17).

A NEW LINE

Not only the Pharisees became religious, but even the disciples of the forerunner of the New Testament service also became religious. John the Baptist was not an Old Testament person. He was the pioneer of the New Testament ministry, yet his disciples soon became religious. The Lord Jesus offended not only the Pharisees but also the disciples of John.

The disciples of John even took the lead to speak to the Lord and say, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast?" Mark says, "The disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting" (2:18). It was their habit to fast; therefore, they said, in effect, "Your disciples are really poor. We fast, but they eat. We pray, but they drink. We believe God is for fasting and prayers, but we are certain He would not care for what Your disciples are doing."

We may all think that fasting and prayers are wonderful and spiritual. To eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners, however, is something that might be called a "new line." Yet all of us need to take this new line. This is something new that we all need to take. I can assure you that the Lord is going to do something new. If we simply maintain what we are doing now for a long period of time, we will become the disciples of John, not the followers of Jesus. The followers of Jesus have something new. For this reason, others may sometimes consider them "troublemakers."

If we take the way of John's disciples, the way of fasting and prayers, there is no new garment and no new wine, and there is no enjoyment of the Bridegroom's presence. Praise the Lord, we have the Bridegroom! He is not a fasting one but a feasting one. He is feasting with us, and we are feasting with Him. To be qualified to feast with Him, we need the new garment to cover us. We need the new garment without, and we need the new wine within.

Although some may fast and pray much, they nevertheless may not have the Bridegroom, and they may not have the feast with the new wine or the new garment. What they have may be something old: an old wineskin with old wine and an old garment. If they do not have the Bridegroom, they do not have the feast, and they need to fast. When we have the Bridegroom feasting with us, and we are covered with the new garment and filled with the new wine, how could we fast? We are feasting.

If we are filled with Christ, how can we keep ourselves silent in the meetings? When we are filled with Christ, spontaneously we shout Hallelujah! Everything is new. There is a new garment, new wine, and a fresh wineskin.

THE UNFULLED CLOTH AND THE NEW GARMENT

Now we need to look into these four new things that the Lord mentioned in these verses, realizing that He used these things to illustrate something of Himself. First of all, there is the unfulled cloth for the new garment. The unfulled cloth is for making the new garment, and the new garment is a covering that we put on outwardly. Therefore, the new garment is our outward expression. This signifies that Christ is our outward expression as the new garment.

What is fasting? That is an old garment. What is prayer? That may also be an old garment. In that case you may ask me whether or not I pray. Certainly I pray, but I do not pray in an old way, in a religious way. The religious prayer of the disciples of John was an old garment. Their fasting also was an old garment.

Now, however, Jesus is here. He is here first to be a piece of unfulled cloth. The word used for *unfulled* here means "untreated," "undressed," or, as one version says, "unshrunk." This unfulled cloth is a cloth that has never been dealt with or used. It is raw material. This refers to the Lord Jesus before He was crucified. While the Lord Jesus was on this earth, what He was and what He did was somewhat like an untreated, unfulled cloth. However, by His death and resurrection the unfulled cloth became the new garment. Before His death and resurrection He was a piece of unfulled cloth, not treated, not dressed, not completed for wearing. However, when redemption was accomplished through His death and resurrection, He became the finished, completed new garment for us to put on as our covering.

We should not try to take a piece of the Lord Jesus as the unfulled cloth to patch up our old garment. That will surely rend the old garment and cause the damage to increase. We could not damage Him, but our old garment would be damaged by our trying to use Him as the unfulled cloth to patch it.

Matthew and Mark use the expression *unfulled cloth*, but Luke uses *new garment*. The unfulled cloth is the incarnated Christ before He was dealt with

by death and resurrection. The new garment is the crucified and resurrected Christ. He was a piece of unfulled cloth, but now He is no longer a piece of unfinished unfulled cloth; He is a completed new garment that we can put on. He as the new garment is our righteousness. We are under His covering, and we are in Him; therefore, eventually He is our expression.

We should not try to adjust or improve ourselves by taking something of Christ to patch up our holes. This is the wrong way. We need to forget about what we are and put on the whole Christ as our new garment. Then we can say, "Hallelujah! We are in Christ. He is our garment; He is our covering; therefore, He is our expression. We are not going to express our own humility, our love, our kindness, or our goodness. We are only going to express Christ. This is not the unfinished unfulled cloth, but the completed, whole new garment."

THE WHOLE CHRIST

There are many people today who say that Jesus is a good example to follow and imitate. However, in so doing, they are simply cutting out a piece of the Lord Jesus as the unfulled cloth to put upon their old garment to patch up the holes. That will never work. The unfulled cloth is for making the new garment. Praise the Lord, He is no more a piece of untreated cloth! He is now the finished, complete garment. Neither should we cut a piece of this complete garment to patch the holes of our old garment, for that will simply damage the old garment. Our old garment is too old. It is good for nothing but to be thrown away. We should put on the Lord Jesus as our new garment. If we take Him, we should take Him wholly. We should not try to take only pieces or parts of Him. If we are going to take Him, we need to take Him as a whole.

The Lord, in effect, was telling the disciples of John and the Pharisees, "Do not cut Me out and apply Me to your old religion. Your fasting and prayers are an old garment. Do you not realize that your old garment is already worn out and full of holes? Do not try to use Me to patch your old and tattered garment. The best way is simply to abandon it and take Me as your new garment. If you take Me, you need to take Me wholly. If you do not take Me, then forget about Me, but do not cut Me into pieces to patch your old garment."

Today many people are doing what the disciples of John and the Pharisees did. They are trying to take the new things of the Lord to patch up their old

ways. However, the holes in their old ways are made larger and larger. We should not cut out any piece of the Lord Jesus to patch up our old ways. Either we keep the old ways or drop them completely. Either we forget about the Lord Jesus or take Him wholly. We should not put the new together with the old. It simply does not work. The Lord said, "The patch from the new will not match the old" (Luke 5:36). If we take something new, we should take it wholly. Otherwise, we should forget about it. Either old or new, there is no compromise. We need to be in the realm of either black or white—there is no gray. We should take Christ as our whole, complete new garment.

THE NEW WINE AND THE FRESH WINESKIN

The Lord used not only the unfulled cloth and the new garment to illustrate something of Himself but also the new wine. In the New Testament service it is not merely a matter of outward expression, but also of inward content. There should be not only the outward covering but also the inward filling of the inner life. Our outward appearance may be quite good, but inwardly we may be empty. We need something to fill us. We need the Lord Jesus as our new garment without, and we need Him even more as our new wine within. For the outward expression we need the new garment, and for the inward filling we need the new wine. Christ is our outward expression, and He is also our inward filling. He covers us as the new garment, and He fills us as the new wine.

If we have only the outward garment, we are like the prodigal son in Luke 15 before the father killed the fattened calf. First of all, when the son came back, the father told the servants to bring a robe to cover him. The old garment was taken off, and the new garment was put on. He then was justified by the father and justified for the father's house. However, he was still hungry within. He had come home a beggar, and he was very hungry. He did not care so much for the outward garment; he wanted something to eat and drink to be satisfied inwardly. Therefore, the father killed the fattened calf to fill him within. Praise the Lord, after speaking about the new garment, the Lord spoke of the new wine, which is Himself as our inner life.

Those who wear the Lord Jesus as the new garment outwardly and drink Him as the new wine inwardly eventually become the fresh wineskin, which is the church, to contain Him. The disciples of John and the Pharisees had come to the Lord to ask Him about fasting and praying, and the Lord spoke of the

fresh wineskins. The fresh wineskins signify the church life, because it is the church life that replaces the old religion. We should not take the new wine and put it into the old wineskins. The old wineskins are the old religion and the old religious way.

Many people today like the old religion and the old system because it fits the old nature. To say, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” does not fit the old nature, and this would offend the religious people. They may even say, “We fast and pray, but you are always singing and praising. Why do you not fast and pray like we do? It seems that you only know how to enjoy; you do not know how to pray and to be burdened by fasting. This must be some new line.”

It was the Lord Jesus Himself, however, who took the new line against the old religion. He was the first one to take the new line, and we need to follow Him. In effect, He told the disciples of John, “Do not put Me into your old wineskins. I am the new wine. If you put Me as the new wine into your old wineskins, I will burst your wineskins, and you will be damaged.” We should put the new wine into the fresh wineskins.

