LOVING GOD

Watchman Nee

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

LOVING GOD

by Watchman Nee

CONTENTS

1. Loving God
2. The Love Of Christ
3. Mary
4. The Widow, The Wife, And The Virgin
5. A Noble Deed
6. Waste And Pragmatism
7. The Goal Of The Gospel
8. Consecration
9. Being Beside Ourselves To God
10. The Life Of The Altar And The Tent

CHAPTER ONE

LOVING GOD

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 37

Scripture Reading: 22:37-38

Several months ago, a certain Western missionary passed away in Fukien province. I once remarked that among the people I have known, she was a very deep person in the Lord. Since I am more knowledgeable about her affairs, I have considered writing a biography for her and have been collecting her lectures, articles, and essays for editing purposes. A package of her belongings arrived several days ago including a piece of paper with the following words written on it: "O God, I thank You, because You have a commandment saying you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind!" Oh! How profound this is! I do not know how many Christians would say, "God, I thank You because You have a commandment which says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Indeed, since we are all believers, we ought to love God. No other religion speaks of loving God like ours. Loving God is unique to Christianity.

The Bible says that he who believes in the Son has life. Believing is adequate because it does not say to believe with all your heart. He that believes will have eternal life. We are never told to believe with all our heart. However, loving God requires all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind.

This is the first commandment. No matter where it is placed, this commandment is always the first. This is also the greatest commandment. Wherever it may be, it is the greatest. Today we must praise God for commanding us to love Him.

God desires that we love Him because this profits Him. To believe in the Lord and have eternal life are for our profit. God not only wants us to believe in Him, but also to love Him. Loving God profits Him.

What kind of condition will we enjoy if we love God? We must look at several matters:

First John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him." If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The love of the Father is something that can be put in us or can leave us. If we let this love of the Father be placed in us, we are able to love the Father.

Many young ones cannot forsake the world. When they are stirred by others in a meeting, it seems that they will not love the world anymore. At a different time they seem to be totally inseparable from the world. We must possess something better within us in order to drop the heart that loves the world. Once there was an art exhibition. While most of the works could be appreciated from a distance, it was necessary to study one of the paintings from close-up in order to understand its meaning. This particular painting, involving a child who was oblivious to all the lovely toys on the floor surrounding him, aptly illustrates a Christian's experience. The child's attention was focused on the windowsill, and he had up-lifted eyes and outstretched arms. The scene was perplexing from a distance, yet after careful observation, one could see a beautiful dove on the windowsill. The caption explained that in order to have the little dove, the child dropped all the toys on the floor. The moral of the painting was that one only discards the second best for the very best. God never demands that we throw anything away. He only places what is better in front of us. In order to obtain it, we will spontaneously forsake many other things.

A young believer who lived with me for two months once told me that he could not forsake the world. He told an old believer, "You can sacrifice because you have tasted all that this world has to offer. But I cannot." This young man knew about believing in God, but not about loving God. While believing in God can save us from sin, only loving God will deliver us from the world. Brothers and sisters, we must allow God's love to enter into us. Once the love of God enters, the world simply slips away.

First John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." This is a familiar verse to many, including unbelievers. This verse does not refer to loving the brother in your family, but

your brother in Christ. Although the attitudes and behavior of many discourage you from loving them, once God's love enters into you, you will be able to love them. It is not loving the brother whom you love, but all the brothers. It is also not loving a lovable brother, but all the brothers. If you do not love all the brothers, the love of the Father is not in you; but if you have the love of God, you cannot help but love them.

The father of a man was killed; afterwards, the man was determined to get revenge. However, he was a genuine Christian. During the bread-breaking meeting one day, he found himself, along with others around a huge round table, sitting next to his adversary, the one who had killed his father. He left the table and went out because a battle had risen up within him. Should he kill him, or should he return to take the bread with him? At that instant God showed him the love of Christ. He saw that though he himself was an enemy to God, Christ saved him. He was melted by God's love. Wiping his tears, he went in to break bread with his enemy. When they were leaving, he no longer looked upon the man as his adversary, but his brother in Christ. If we truly have the love of God, we are able to love even an unlovable brother.