At the time the Lord raised up John Wesley in the eighteenth century, the Church of England would not allow anyone to preach the gospel or teach the Bible in an undedicated place. John Wesley, however, preached on the street corners and in the open air, and his ministry brought about a great revival. In some of the meetings there were people shouting, weeping, and crying. There was no religious order and no religious background or system. That was something new to the religious people.

We need to realize that today God is going to revolutionize organized Christianity. If we try to put the new wine in the old organization, there can only be damage. The new wine needs to be put in the fresh wineskins, which are the proper church life.

However, the fact still remains that those who have been drinking the old wine will say that the old wine is the best. “No one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better” (Luke 5:39). This is the principle. It is not better, and it may even be bitter, but those who have drunk the old cannot be convinced. It is really hard for people to drop the old system, the old religion, and the old tradition.

FOUR IN ONE

The Lord Jesus used four new things, yet these four new things are one. He is the unfulled cloth, He is the new garment, He is the new wine, and He, enlarged in a corporate way, is the fresh wineskins.

The unfulled cloth is for making the new garment, and this is Christ for the outward covering, the expression outwardly. The new wine is for drinking and for satisfying people within, and this is Christ as the inner life. Christ is not merely something without; Christ is also something within. He is not only our outward expression but also our inner life. Therefore, we have Christ as the new wine, satisfying us within, and we have Christ as the new garment, expressing Himself through us.

The wineskins are the container for the new wine. This is also Christ, not Christ individually but Christ enlarged as a corporate body, the church. Christ is our expression outwardly and our inner life, and this inner life should be contained in the church life. We cannot put Him as the inner life into the old religion. The new wine as the inner life should be in the fresh wineskins, which are the church life. This is very meaningful.

THE GREAT MYSTERY

The Lord used four new things to illustrate one thing: Christ and the church. The disciples of John and the Pharisees asked a simple question about fasting and praying. By answering them, however, the Lord revealed something profound, marvelous, and eternal. He unveiled the mystery of God. The Lord spoke such simple parables, yet they contained all the main points of God's mystery and God's eternal purpose. They were short illustrations concerning four new things, but they contained the mystery of Christ and the church.

Therefore, we see that after the four cases in chapters 1 through 4 of Matthew, chapter 9 shows us the proper way to be with the Lord Jesus in the New Testament service; that is, there should always be something new. Something new of the Lord should continually fill us and be expressed through us. We should wear the new garment, drink the new wine, and have the new wine in the fresh wineskins.

NEW IN TIME AND NEW IN NATURE

In the mentioning of the four new things in Matthew 9 and Luke 5, three different Greek words are used that are sometimes translated into the one English word *new*. In the original language *unfulled cloth* means cloth that is untreated, undressed, unshrunk; *new wine* means wine that is new in time, wine that is freshly made; and the *new garment* and the *fresh wineskins* are new in nature. The wine is new in time, and the wineskins are new in nature. The church life is the fresh wineskins; it is absolutely new in nature.

We need to be so much up to date with something new in time and also absolutely new in nature. I believe that now is the time the Lord will do something new and up to date among us. What the Lord will do will be different in nature from all the things that are old, and it will be the expression of Christ as the new wine in the fresh wineskins. How much we need to realize that we are hindered by the old teachings! Perhaps those teachings have helped us in the past, but many times what has helped us in the past is the very thing that frustrates us from going on in the present. On one hand, we appreciate the old things that have helped us, but on the other hand, we should be willing to drop them for something new. We need to remember the principle that all those who have been drinking the old wine will say that the old is better. Therefore, we should pray, "Lord, be merciful to me that I may forget the old and be so willing to go on with You in newness."

I am afraid that some of us are still stuck to the old things. We have received so much help from them that it is hard for us to forget them. However, those are the very things we need to forget. The Lord Jesus is not old; He is always new in time and new in nature. He is an up-to-date and ever-present Christ, a Christ always new in nature, completely different from the old things.

We need to be clear that the New Testament service is always outside of religion, having nothing to do with the old system. If we try to take something of the Lord Jesus to fit our old religion, we are using the unfulled cloth, or the new garment, to patch our old garment. By the Lord's mercy we need to drop the old garment and put on the new garment, and we need to put the new wine into the fresh wineskins. Then we will have Christ in the church. Christ is the new wine, and the church life is the fresh wineskins. It is not a matter of religion, not something old, but a matter of the proper church life, something so new in nature for Christ to dwell in.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONFIRMED BY THE LORD'S TEACHING

Scripture Reading: Matt. 11:18-19; 12:1-14, 39-42

THE LIFE OF WISDOM

We have seen four cases from the New Testament concerning service. The first case was the conceiving and bringing forth of Christ. The second case was that of finding Christ. The third case was the testifying for Christ, and the fourth case was following Christ. All these cases have illustrated clearly, adequately, and completely that the New Testament service is outside of religion. Some may say that this is simply our way to interpret these four cases; therefore, we need confirmation from the Lord's own teaching. In this chapter we will see the clear and plain word of the Lord Jesus. By this we will see that the way we have interpreted these four cases is soundly confirmed by the Lord's teaching.

In the above passages there are four cases that reveal something of the Lord's teaching concerning the New Testament service. The first case is related to John the Baptist. "John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, He has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking; and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her works" (Matt. 11:18-19).

John came neither eating nor drinking. This does not mean that John did not eat anything. We are told that he ate strange things such as locusts and wild honey. What the Lord meant is that John did not come eating and drinking in the cultural way. He did not eat in the way that people were accustomed to; he did not come eating according to tradition. Surely he did a lot of drinking, but he did not drink any drink in the way of culture. In other words, in his eating and drinking there was no culture, no civilization, and no tradition; he did not eat and drink according to man's system or culture.

What did people say about John? They thought that he had lost his mind, and they said that he had a demon, that he was demon-possessed. By looking

at the way he ate, drank, and lived, they thought that he had lost his mind and that he was possessed by a demon.

Then Jesus said that the Son of Man came eating and drinking. This was also not normal in the eyes of the people because He was eating and drinking more than they thought He should. He was feasting with tax collectors and sinners. Therefore, they said that He was a gluttonous man and a drunkard. John was at one extreme, and Jesus was at the other. Which one was right? Is it right to eat contrary to human culture, or is it right to feast even with the sinners?

We may think that it would be better to compromise a little and to be somewhere in the middle, not at either extreme. However, let me say a word at this point. In the Lord's salvation there is no compromise. Eventually, you will be either in the New Jerusalem or outside of it. If there is no compromise, then what should we do? Should we follow John or Jesus? The Lord Jesus said nothing about following one or the other in this matter. In this aspect, there are no rules for living. What He said is that wisdom is justified by her works, or justified by her children.

We need to be the children of wisdom; and wisdom, no doubt, is Christ Himself. Children are those who have the life of the parents. To be a child is a matter of life; therefore, the children of wisdom are those who have the life of wisdom. Christ is justified by those who have His life. It is a matter of life; it is not a matter of eating and drinking the way John did or the way Jesus did. We all should eat and drink by following the life of Christ within us. Should we eat and drink in a wild way like John, or should we feast like the Lord Jesus did? The answer is simply to follow the life of Christ. Because we are the children of wisdom, we have the life of wisdom, and wisdom is Christ. Because we have the life of Christ, we do not need to go along with any outward rules, but we need to go along with His life within us.

Let us apply this principle. Today there is the so-called "hippy" type of living, and nearly all the hippies have long hair. Suppose a hippy becomes a Christian. Should he leave his hair long or cut it short? Christians, of course, are not hippies, but neither are they non-hippies. Christians are the children of wisdom. They have the wonderful life of Christ within them. Therefore, they should not go along with the hippy way or with the non-hippy way. They should simply go along with the life of Christ within them. We who are

Christians are men of Christ. We are those who have Christ as life. Gentlemen condemn the hippies, and the hippies condemn the gentlemen, but we do not condemn anyone, nor do we justify anyone. We only justify the life of Christ. Wisdom is justified by her children. We do not care for the gentleman-way or the hippy-way; we only care for Christ. Hallelujah! Christ as life is the rule of our living.

If you consider yourself a gentleman, you may see all the hippies among us and think that we are a "hippy-church." However, you need to take note that we also have many so-called gentlemen among us, but this does not mean that we are a "gentleman-church." We should not be a gentleman-church or a hippy-church, but a Christ-church, a church full of Christ.

Some may ask why I have the gentlemen's style haircut and not the hippies' style. Let me tell you, before I made the decision to have my hair cut in this way, I had much contact with the Lord. Eventually, my decision was made according to the inner life of Christ. The inner life of Christ directed me to cut my hair in this way. Because I cut my hair in this way does not mean that I am in favor of the gentlemen's way. If you ask me how you should cut your hair, I will simply tell you to go to the Lord and see what He tells you. Let the inner life of Christ decide for you. None of us has the position to criticize anyone. As long as something is not sinful, we have no right to judge it. Let the Lord Jesus do this.

Here then with John the Baptist is a case showing us that the proper Christian life is outside of religion and culture.

THE REAL DAVID

The second case is found in Matthew 12:1-8. "At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields. And His disciples became hungry and began to pick ears of grain and eat. But the Pharisees, seeing this, said to Him, Behold, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. But He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, and those who were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, except for the priests only? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here.

But if you knew what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This is a case that offends religion and is against religion. It is again a case of eating. It seems that eating is a troublesome matter. Jesus and His disciples went into the grainfield, and the disciples picked the ears of grain and ate to satisfy their hunger. This kind of eating was against the Pharisees' religious regulation of the Sabbath. The Lord, however, did not care for that regulation.

We should not think that it was merely a coincidence that the Lord Jesus allowed His disciples to do such a thing on the Sabbath. No, He did it purposely against the Pharisees' religion. It was quite offensive to them, and they came to Him and said, "It is not lawful." The disciples were breaking the rules of the Pharisees' religion; therefore, they told Him that the disciples were acting contrary to their religious regulation. They cared for their religious regulation, but they did not care for people's hunger.

The Lord Jesus is the wisest One. We have seen how wonderful His answer was to the disciples of John concerning their question. Now let us see His answer to these religious people. Three main things are mentioned by Him: David, the temple, and the Sabbath. He clearly told the Pharisees that He is the greater temple and also that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. There is no clear word telling them His relationship to David, but if we read the context we will realize that the Lord was truly saying that He is the real David. Because the Pharisees asked regarding eating on the Sabbath, the Lord Jesus referred to David and his followers. This indicates that He is the real David today, and all His disciples are the followers of the real David.

According to the regulation of the Pharisees, people must keep the Sabbath, and they must keep it without eating this way. Jesus' disciples, however, broke the sabbatical regulation by eating the grain in the field. When the Pharisees said that this was not lawful, Jesus answered them by asking, "Have you not read what David did?" David and his followers went into the temple and ate the bread of the Presence, which was not lawful for him to eat. The bread of the Presence was the food for the priests. Only priests were entitled to enjoy the bread of the Presence in the temple. David was an anointed king, but he was not a priest. Yet he went into the temple with his followers and ate the bread of the Presence and was not condemned.

This incident indicates that the dispensation had been changed. In the Old Testament the dispensation of the priests was from Genesis to the time of Samuel. Even the great leaders, such as Joshua, were under the priests. However, due to their failure, the Lord turned the dispensation from that of the priests to the kings. David was the king who brought in the dispensation of the kingship. In this dispensation the priests came under the kings. Thus, in the answer of the Lord Jesus to the religious people, there is the implication that the dispensation has been changed. When David came, the dispensation of the priests was over. Now the real David is here. To keep the Sabbath was a rule of the dispensation of the priests, but the dispensation of the priests is over. It is now the dispensation of the king; therefore, there is no need for anyone to keep the regulation of the old dispensation.

How was David able to eat the bread of the Presence in the temple and yet not break the law? The age had been changed. The Sabbath-keeping law was something of the dispensation of the priests, but now the dispensation of the king has come. This answer of the Lord Jesus reveals that He as the King has come; hence, there is no need to keep the religious regulations of the priests any longer.

In other words, where Christ is, there is no longer the need to keep the law. When we do not have Christ, we need to keep the laws. When Christ is absent, we need the regulations. When Christ Himself is here, however, all the regulations are gone. Without David everyone needs to keep the regulations of the old dispensation. In that case, if we do not keep them, we are wrong. Since David is here, however, there is no need to keep the regulations. Nevertheless, this does not mean there should be lawlessness. It means neither to be lawful nor to be lawless, but rather to be “Christful.” If Christ tells us to keep the Sabbath, then we keep it. If He tells us to forget it, then we forget it. We are not lawful people; neither are we lawless people. We are “Christful” people. Again, it is not a matter of regulations or no regulations, but a matter of Christ.

THE GREATER TEMPLE

Then the Lord referred the Pharisees to another passage of Scripture. “Have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?” (Matt. 12:5). Even without the dispensational change, it was lawful for the priests to break the Sabbath in the temple. If they

were outside of the temple and broke the law, they were really lawless. However, if they were in the temple and broke the Sabbath, it was lawful. Therefore, the temple was greater than the law, and the temple was higher than the Sabbath law. Outside of the temple, people needed to keep the Sabbath law, but when they were in the temple, they were freed from that law. Outside of the temple they were bound, but in the temple—Hallelujah—they were free! Christ is the greater temple. When we are in Christ, we are really freed from religious regulations, forms, and rituals.

It was as if the Lord was telling the Pharisees, "Do you not realize that I am the greater temple and that all My disciples are in Me? Therefore, they are free. There is no need for them to keep the law. Why do you need to keep the law? It is because you are outside of the temple. However, these who are following Me are in Me; therefore, they have the liberty and the right to do anything I tell them, because I am the temple."

The Lord Jesus is not so simple. His word is simple, but the meaning of His word is profound. It is simple, yet it is full of God's mystery. He told the Pharisees that if you eat with David, you are justified, and if you do anything on the Sabbath day in the temple, you are also justified. He is the real David, and He is also the greater temple. David is higher than the law, and the temple is also higher than the law. Have you seen that Christ is higher than all the laws? If we do not have Christ, we need to keep the laws. If we have Christ, however, we are free! Hallelujah! We are not free to be lawless but free to be filled with Christ.

THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

The Lord also told the Pharisees that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Lord of the Sabbath is much higher than the Sabbath. He even owns the Sabbath and possesses it. Therefore, the Owner of the Sabbath can do anything He likes with it. Of course, you should keep the Sabbath if you do not have the Owner of the Sabbath.

Jesus is the real David, He is the greater temple, and He is even the Lord of the Sabbath. How strong were His answers! How right, profound, all-inclusive, and meaningful they were! No one could deny that He is the very Christ—the wisest One.

THE CARE FOR THE SHEEP

Following this, the Lord did something else on the Sabbath to offend the religious ones. “Departing from there, He came into their synagogue. And behold, a man who had a withered hand was there. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, What man will there be among you who will have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath. Then He said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out and it was restored, as sound as the other. But the Pharisees, going out, took counsel against Him as to how they might destroy Him” (vv. 9-14).

On the first Sabbath the Lord did something to reveal who He is. On the following Sabbath He did something to rescue His sheep. As the members of His Body, we are His sheep. What He did on the first Sabbath was something of a vindication of Himself as the Head. However, what He did on the following Sabbath was to take care of the members of His Body. As long as we do anything with Him, we are free from the regulations, and as long as we do something for His members, we are also free from the regulations. Some have asked if it is scriptural to baptize people more than once. It is a fact that many dead sheep who have been buried in the water have become alive. It is something for the sheep. Some may say that such a thing is not scriptural, but we need to look at so many dead ones who have become alive by being buried.

To heal the sheep is much more important than to keep the Sabbath. Which do you prefer? Do you prefer a way in the letter of the Scriptures without life or a way that helps the sheep to be living? Do you think that the Lord is concerned about His people keeping the Sabbath? No, the Lord does not care for that. He is the good Shepherd, and He has many sheep. He cares for His sheep, not for the keeping of the Sabbath.

Should we think that the Lord cares for religious service without life, although it seems to be fundamental and scriptural? No! What the Lord seeks is that people be alive. Do you think the Lord prefers a silent, scriptural, fundamental worshipper, so careful to behave according to the Scriptures, or a noisy Christian who shouts, “Hallelujah! Jesus is Lord!” If you were the Lord Jesus, which kind of Christian would you prefer? Hallelujah! Today is

not the day of the law, not the day of regulations, but the day of Christ. We should not care for the law, but for Christ and for His sheep. Again we see the wisdom of the Lord in His answer to the religious ones. He gave them such a simple answer, yet it was so profound, revealing Himself and the church.

THE GREATER JONAH AND THE REAL SOLOMON

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus, asking Him to show them a miracle or a sign. "But He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Ninevite men will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something more than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something more than Solomon is here" (vv. 39-42).