First John 5:2-3 says, "In this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." Why is it that we can keep God's commandments when we love Him? Let us look at John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me." This says that if we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments. Brothers and sisters, who among us dares to say that he has kept all the commandments that God has given us? Never mind the unknown commandments, were all the known ones kept? Having God's commandments means to find them. How many believers plug their ears for fear that God may speak a commandment to them? We not only ought to obey when God commands us, we ought to find His commandments. Furthermore, we must keep them once they are found. Seeking God's commandments is our care for Him. This is loving God.

"He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21b). This speaks of the benefit of loving God. Though I have met many well-known children of God, I have yet to see but a few who know God. Many can read the Bible, but they do not know God. They may understand the Bible, but they do not know the power of God.

Others preach without knowing what they are preaching because the Lord has not manifested Himself to them. Even if the Lord were to stand before them, they still could not know Him without His revelation. Many have not experienced the Lord's manifestation because they do not love the Lord; neither do they keep the commandments of the Lord. Only one kind of people love the Lord on this earth—the faithful ones.

Never go to big and popular places to look for those who know the Lord. Oftentimes you will find one serving God in a secluded place or in a simple house. When you see such a one, you meet God's presence. Some people always stir my respect. Others may be zealous, capable, kind, humble, and gentle, but one does not necessarily see God through them. A certain one asked me once, "What were the strong points of this missionary?" I said, "There was always the sensation of God every time I saw her." This is God's revelation. You should remember the great woman of Shunem who said to her husband, "I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4:9). What had Elisha shown this woman? He did not perform any miracles. Rather, every time he came, he gave the woman the sensation of God. Brothers and sisters, do we love God's manifestation? If we do, we should employ every means to find God's commandments and keep them.

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him" (John 14:23). God and Christ are present with all who believe in Him; however, God and Christ only make an abode with those who love Him. It is not just a matter of presence, but of an abode. A presence at times cannot be felt. But when one faithfully seeks God's commandments at all costs, he will experience the Lord making an abode with him.

John 15:9-10 says, "As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." What does abiding in the Lord's love mean? We all sensed how much the Lord loved us when we were first saved. But today we do not sense His love that much. Though we can still speak of the depth of the Lord's love, we do not feel it. If we abide in the Lord's love, we should always sense such a love. Abiding in the Lord's love is just affording Him the opportunity to love. In other words, it is to be enveloped in His love. When others oppose and forsake us, we will really

know how the Lord loves us. If we always find God's commandments and obey them, we will abide in His love. Did the Lord not sense the Father's love for even a single moment? He was constantly in the Father's love because He kept God's commandments. In order to abide in the Lord's love, we must always keep His commandments. If the love of God is in us, we can keep even the most difficult of His commandments. Some forsook their parents, some their wives, others their positions, and still others their fame, all because they loved God. They were enabled by the very love of God.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God." Many know this verse well. Only one kind of people enjoy the good: those who love God. If you do not love God, perhaps not even one thing is working for you. God does not alter things; He changes your heart. If you love God, then all things, though unaltered, will work for your good. Sometimes you complain about everything that comes your way. You complain concerning this and concerning that. Yet if love is there, all these will mean nothing to you. Loving God will make an unsatisfactory environment a profitable one.

First Corinthians 2:9-10 says, "But as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But to us God has revealed them through the Spirit." What do we see in these two verses? What God has prepared for those who believe is eternal life, yet the thing which God has prepared for those who love Him is in the future. Only those who love God can know of this coming blessing. If someone tells you about a marvelous thing he saw, it surely will not be comparable because the coming blessing has not yet been seen by eyes. If someone tells you about a wonderful thing he heard, it also must be a lesser thing than the coming blessing because no ears have heard it. If someone can indeed imagine the unsurpassable best, it still cannot compare to the coming blessing because it has not yet entered into the heart of man. Nevertheless, God has revealed to us by His Spirit this thing which no eyes have seen, no ears have heard, and what has not entered into man's heart. In other words, a lover of the Lord may enjoy what men have not seen, heard, nor dreamed of in this life. When God discloses His glory to you, you will exclaim, "Oh, what joy!" This heavenly glory is so much that you will find it hardly bearable.

Brothers and sisters, we must suffer for the Lord and willingly pay the price to take this way. We must love the Lord so that He can reveal His glory to us.

James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, because when he has become approved by testing, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him." We often think of the labor we need to perform in order to obtain a crown of life. However, one of the conditions required to gain the crown is to love the Lord. Brothers and sisters, our love toward God is lacking! It seems as if we have already lost our first love! This is most regrettable!

In John 21 the Lord asked Peter if he loved Him and told him to feed His lambs. If someone truly loves the Lord, he will definitely care for people's souls. One cannot love the Lord while neglecting the souls of men. You must care for the souls of your colleagues, relatives, and whoever is close to you.

John 14:28 says, "If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." When we love the Lord, we will not only love the brothers and keep God's commandments, but we will also rejoice that the Lord Jesus went to the Father. In other words, we will surely rejoice that the Lord Jesus has gone to the Father to obtain His glory. This is too profound! Many have no realization of the magnitude of glory when the Lord ascended to the Father who is greater than He. Without such a realization, we cannot worship God. We care that those we love will obtain glory, but if we love the Lord, we will definitely rejoice at the Lord's going to the Father.

Matthew 10:37 and 38 say, "He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." After reading these two verses, we should realize that only by dropping all considerations can we love the Lord more dearly. A certain believer remarked that when we worship, we should not only be aware of God's greatness but also of His loveliness. This is a most meaningful word. We come before Him and draw near to Him because of His loveliness.

How does God love us? The Bible speaks a great deal about God's loving us. Concerning the individual aspect, it says that He "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). Concerning the corporate aspect, it says that "Christ

also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Romans 5:8 tells us that "God commends His own love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." First John 4:10 says, "Herein is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins." He loved us and sent His Son to die for us. There is no love apart from the cross. Why did the Lord ordain that we break bread once a week? The Lord did not want us to forsake Him or forget Him; He wants to draw us back. If we recall the pain of being sinners and the greatness of the Lord's salvation towards us, how can we not love Him? In the wilderness, the Israelites thought of the melons and leeks of Egypt, forgetting Pharaoh's torment with the pain of slavery and God's deliverance of them out of their anguish. Their hearts would not give up Egypt. If we forget the cross, we will forget God's love; when we forget God's love, we cannot but think of the world.

How can we love God? Luke 7:47 says, "For this reason I say to you, Her sins which are many are forgiven, because she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, he loves little." If we would only recall how our sins were forgiven, we cannot help but love the Lord. The day the cross ceases to inspire you, you have already fallen. Mr. Evan Roberts wept for months over his inability to receive the cross's inspiration until God touched him. The result was the mighty revival in Wales. Since then there has not been a more prevailing revival. The woman could wash the Lord's feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and kiss them with her mouth because she remembered that her sins had been forgiven.

Brothers and sisters, we must stand beneath the cross. Even if our spiritual condition becomes a hundredfold stronger, we should still remember how our sins have been forgiven.

First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed! The Lord comes!" This is a most serious word! If anyone does not love the Lord, he is accursed.

Ephesians 6:24 says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility." To whom is grace given here? God gives it to those who love the Lord in incorruptibility. If others would ask you, "Do you believe in the Lord?", the whole world would marvel if you answer, "I am one who loves the Lord."

First Peter 1:8 says, "Whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." This verse says that we love Him because we believe in Him. What is born out of this love through believing? It is joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

Finally, brothers and sisters, I wish to repeat what that old believer said to the departing young man: "May you be a passionate lover of the Lord Jesus!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 17:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (1), Issue No. 25

Scripture Reading: Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Eph. 3:14-19

These three passages have one identical phrase, which is "the love of Christ." The Bible mentions the love of Christ many times, but only in these three cases does it specifically use this phrase. The rest of the time it speaks of the love of God. Strictly speaking, the love of Christ is the love of God. For example, in Romans 8:35 it says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" while in verse 39 it concludes, "Nor...will be able to separate us from the love of God." Thus we see the love of Christ and the love of God are one and the same. What I am going to speak about today is Christ's love towards three types of people.