The request of the scribes and Pharisees to see a sign was a challenge to the Lord. It was as if they said, "Show us Your power." However, the Lord Jesus did not perform a miracle for them. He did not care for their challenge. He only said that there would be one sign given to them—the sign of Jonah. Jonah was cast away by the people. He did not show his power, for he was powerless outwardly. He was swallowed up by the sea, and for three days and three nights he was powerless. Eventually, however, he came out on dry land. It was as if the Lord Jesus said, "I am the greater Jonah. The more you challenge Me, the more I am powerless. One day you will put Me on the cross. I am willing, and I will not do anything to stop you. I will be in the tomb for three days, but on the third day I will rise again. This is the real sign." This means that the unique sign of this age is for Christ to die on the cross and rise again so that He might release us in resurrection. The biggest sign today is not anything done outwardly, but a person buried and risen with Christ. This is the sign in this age. Therefore, Christ is the greater Jonah.

Then after His resurrection Christ is the real Solomon, judging and discerning with wisdom. "Behold, something more than Solomon is here" (v. 42). Solomon is mentioned after Jonah, even though in history Solomon was before Jonah, because here the order is according to the spiritual significance.

Christ first of all had to die and then be raised to be the King. He had to be Jonah first, and then He could be Solomon. We first need to experience Christ as the dead and resurrected Jonah, and then we can experience Him as the wise Solomon. He is the greater Jonah, and He is the greater Solomon. He is the greater Prophet, and He is also the greater King. He is the One who brings us into death and brings us out of death in resurrection, and He is also the One who judges and discerns within us. For Christ to be greater than Jonah means crucifixion and resurrection. For Christ to be greater than Solomon means that He is the One who has been entrusted with all of God's economy. He judges, and He has the wisdom to judge. In addition, He is the One who builds the temple of God. First, He passed through crucifixion into resurrection, as typified by Jonah. Then after resurrection He accomplished God's economy and fulfilled God's purpose on the earth. This was fully typified by Solomon.

In conclusion, these cases show us that we do not need the Sabbath law. Neither do we need David, the temple, Jonah the prophet, or Solomon the king, because we have Christ. Christ is everything. He is our David, He is our temple, He is the Lord of the Sabbath, He is our Jonah, and He is our Solomon. As long as we have Christ, we need nothing more. Thus, we can see by all these cases that the New Testament service is outside of religion but altogether with Christ.

CHAPTER TWELVE

JESUS ONLY

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:13-17; 17:1-8, 24-27

When we read these passages in Matthew 16 and 17, we see that they are altogether for Christ and about Christ. To serve in the New Testament dispensation, we need to be very clear about Christ. The New Testament service is a matter altogether of Christ, for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. It is altogether a matter of Christ.

WHO IS CHRIST?

In the first chapter of Matthew we have seen the conceiving of Christ, and in the second chapter, the finding of Christ. Matthew 3 and 4 have shown us the testifying for Christ and the following of Christ. When we come to chapter 16, however, a real problem is raised—that is, who is Christ? There is the conceiving of Christ, the finding of Christ, the testifying of Christ, and the following of Christ, but who is Christ? Peter, James, and John, with the others, were all followers of Christ, but there was nevertheless the problem of who Christ is. Yes, we follow Christ, but do we know who Christ is?

In Matthew 16 the Lord raises this problem, but notice that it was not raised in the temple. It was not even in Jerusalem or in the land of Judea. Rather, it was on the border of the Gentile world, in the parts of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus left not only the temple and Jerusalem but also the Holy Land. He was in the vicinity of the Gentile world when He asked, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (v. 13). The Lord did not ask such a question in the religious realm. When we are in the religious district, the religious sphere, it is doubtful that we will ask questions about Christ.

However, once we move outside of the religious world and the religious circle, immediately the question comes, "What about Christ?" Why did the Lord Jesus not ask this question when He was in the temple? There was a reason. Why did He not ask it when He was in Jerusalem? Why did He wait until He crossed the border of the Holy Land and was in the vicinity of the Gentile world? It is quite meaningful. The reason is that the New Testament

service is outside of the religious region, the religious circle, the religious sphere.

In the Bible there are no wasted words. If there were no significance in this matter, there would be no need for Matthew to say that Jesus and His disciples came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi. The mention of this matter indicates that to know Christ, we need to leave religion. We need to leave the temple, the holy city, and even the Holy Land. It is only when we come into the parts of Caesarea Philippi that we are in the right position to know Christ.

When Jesus asked this question, the disciples answered that some said that He was John the Baptist; others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus 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" (vv. 14-17). Peter took the lead in answering the question by saying that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is really good. Then the Lord told him that his answer was not of flesh and blood, but it was something that had been revealed from the Father in the heavens. To have the revelation from the heavens, we need to be on the border of Caesarea Philippi. The disciples did not receive the revelation of Christ in the temple, in the holy city, or in the Holy Land. We need to be outside of the religious realm. The revelation of Christ was given outside of religion.

JESUS TRANSFIGURED

Then in the following chapter, the Lord Jesus brought Peter, James, and John up to a mountain, where suddenly He was transfigured before them. This was not something of a doctrine or a teaching; this was a transfiguration. Jesus was transfigured before them. He was no longer in the lowly form of a little Nazarene, but with a face shining like the sun. Then Moses and Elijah came to talk with Him. At that time Peter acted very foolishly. "Peter answered and said to Jesus, 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. While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him! And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their face and were greatly frightened. And Jesus came to

them and touched them and said, Arise, and do not be afraid. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone" (17:4-8).

When Peter saw Moses and Elijah, he became excited; therefore, he spoke nonsense. When we become overexcited, we often speak nonsense. Peter's proposal was to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. This means that he uplifted Moses and Elijah to the same level as Jesus. No one knew where Moses was buried or to what place Elijah was taken. Now both of them suddenly appeared. Therefore, Peter thought that surely they all were equal. The Lord Jesus said not a word; He would not vindicate Himself. The heavens, however, reacted. While Peter was still speaking, there came a voice from heaven, saying, "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" In other words, the Father was telling them to forget Moses and Elijah and listen to His Son. That stopped Peter's nonsense. Then the Lord came and touched Peter and the other two disciples. How wonderful the Lord is! He would not vindicate Himself, but He will always touch us. Whenever we are frightened, He comes to touch us. Then Peter and the others arose and saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. How full of meaning this is!

Not only did Peter receive a revelation in chapter 16, but in chapter 17 he also saw a transfiguration with his physical eyes. Furthermore, he heard the heavenly voice with his physical ears, a voice saying that they should hear Jesus only. Why would the voice from heaven say this? Because Moses and Elijah were not there on the mountain simply as two individuals. They were there representing the law and the prophets. Therefore, the voice from heaven said, "Hear Him," not Moses or Elijah. This means that we need to hear the living Christ, not merely the written law represented by Moses, nor the written prophets represented by Elijah. In other words, we need to hear the living Christ, not merely the written Scriptures.

We need to read Matthew 17 again and again. The voice from heaven told Peter to hear Jesus only. We should realize that Peter had suggested putting up three tents—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Therefore, Peter was making the law and the prophets equal to Jesus. This was the background. The concept of listening both to Christ and to the law and the prophets is against the concept of the heavens. Therefore, the heavenly voice said, "This is My Son, the Beloved...Hear Him!" It seems that the Father in the heavens was saying, "I do not like to hear you expressing your appreciation

for Moses, even though you have a good intention. And I also do not like to hear that you care for Elijah, even though that also may come from a good intention. I, the Father in the heavens, do not care for the law; neither do I care for the prophets. I care for My Son. This is My beloved Son; hear Him."

It was not merely a vision but a visible transfiguration witnessed by Peter with his physical eyes. In addition, a voice from the heavens was heard by Peter with his physical ears. Peter was shocked and no doubt was deeply impressed. If you were Peter, could you forget what you had seen and what you had heard? You may forget the things you dream, but I do not believe you could ever forget such an experience.

THE APPLICATION

However, there is another portion in Matthew 17, a portion describing another event which occurred a short time after the transfiguration. "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" (vv. 24-27).

At this time Jesus and His disciples were within a house, and a poll tax collector came. As always, Peter took the lead and confronted this man. If he had not taken the lead, I do not think that he would have gotten himself so involved. The tax collector asked Peter if his teacher paid the half-shekel for the poll tax. This half-shekel was the offering given to God by all His people for the expenses of maintaining the temple. In Exodus 30:11-16 the record of this regulation is given. Every Israelite was required to pay this half-shekel.

Once again, Peter was too quick to speak. When the tax collector asked Peter if Jesus paid the half-shekel, immediately Peter answered, "Yes!" Did Peter not receive the revelation in Matthew 16? Did he not see the transfiguration on the mount? The central point of that revelation and of that vision of transfiguration was that Christ was the Son of God. "This is My Son,

the Beloved." The half-shekel was collected for keeping the house of the Father. Should then the Son of the Father pay the half-shekel? Of course not! Therefore, Peter was careless, not paying attention to what had been revealed to him, nor to what he had seen in the vision of the transfiguration. What he did was to keep the tradition. Tradition dictated that every Israelite pay the tribute. Peter's thinking was that since Jesus was an Israelite, surely He must pay. He answered the question based upon traditional knowledge, forgetting what he had seen and heard. He saw the vision, and he heard the voice, but he did not apply what he saw and heard.

Many times we may have seen the vision, and we may even have heard the voice, but we simply do not apply what we have seen and heard. The reason we will not apply it is that we are still so traditional. Have you seen that all the members of the church should function? Surely you all will answer Amen. Then why do you not apply this vision? Since you have seen that all the members of the church need to function, why do you not function? Such a thing happens because, on the one hand, you have seen the vision, but, on the other hand, you are still in the old tradition.

Sometimes in the meetings we are on the mount; we have really seen something. However, when we get home, the tax collector meets us. We feel that we still remember what we have seen, but the Holy Spirit sends the tax collector in an unexpected way. This is a test to us. If the Lord Jesus had warned Peter that he would be put on the test by the coming of a tax collector before the tax collector came, I believe Peter would not have been so careless. Many times, however, the Lord does not give us any forewarning. I am sure that Peter still rejoiced concerning what he had seen on the mount. He may have said, "Hallelujah, I have seen that it is a matter of Jesus only!" Then the tax collector came. "Does not your Teacher pay the temple tax?" Peter may have said to himself, "Surely we are Israelites and so is He. As an Israelite He would pay. This is the commandment of Moses, and this is the regulation of the law." Therefore, we see that we may have seen the vision, but when we are put on the test, it is a different matter. Merely to be clear concerning the vision is not trustworthy. We need to be tested, and we need to learn how to apply what we have seen.

What should Peter have done when he was asked this question by the tax collector? He should not have answered according to tradition, because he had seen the vision and heard the voice from the heavens. He should have

answered according to what he had seen and heard. Peter, however, was careless. He immediately answered according to his traditional knowledge. Then he turned and entered the house. I believe his intention was to tell the Lord that He must pay the tax. The Lord Jesus, however, prevented him from saying anything by asking him a question first. “From whom do the kings of the earth receive custom or poll tax, from their sons or from strangers?” Of course, Peter answered that it should be from strangers. The Lord Jesus replied, “Then the sons are free.” He said, in effect, “Do you not know that I am the Son? Did you not hear the voice saying that I am the Son? Then why did you tell the tax collector that I would pay?” Peter was caught. He erred by forgetting what he saw in the vision and heard from the heavens. He answered in the old way, in the traditional way. He made the mistake innocently. Nevertheless, whether it was innocently or otherwise, Peter made a great mistake.

THE LIVING, PRESENT WORD OF CHRIST

By these few words, Peter became quite clear that the Lord need not pay the tax. He came to realize fully that the Son is free. Then the Lord said, in effect, “Nevertheless, lest we stumble them, we should pay.” When we say “Yes,” Jesus may say “No.” When we say “No,” He may say “Yes.” In my experience very often when I said “Yes,” the Lord Jesus would say “No.” Then when I followed Him to say “No,” He would then say “Yes.” It seems that He is a real “troublemaker.” It is not such a simple lesson to learn to do whatever the Lord says, regardless of what He has said in the past.

Peter learned his lesson in a hard way. The Lord said that He would pay the tax to keep from stumbling the others, but He would not give money to Peter for him to pay it. No, Peter needed to go fishing to find some money in the mouth of a fish, money that would be sufficient for both the Lord and himself. If I were Peter, in a sense, I would not know what to do. The Lord gave him a difficult task. “Go fishing, and find the money in the mouth of the first fish that comes up.” I do not know how long Peter had to wait for that fish, but I am sure that by that experience he learned a lesson. He may have said, “O Lord, from now on, I will never forget the vision. I will never forget what I heard from the heavens at the transfiguration. The next time someone asks me a question, I will answer according to what I have seen.” This was a good lesson for Peter. Eventually, the fish came, and the money was there. Then he paid the half-shekel for the Lord and for himself, and the problem was solved.

It was by such a simple matter that the Lord caused Peter to know that today it is not Moses who gives the commandment but Jesus. When the Lord says to pay, we pay; when He says not to pay, we do not pay. Now Peter paid the half-shekel not according to what Moses said but according to what Christ said. Now to pay the poll tax is not a matter of keeping the law of Moses but a matter of keeping the word of Christ. In that sense, there is no need to obey the law of Moses any longer—that is over. Today Christ is the present and living Lawgiver. We should forget about Moses and apply Christ in every situation. When He says to pay, we pay. When He says not to pay, we do not pay. It is not a matter of listening to Moses, but a matter of listening to Christ. It is not a matter of paying or not paying but a matter of what Christ says.

Because Christ today is within us, it is not a matter of doing or not doing. It is altogether a matter of listening to the living, present word of Christ. It is not a matter of cutting your hair short, for example, or of wearing it long. It is absolutely a matter of listening to the living word of Christ. This is today's New Testament service.

THE NEW MOSES AND THE NEW ELIJAH

In this test, the Lord Jesus made it clear to Peter that He is today's Moses, He is the present Lawgiver. The old Moses is over; the old Moses was finished at the Mount of Transfiguration. Christ is the new Moses, the unique Moses. We should listen to Him. This Moses is in contradiction to us; that is, when we say "Yes," He will say "No." Furthermore, He has a stronger argument to prove that He is right. Then after we are convinced that we should follow Him, He may say something different. Either way, the case is in His hand, because today He is the living Lawgiver; therefore, whatever He says is right. We should not say anything, but let Him do all the speaking. When He says "Yes," we say "Amen." When He says "No," we also say "Amen."

The problem with Moses is that when he gives the commandment, he simply gives the commandment. He does not supply the strength to fulfill that commandment. Moses told the people to pay the half-shekel, but he did not offer the strength to do it. Moses said, "Pay!" but he offered no payment. However, when Christ asks us to pay, He supplies the payment. When the Lord gives the commandment, He affords the strength to fulfill it. He is the present, living Lawgiver with the strength to keep the law. The Moses of the

old dispensation is over; Christ is the Moses of the new dispensation, the new Moses.

Furthermore, Christ is not only the present Moses, but He is also today's Prophet, the Prophet who is living in our daily life. He prophesied that a fish would come and that a piece of money would be found in the fish's mouth, money sufficient to pay the half-shekel for Him and for Peter. This was not a great thing. It was not like the so-called prophecies of today that say, "Thus saith the Lord: There will be a big earthquake, and Los Angeles will fall into the ocean." What does a so-called prophecy such as this have to do with our daily life? The prophecy of Jesus was not so great. It was such a small thing, but it had a real meaning for Peter's daily life.

This Jesus is the real Prophet, the living Prophet, the Prophet in our daily life. He does not give a lot of teaching and doctrine, but He gives simply a little prediction with a living instruction. If we will take His word and go along with His instruction, we will receive the help. We do not need the big terms and the big teachings. We need something living and practical. We do not need a great prophecy that has no meaning, but we need a few little words that teach us some lesson and supply some need. That is good enough. By this we can realize that Jesus is the living, present Elijah. We do not need the Moses and Elijah of the old dispensation any longer. Christ is everything we need.

If you will not misunderstand me, I will say also that because we have Christ, we do not need the Bible in the same way that we need Christ. To uplift the Bible to the level of Christ Himself could even be an insult to Him. If I wrote you a letter a month ago, yet today while I am here in your presence you will not talk to me but merely quote my letter, that would be an insult to me. In a sense, the Bible is the letter of Christ to us, and we need to read it. However, when Christ Himself comes, we should go to Him. I believe you can understand what I mean. If there is a group of people on this earth who love the Bible, surely I must be one of them. Nevertheless, I would tell you that the Bible cannot be on the same level as Christ. The written word of God cannot compete with the living Word of God. A picture or a photo cannot compete with the real person. I love the Holy Bible, but I would not uplift it to the same level as the Lord Jesus. There is a difference. I love the Bible, but I love the presence of the Lord more. It must be Jesus only. He is the One who says "Yes" or "No" to me, and He is the One who predicts things in my daily life. He is

my law, and He is my prophecy. He is my living Bible. This is today's New Testament service.