I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN ROMANS 8

BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING

Every believer in this world has his unique experience, unique difficulty, and unique environment. Paul was saying that whatever problem we may have, the answer is always the love of Christ. Even if we have a hundred different kinds of difficulties, the solution is still the love of Christ. Some believers may encounter tribulation, some believers may be in anguish, others may encounter persecution, and still others, famine. Even if nakedness, peril, sword, etc. all come, they still cannot separate us from the love of Christ because the love of Christ can deal with all kinds of situations. Do we realize that after many people are captured by the love of Christ, they are able to pass through what other people cannot pass through?

A widow may live in great difficulty because of her husband's death. She may be unable to pay rent, and her possessions may be pawned. Under such circumstances, however, she still can keep her smile. When does she smile?

When she looks at her child of less than one year in age, she smiles. The reason for her smile is love.

I really treasure the word in Romans 8:37 that "in all these things we more than conquer"! We more than conquer in all these things, not out of all these things. If all these things did not happen, there would be no need to overcome. Many people think if there is no tribulation, anguish, or persecution, etc., they can overcome. But the Word of God says, "In all these things we more than conquer." It is the love of Christ that enables us to overcome all the tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, and danger. The love of Christ is a power which enables us to overcome all these things. All of these are bitter, but because we have tasted the love of Christ, we do not feel bitter about them anymore.

II. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN 2 CORINTHIANS 5

BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE SERVANTS

This love of Christ is for those who are servants, those who serve the Lord. "For the love of Christ constrains us" (v. 14). Constrains in the original text means something washed away by the torrent of water. This is the meaning here. The love of Christ carries us away like one being carried away by the power of water. David Livingstone said if someone could go to Africa for the slave business, would the love of Christ not be strong enough to constrain another to go to Africa? For that reason he went. Having been constrained by the love of Christ, he put aside his life, and countless numbers of people obtained life through him. Indeed, only the love of Christ can constrain a person. Love cannot be seen with the eyes. But once a person has tasted the sweetness and beauty of this love, it is impossible for him not to be washed away by its flow.

"We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised" (vv. 14-15). The love of Christ constrains us because we judge two things. First, if Christ died for all, then we all died. The love of Christ cannot be separated from the death of Christ; the reason for Christ's death is Christ's love. Second, those who live should no longer live to themselves but to the Lord who died and resurrected for them. This is the goal. I cannot help but live for Him because the love of Christ constrains me. I cannot hold onto my own standing anymore.

So many times we feel that it is so difficult to testify to a sinner. It seems that we blush before we even utter anything. When I was first saved, I wanted to testify to a classmate; but when I approached him, it was so difficult to open my mouth. I went to him again and again, and every time I found myself reluctant to open my mouth to speak of Jesus. But when we are constrained by the love of Christ, we cannot help but testify. If we could choose, we would rather choose not to testify. But when we are constrained by the love of Christ, we cannot help but testify. Praise the Lord, His love constrains us.

Many times, we find that preaching the gospel is not an easy thing. Famine and persecution are unavoidable. I have had the experience of being threatened with a pistol not to preach Jesus any more. I would rather stop the mouth of the pistol with my body, but I cannot stop speaking about Christ. His love carries me away. I always urge young believers to consecrate themselves to the Lord. This is because He loves us. A number of brothers ask me what they should do in order to be a full-time evangelist. Unless we have to, it is better not to be a full-time preacher. Unless we have the feeling of "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16), it is better that we not try to be a full-time preacher. Only when we find Him irresistible will others find Him irresistible. Those who preach the gospel must do so through the constraining of Christ's love. I am not exhorting everyone to be a full-time preacher. However, every believer should testify. Brothers and sisters, have you ever told anyone of the love of Christ? Have you ever felt the love of God burning like a fire within you to the extent that you cannot help but speak of His love? Brothers and sisters! May the love of Christ fill us and constrain us today.

III. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN EPHESIANS 3
BEING FOR THOSE WHO ARE LIKE STUDENTS

Ephesians 3:14-19: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father...that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." Here the love of Christ is for those who are like students. Paul was a very learned man. Would Paul make a grammatical mistake and write poorly? Those who have read the original text of the New Testament

agree that all the letters Paul wrote used complicated and difficult grammar. But in Ephesians 3, when he spoke of the love of Christ, Paul's grammar was wrong; his writing was not proper Greek. After writing the phrase, "apprehend with all the saints," he stopped. All of a sudden, he wrote these four words: "the breadth and length and height and depth." It seems that there is no connection between the previous text and the following text. Brothers and sisters, this is the real condition of one who speaks of the love of Christ. When Paul came to this point, he did not know how to go on, and he shouted, "The breadth! and length! and height! and depth!" He could not describe it. Even if we were to use the best rhetoric to describe the love of Christ, what we comprehend would be very different from what it really is. When we consider the love of Christ, it seems that our mind becomes powerless; we do not know how to describe it.

The word know is the same in meaning as the word apprehend. The love of Christ is incomprehensible, yet at the same time it is very apprehensible. Day after day while we live on earth, we learn a little more of the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love. There was a preacher who felt a great pressure once while he was preaching. He wanted to speak, but he could not utter anything. So he requested others to pray for him. While all the people were praying, one black person repeated over and over again, "Precious Jesus!" The preacher heard him praying this way for more than an hour. Later, the preacher said, "I have nothing to preach today, but I heard one sentence from a prayer: ‘Precious Jesus!’"

Because of the constraining of Christ's love, we love Him though we have not seen Him. Because we believe in Him, we know that He is precious.

CHAPTER THREE

MARY

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 28

Scripture Reading: John 20:1-18

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

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

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

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

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

When Mary came to the tomb, what did she see? What did she do? She thought, "My beloved Lord has died. Today all I want is to have a look at His body." However, the body was gone! She could only run to Peter and John and say to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter and the other disciple, John, then went to the tomb. They ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb. Stooping down and looking in, he saw the linen cloths; yet he did not go in. Simon Peter followed him, went into the tomb, and saw the linen cloths; the handkerchief that had been over His head was not lying with the linen cloths, but was folded up in one place apart. Then the other

disciple went in, saw, and believed. After the two disciples saw this, what did they do? The Bible says, "The disciples therefore went away again to their own home." They still had a home in the world which they regarded as their best. They still had a home. Although they found that the Lord was not there, they did not feel anything. They felt that going back to their own home was the most important thing to do. Besides the Lord, they still had a place to go.

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

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

Perhaps someone may think, "John loved the Lord so much. If I could only follow after him, it would be wonderful. Peter was dealt with by the Lord very much. If I could listen to his instruction once, it would be wonderful." But Mary's heart was not concerned with these things. Although Peter and John

were present, it was not enough. Her heart was a widow's heart! You may think that she should have been glad to have angels talking to her. But Mary did not feel anything. While others may think that the angels were special and attractive in such white and shining clothes, Mary thought only about her Lord being taken away. The angels could not fill up her empty heart, and she could only weep. She thought, "The Lord is gone; I cannot be satisfied anymore! Although Peter and John are here, the Lord is gone; I cannot be satisfied! Although angels are here, the Lord is not here; I cannot be satisfied."

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

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

"When she said these things, she turned backward and beheld Jesus standing there, yet she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing that He was the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." She saw the Lord Jesus, but she thought He was the gardener. The Lord asked her whom she sought. She said, "If you have carried Him away." She forgot to say she was seeking the Lord. She was seeking Jesus the Nazarene. She only said, "Him." In Mary's eyes, there was only one "Him" in the world. In Mary's heart, she supposed everyone knew who "Him" was. Mary supposed everyone should

recognize "Him." Mary did not care for anyone but only one "Him." This was Mary's heart.