In God's economy there is only one person, one man, one center. This is Christ, not Moses or Elijah. Christ is the One who gives the commandments, and He is also the One who prophesies. It is by His prophecy that we may know how to keep His word. Hallelujah! Christ is all in all. He is all we need. It is not Christ and something else. It is Christ alone. There is no more Moses or Elijah, but Jesus only. He is today's Moses and today's Elijah. He is not only the living Lawgiver but also the living Prophet. He is today's everything. He is the One who is qualified to give the commandments, and He is also the One who predicts and affords the strength to fulfill what He commands. He gave the commandment to pay the half-shekel, and He predicted the way to get the money to pay it. This is Christ today in the New Testament service.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOUR QUESTIONS AND THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 21:23-27; 22:15-46

In Matthew 21 and 22 there are four kinds of questions that were asked by different kinds of people. The first question was asked by the chief priests and the elders. The chief priests were the leaders in religion, and the elders were the leaders in the community.

The second question was asked by the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees were a religious party. They sent their disciples with the Herodians, who were the political party of Herod the king.

Then the third question was asked by the Sadducees, who might be called the ancient modernists. Today there are many who can be compared to the Sadducees, because they do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross, shedding His blood for our redemption, and was resurrected. The modernists might be called today's Sadducees, and the Sadducees were the ancient modernists. They do not believe in the Word of God or in His power, and they do not believe in angels or in resurrection.

The fourth question was asked by one of the Pharisees, who was a lawyer, a learned one with knowledge of the Scriptures. Of course, he was more qualified and equipped. Here we see all these different kinds of people: the chief priests, the elders, the disciples of the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the more learned Pharisee. All of them surrounded this little Jesus. All of these leading ones with their high attainments, knowledge, power, and position surrounded the Lord Jesus to entangle Him. He had not received a degree. He came out of Nazareth, a despised town. He was a poor man, not having any name or position in the midst of such people. Nevertheless, although He was small outwardly, He is not small inwardly. He has no form outwardly, but He has tremendous power inwardly. He may not have outward knowledge, but He has inward wisdom.

THE FIRST QUESTION: A MATTER OF RELIGION

"When He came into the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching and said, By what authority do You do these things? And who gave You this authority? And Jesus answered and said to them, I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from men? And they reasoned among themselves, saying, If we say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, From men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus and said, We do not know. He too said to them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (21:23-27).

The chief priests and the elders wanted to know where Jesus obtained His authority. How could such a little man like Him have such authority? The Lord Jesus was wise. He said, in effect, "Since you ask Me a question, let Me also ask you a question. If you tell Me, then I will tell you. What about the baptism of John? Was it from heaven or from men?" Then the chief priests and the elders said among themselves, in effect, "If we say that it was from heaven, then He will ask us why we did not believe John. We all know that John recommended this man. If we say that we believe John and recognize that his baptism was from heaven, we will also have to believe that this man is from heaven, because John was His forerunner. However, if we say that John's baptism was from men, we will offend the people, because they all regard John as a prophet." Therefore, they decided that the best way was to tell a lie, and they said, "We do not know."

Notice the wisdom with which the Lord answered. He did not say, "You are lying. You know, but you will not tell Me." No, He simply said in a gentle way, "Neither do I tell you." These few words are full of meaning. They reveal that He knew they were lying. They told a lie, but the Lord told the truth. They knew, but they said they did not know. He knew, but He would not tell them. Jesus is really the Lord. He is worthy of our worship. Who else could answer such a question in this way?

THE SECOND QUESTION: A MATTER OF POLITICS

By this time the Pharisees realized that it was not so easy to deal with this Jesus; therefore, they asked their disciples to go to Him with the Herodians.

“Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how they might ensnare Him in His words. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that You are true and that You teach the way of God in truth and do not fear anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us therefore, What do You think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, Why do you tempt Me, hypocrites? Show Me the coin for the tribute. And they brought to Him a denarius. And He said to them, Whose is this image and inscription? They said, Caesar’s. Then He said to them, Render then the things that are Caesar’s to Caesar and the things that are God’s to God. And when they heard this, they marveled. And they left Him and went away” (22:15-22).

The Pharisees were a religious party, patriotic to their Jewish nation, whereas the Herodians were a political party, faithful to the Roman Empire. The Romans were the ancient imperialists, who had occupied the land of Israel. Here, however, these two opposing parties came together to try to entangle the Lord Jesus in His words. “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” This tribute was different from the poll tax, the half-shekel paid to the temple. This was the tax paid to the Roman government, a tax that all the faithful patriotic Jews opposed. They would not pay one penny to the Roman government if they could help it.

These two groups who were otherwise enemies asked Jesus this question to put Him on the spot. If the Lord said they should not pay, then the Herodians would immediately charge Him with being against the Roman government. However, if He said that they must pay, then the faithful Jews would say that He was betraying His country. This was the subtlety of the Pharisees.

We should not think that anyone can succeed in entangling the Lord Jesus. Even if they combined ten parties, they still could not entangle Him. He has a way. Hallelujah! He is Jesus! Do you realize the wisdom in His response? He did not take a penny out of His own pocket. If He had done that, He would have been caught. He asked them to show Him a piece of the Roman money. They—not He—had the Roman money. Therefore, they were caught. Jesus is Lord! Then He asked them whose image and inscription were on the coin. They told Him that they were Caesar’s. Then the Lord Jesus said, “Render then the things that are Caesar’s to Caesar,” but He did not stop there. He left no ground for the enemy. He also said, “And the things that are God’s to God.” This silenced them. When they heard this answer, they marveled.

THE THIRD QUESTION: A MATTER OF FAITH

The Sadducees, somewhat like today's modernists, prided themselves in their knowledge; they came to Him and asked a question. "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" (vv. 24-28).

Jesus answered, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 29-32).

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection; therefore, they thought they could catch Jesus with this question. In other words, if Jesus said that there was a resurrection, whose wife would this woman be in the resurrection? Jesus told them that they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. In resurrection there will be no marriage or giving in marriage, for everyone will be like the angels. As far as the resurrection of the dead is concerned, He asked them if they had not read in the law what God had spoken: "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead. If there were no resurrection, then God would be the God of the dead. God, however, is the God of the living. This proves that one day Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected. The Sadducees were astonished at His answer. There was nothing more they could say.

THE FOURTH QUESTION:

A MATTER OF INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

When the Pharisees saw that the Sadducees were put to silence by Jesus, a learned one among them came and tried to tempt Him with another question. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (v. 36).

Jesus answered the lawyer, "'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. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (vv. 37-40).

When the Lord replied in such a way, none of those questioning Him had anything more to say. Eventually, all their mouths were shut. No matter what question they asked the Lord, He was too wise for them.

THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS:

A MATTER OF CHRIST HIMSELF

Following these four questions, the Lord asked them a question. "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus questioned them, saying, What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He? They said to Him, David's. He said to them, How then does David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies underneath Your feet'? If then David calls Him Lord, how is He his son? And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone from that day dare to question Him anymore" (vv. 41-46).

Those trying to entangle the Lord had asked questions concerning religion, politics, faith, and the interpretation of the Scriptures. The first question was a question of religion: What is Your authority? What is Your religion? The second question was a question of politics, of whether or not they should pay taxes to the Roman Empire. The third question was a question of faith or belief. What is your belief regarding the resurrection? The last question was a question of scriptural interpretation. How do You interpret the Bible?

Today there are many who spend nearly all their time on these four things. They are working for religion, politics, belief or faith, and the interpretation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, very few are concerned for the living Christ Himself. Many are concerned about all the different problems, but they do not care for Christ. The situation is very much the same as it was when the Lord Jesus was on the earth.

The Lord Jesus asked those who were questioning Him, "What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?" They had the accurate scriptural

knowledge; they answered that He was the Son of David. They had the Scriptures; yet Christ Himself was in their presence, and they were fighting against Him. They held the Bible in their hands, but at the same time they tried to entangle Christ with their questions.

How careful we need to be lest we repeat the same story. It is possible for us to fall into the same trap of holding the Bible and yet missing the presence of Christ. Today there are many who care for the Bible and yet miss Christ Himself. In a sense, they are also fighting against Christ.

I have no intention of criticizing anyone or damaging anyone; my burden is simply for Christ Himself, and I must stand up and speak for Him. I would ask you whether you are merely for the Bible or you are for Christ Himself. For us, it should be "Jesus Himself alone." The opposers of the Lord Jesus had the Bible and the accurate knowledge; yet they were opposing Christ. "Who is Christ? Whose son is He?" They answered that He was the Son of David. They were correct concerning the knowledge in their mind, but there was nothing of the heavenly vision in their spirit.

Then the Lord asked them, if Christ is the Son of David, "How then does David in spirit call Him Lord?" How can David as the great-great-grandfather call Christ, his great-great-grandson, Lord? They had the knowledge, but they did not have the revelation. They could answer in the way of knowledge, but they could not discern in the spirit. They knew doctrinally that Christ was the Son of David, but they did not have the revelation in the spirit that this Christ who is, on one hand, the Son of David, is also the Lord of all. They were completely in the realm of their mind and not in the realm of the spirit. They had the Bible, but they missed Christ Himself.

How can we serve today in the New Testament service? To serve is to care for Jesus Himself alone. How much the Bible in letters has become an enemy to Christ Himself! How many dear ones have been distracted, frustrated, and kept away from Christ by the mere knowledge of the Bible! Certainly this does not mean that we do not need the Bible. We need it, but we need it in the spirit in a living way. We should be careful not to let the knowledge of the Bible frustrate us, distract us, or keep us away from Christ.

For the past seven or eight years, by the Lord's mercy, I have been telling the saints that the crucial thing is not a matter of knowledge, not a matter of

teaching, but absolutely a matter of the living Christ. It is a matter of His living presence, His living Spirit. Christ today is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The letter kills, the knowledge deadens, and the Bible merely in the letter veils, frustrates, and distracts (2 Cor. 3:6). We need the living Bible, the living word, and the living teaching. We need to turn ourselves from the realm of our mind to our spirit and learn as David did to call Him Lord. We would say, "O Lord! O Lord! O Lord! I do not care for any knowledge or teaching. I only care for You in my spirit."

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

By all these questions we see that the leaders of human society in that day were paying their attention only to the matters of religion, politics, faith, and the interpretation of the Bible. Today the situation is much the same. Both in the secular world and in the religious world, many are still paying attention to these things. Very few pay attention to Christ Himself.

The Lord is still asking today, "What do you think concerning the Christ?" It is not a question of religion, politics, faith, or a fundamental interpretation of the Bible. What do you think concerning the Christ? This is the question of questions. All the other questions are of little importance. Only Christ counts. Regardless of how many questions you may solve, if you do not have Christ, you still do not have the answer. What do you think concerning the Christ, and whose son is He? To know Christ is not merely to know what He did; it is to know mainly who He is. It is to know His person, His nature, His being.

There are many today who, although they believe in Christ, know nothing of the mysterious person of Christ. On the one hand, He is the Son of Man, and on the other hand, He is the Son of God. This is a mystery. There are Christian leaders and teachers who cannot speak clearly concerning the person and being of Christ. Most of them know simply what He did; very few know who He is.

The Lord Jesus did not ask the Pharisees concerning the birth of Christ or concerning the work of Christ. No, He asked them what they thought of Christ, and whose son He is. Because they knew the Bible so well, they answered that Christ is the Son of David. If we see the person and being of Christ, however, we will see that the fact that Christ is the Son of David means that He is the Son of Man; yet He is nevertheless the Lord of David because He is the very

God, the Lord of all. His being is of two natures. According to His human nature, He is the Son of David. According to His divine nature, however, He is God, the Lord of all. He is a wonderful person and a wonderful being of two natures, human and divine.

We all should realize that the problem we have is nothing but a question of Christ. Let us forget about religion. Let us forget about politics, beliefs, and the interpretation of the Bible, but let us not at all forget about Christ Himself. If you ask me anything concerning religion or politics, I will say that by the Lord's mercy I do not like to talk about these things. I do not care for all these things. I only care for Christ. Christ is my goal; Christ is my mark.

Again I say, there are many today who pay their full attention to the Bible in the way of letters, yet they care little for the person of Christ. This is the situation today, and how pitiful a situation it is. May the Lord be merciful to us that we may be so clear. I love the Bible, but I would only touch it in the presence of the Lord. This is what the Lord is going to recover. In no sense do we despise this holy Word. Speaking in faithfulness, we respect it even more than many others, but we do so in the presence of the Lord and under His anointing. We cannot separate the holy Word from the holy person. This is the way of the New Testament service.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NEW TESTAMENT SERVICE IN THE ASPECTS OF LIFE AND WORK

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:1-30

This chapter concludes this series of messages on the matter of the New Testament service. We have seen that the New Testament service is simply to conceive Christ of the Holy Spirit, to find Christ by following the heavenly living star, to testify of Christ in a living way, and to follow Him in the way of the two ministries—the ministry of fishing and that of mending. We have also seen that all our service needs to be outside of religion and that it should be a living service, fresh and up to date, with Christ Himself.

TWO PARABLES

Matthew 25 reveals another point in the New Testament service. It gives us two parables: one of the ten virgins, and the other of the talents. Why did the Lord Jesus give us these two parables? In our New Testament service there is always the need to know the two aspects shown by these parables. The parable of the ten virgins is a matter of life, and the parable of the talents is a matter of work. As Christians today we need to take care of these two matters. We need to take care of our life, and we should take care of our work. On the life side, we are the virgins to Christ in love, and on the work side, we are His slaves in service.

THE TEN VIRGINS

First of all, the Lord speaks about the ten virgins. “At that time the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish and five were prudent. For the foolish, when they took their lamps, did not take oil with them; but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps. And while the bridegroom delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Go forth to meet him! Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their own lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the

prudent answered, saying, Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves. And as they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came; and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast. And the door was shut." (vv. 1-10).

In this parable of the virgins, the Lord is not speaking of individual virgins, but He is saying something about a group of virgins. We need to realize that we should not try to be a separate individual, loving the Lord and living for the Lord. We need to be in the Body. There are ten virgins, and ten means a complete number, a complete group. We should all be together as a complete Body. We should not think that we can be a proper, normal Christian by ourselves individually. We need to be one of the ten virgins. If we read this parable again, we will see that all the virgins moved together. Whatever they did, they did together in the group. This is quite meaningful. They were not individualistic; they were a corporate body of virgins.

To be a virgin is deeply meaningful. We have already seen that the book of Matthew begins with a virgin, the virgin Mary. Now we see that Matthew ends with ten virgins. The one who conceived Christ of the Holy Spirit was a virgin, and the corporate ones moving together are also virgins. To be a virgin is to be so simple, so single, so isolated from all other involvements. We all need to be such persons. We need to be those who are separated from all earthly ties and earthly involvements. We should be so single in our goal.

Then we see the kind of life these virgins led. Theirs was a life of holding a lamp and going forth to meet the bridegroom. What kind of life do we need day by day? The life we need is that of going forth to meet Christ. As we go forth to meet Him, we hold the lamp, for this is a dark age. This is very significant. The impression the seekers of Christ today should give others is that we are a people holding the heavenly lamp and going forth to meet Christ. To hold a lamp as we walk in this dark age is a real testimony. The lamp in our hand shines out as a testimony to those who are in darkness.

If someone were to ask us what we are doing here in the local church, what should we answer? We should say that we are holding the lamp and going forth to meet Christ. We are not settled in any way; we are going forth. We are not rooted in this earth; we are going forth to meet Christ. Christ today is returning, and He is already on His way. We are going out of this world to

meet Him with a burning, shining, enlightening lamp in our hands. While we are going forth, we hold a testimony.

The Extra Portion of Oil

Nevertheless, there is a problem. It is possible to have the lamp but to lack the extra portion of oil. The lamp mentioned here was an oil lamp; therefore, there was the need of a vessel along with the lamp to contain an extra portion of oil. When the lamp begins to run out of oil, it can then be supplied again with an extra portion. Five prudent virgins prepared the extra oil. This means that they had an extra portion of oil in the vessel. The foolish ones, however, did not carry any extra oil. Here is the difference between the prudent and the foolish. It is not that the prudent had lamps and the foolish had none. The distinction is that the prudent had the extra oil in their vessels, whereas the foolish did not.

I would like to ask you, according to your own feeling, whether you are one of the prudent virgins or one of the foolish. I believe the Lord is speaking to many of us that we are still among the foolish. We are saved; there is no doubt about this because the lamp is in our hand. However, we do not have the extra portion of oil in our vessel. The five foolish ones had lamps, but their lamps were going out. This is the proper rendering according to the Greek text. It is not that their lamps had gone out but that they were going out. They were still shining and burning, but there was very little oil left. Not only are the prudent ones saved; the foolish ones are also saved, for they are virgins and have lamps. Unbelievers are not virgins; they do not have lamps, and they are not going forth to meet Christ. Only the saved are the virgins going forth with lamps to meet Christ. The difference is that the foolish did not prepare the extra portion of oil. This was their problem.

What is the extra portion of oil in the vessel? We all know that oil typifies the Holy Spirit. We have all been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and therefore have the Holy Spirit within us. This means that we have oil in our burning lamp. However, we need an extra portion of the Holy Spirit. I believe that this refers to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

The extra portion of oil in the vessel is the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit is an experience beyond regeneration. We may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit yet come short of being full of the Holy

Spirit. We may all have been regenerated of the Holy Spirit, but so many of us are not filled inwardly with the Holy Spirit. We have regeneration, but we do not have the infilling. Regeneration is sufficient to save us, but we need the infilling of the Holy Spirit to be ready to meet the Bridegroom.

The parable of the ten virgins is not a matter of salvation; it is a matter of being prepared for the wedding feast of Christ. To be saved is one thing, and to be ready for the wedding feast of Christ is another. To have your lamp burning is one thing, but to have an extra portion of oil in the vessel is another. It is possible to have a burning lamp but to be short of the extra portion of oil. Such a person's lamp, in a sense, is going out. That one needs an extra supply of oil.

Among Christians there are many different interpretations of this parable. The dispensationalists say that this parable is only for the Jews, not for the Christians. The fundamentalists say that it is indeed related to Christians, but that the prudent virgins are the saved and the foolish virgins are the unsaved. However, we should forget all the different interpretations and simply come to the Word in the presence of the Lord. If we read this chapter in the Lord's presence, we will know what it means. We should forget all the traditional teachings, the old teachings, and be the single virgins, holding the lamp, going forth to meet our Bridegroom with an extra portion of oil in our vessel.

The Key Word: *Buy*

We have been saved, and we have been regenerated, but we need the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In this parable there is a key word concerning the matter of being full of the Spirit. When the foolish ones asked to borrow oil from the prudent, the prudent told them to go and buy for themselves. The word *buy* is a key word. We all know that to buy something, we must pay the price. The regeneration of the Holy Spirit is free; it costs us nothing. For the infilling of the Holy Spirit, however, we must pay a price. What is the price? Let me illustrate. Suppose you go to the department store and select an item for purchase, but the Spirit within tells you to drop it. You like it, but the Spirit says, "Drop it!" That is the time that you need to pay the price. If you go along with the inner regulating of the Spirit, you will buy some extra oil for your vessel. There are some things that we need to drop at a cost. We need to pay the price to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are children of God, we have been regenerated, but the problem is that we will not pay the price by dropping so many things. If we hold on to all these things, we miss the infilling of the Spirit. If we do not pay the price, then surely we cannot get the merchandise. If the Holy Spirit says to drop a certain item when we are shopping, we should say, "Amen, Lord, I will drop it." When the Holy Spirit asks us to give up a certain thing, we should simply give it up. This is the price we need to pay. In return we will receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In this case, we receive what we pay the price for. If we pay a great price, then we will receive that much. The amount we pay determines how much we receive.

Nevertheless, there is a warning that there is a time element. The foolish ones finally went to buy, but it was too late. The door was shut. One thing is certain: we need to buy the oil, we need to pay the price. However, if we do not buy before the Lord comes back, it will be too late. If we do not buy today, then some day we still must buy, but that will be too late. If we buy today, we will receive a prize, but if we buy later, we will lose the prize. This is the life we need to serve the Lord in the New Testament service.

THE TALENTS

On one hand, we are the virgins to Christ, but on the other hand, we are His slaves. We are not only the virgins going forth to meet Him; we are also the slaves serving Him. In the parable of the ten virgins we need the extra portion of oil, but in the parable of the talents, for the kingdom of the heavens we need the trading of the talents.

"The kingdom of the heavens is just like a man about to go abroad, who called his own slaves and delivered to them his possessions. To one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability. And he went abroad. Immediately he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and gained another five. Similarly, he who had received the two gained another two. But he who had received the one went off and dug in the earth and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them" (vv. 14-19).

"Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and

gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away from him" (vv. 24-29).

It is clear that every slave received a talent. Not one slave failed to receive at least one talent. This shows that every one among us has some gift or talent. You should not say that you do not have any talent or gift. Every one in the Body of Christ has at least one talent. The problem, however, is this: he who has one talent frequently buries it. In the church, among the saints, it is easy for those who have the greater gifts to serve and to function. Those who have the smaller gifts, however, hide them and bury them. This means that they do not function. Look at this parable. The one who received five talents traded with them and made a profit. The one who received two talents did the same. He who received one talent, however, thought that to serve the Lord is a difficult task. He did not think that what he had received amounted to very much. Therefore, eventually he hid his talent and did nothing.

A Hard Man

Many times we have the same concept the one-talented slave had. We feel that we are not able or qualified to serve the Lord. It seems that the Lord is demanding too much. We feel that we simply cannot fulfill what He demands. This means that we consider the Lord "a hard man." However, it is quite interesting that the Lord did not argue with the one-talented slave when he said this. The Lord did not say, "You are talking nonsense; I am not that hard." It seems to me that the Lord admitted that what he said was right. Many times the Lord sends us to reap where He has not sown and to gather where He has not winnowed.

If you come to the meeting and merely look at yourself, surely you will say, "Lord, it is too difficult for me to function. You have not given me anything with which to function. You are reaping where You have not sown, and You are gathering where You have not winnowed. You are requiring too much.

You are a hard man." Many times we have had such a concept. When the living word tells us to function, we say that another brother can function, but we cannot. We consider that another one has the talents, but we have nothing. Therefore, we think that the Lord is really hard. The Lord, however, did not contradict the one-talented slave. He said, "Evil and slothful slave,...you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest."

Gaining the Interest

Whenever we have the concept that we have nothing to give and it seems too difficult to serve or to function, that is the time we need to stand up. It is then that we will see that the Lord is not so hard. If we will simply open our mouth to function and share something with others, the Lord will fill our lips. If we will not function, we cannot function. If we function, however, we simply function. Many times I have not had anything to minister, but I needed to minister something. Praise the Lord, at those times something from Him would come for me to minister. Many times, however, when I felt I had something worthwhile to minister, eventually it was not so good. Sometimes I have stood up when I did not even know what verse of Scripture I should use. However, I turned to the Lord, and when I opened the Bible, He led me to a certain passage. In my speaking from that passage, the Lord came through in a marvelous way.

It was in a similar way that the Lord gave us four words that have become rich and wonderful to us in these days: *O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah!* In the early part of 1968, on one Lord's Day morning, I was burdened to encourage everyone to function. While I was speaking, I said that everyone could say at least four words. However, to tell you the truth, I did not know what four words I could use that everyone could say. I was quite troubled. Then I received something from the Lord concerning these four words, one by one, and I said, "The four words are: number one, *O;* number two, *Lord;* number three, *Amen;* and number four, *Hallelujah!*" These four words came out in this way, and they have brought us much release in calling on the Lord.

We need to believe that the Lord is with us. If we open ourselves to Him and cooperate with Him, He will certainly do something through us. We should not count on ourselves; we need to count on Him. He has given each of us at least one talent. We cannot say that we have nothing. If we feel that we

have nothing, we should pray, “Lord, although I feel that I have nothing, I nevertheless believe in Your Word. I believe that You have given me at least one talent. Now, Lord, I am going to use it.”

If this is our practice, we will see some profit. I can testify that whenever I have stood up without anything to say, yet I stood up to function, eventually I received much interest. When we function, others receive the benefit, but we are the first to receive the interest. I encourage you to try it.

Listen to the word of the Lord. The only way to lose our talent is not to use it, and the only way to increase our talent is to use it. By using it, we will receive more and more interest. Our talent will be doubled from the increase of its use. If we do not use our talent, if we do not function, we will lose what we have. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we will use what we have.

This is the New Testament service. In life, we love the Lord as virgins going forth to meet Him with a lamp in our hand, and in the work, we exercise ourselves to use what He has given us. We should not use our talent according to our feeling but according to the Lord’s word. Then we will receive the profit with interest. This is the service we need in the matters of life and work.