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

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

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

How did the Lord manifest Himself to her? "Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, Rabboni! (which means Teacher)." Have we heard the Lord speak "Mary" with such a voice? At the time of your prayer, in your chamber, if you hear this voice say, "Mary," it will be enough. When the Lord said, "Mary," Mary recognized Him. This was a revelation. Once the Lord speaks, it is enough. When the shepherd calls his sheep, the eyes of his sheep are opened. Once Mary heard the voice of the Lord, she knew that it was not the gardener but the Master. She did not need to weep anymore. Once the Lord reveals Himself to us, there is no need to say anything more.

The Lord only said "Mary" once, and she immediately recognized that it was the Lord. Brothers and sisters, do we recognize the voice of the Lord?

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

Following this, "Jesus said to her, Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." In Matthew 28, because the women were worshipping Him, the Lord allowed them to touch Him. Here the Lord did not allow Mary to touch Him. What does this mean? Mary had a strong desire to keep the Lord on the earth. She wanted to catch Him and not let go of Him. But what the Lord received on the earth was nothing more than the crown of thorns, the cross, and the tomb. Now the Lord would ascend to the heavens, to the place of "My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." This is why He said to Mary, "Do not touch Me." Do not keep Him on the earth. The Lord not only resurrected, but He also ascended, becoming the Head of the new mankind and the representative of man. Man had never been in the heavens. By the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the first man went there. Now, those who believe in Him will also go there. Hebrews 2:9-10 says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor...For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory." Because of the suffering of death, the Lord received glory and honor, and many sons will also be brought into glory. The Lord has gone. The disciples will go too. After resurrection the disciples were called brothers by the Lord for the first time. In other words, the Lord is the firstborn, and we are the many sons. The Lord resurrected and ascended. His Father is also our Father; His God is also our God. Therefore, the Lord said to Mary, "Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God."

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

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WIDOW, THE WIFE, AND THE VIRGIN

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 18:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (2), Issue No. 41

Scripture Reading: Luke 18:3; Rev. 18:7; 17:1; Rom. 7:2-4; 2 Cor. 11:2-3

The verses today tell us that the church or Christians have three kinds of circumstances before God. Before speaking about these three circumstances, I want to relate one thing first: there is a line from Genesis to Revelation of women being used by God to typify His children, His people. In the verses which I have read today, God likens His children to women. In one case He likens them to a widow; in another case He likens them to a wife; in the third case He likens them to a virgin. Every Christian who lives in the world is a widow, a wife, and also a virgin. In the world, there are great differences between a widow, wife, and virgin. Yet in the Bible, Luke says that a Christian takes the position of a widow (18:3), Romans 7 says that a Christian takes the position of a wife (vv. 2-4), and 2 Corinthians 11 says that a Christian takes the position of a virgin (vv. 2-3).

Every Christian is a widow towards the world. At the same time, he is a wife with respect to the enjoyment of the riches of Christ, and a virgin with respect to his restriction for the sake of Christ.

I. WIDOW

"And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent" (Luke 18:3).

"As much as she has glorified herself and lived luxuriously, as much torment and sorrow give to her; for she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow" (Rev. 18:7).

"And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits upon the many waters" (Rev. 17:1).

One thing that moves my heart very much is that on earth today, our heart is a widow's heart! The reason we do not love the world is not that the world is unattractive or that the Bible forbids us. It is not because the world and the lusts of it will pass away. The world is lovely, and the things, objects, and people of the world are lovely. Although the Bible has sixty-six books, only one book, Ecclesiastes, says that all things are vanity under the sun. The reason a Christian does not love the world is not that the world is vain but that our Lord was crucified in the world. Consequently, our heart is a widow's heart.

If the one you love is in a certain place, the place becomes lovely. The place where he is becomes paradise to you. But since He is not here, our heart is a widow's heart. The world is not attractive to us because it has become a void to us. It is comfortable and pleasurable to dress and eat well, but when our heart is drawn to the One we love, all these things will become nothing to us. Since He is not here, our world has become bitter. If a woman can still dress and eat well after her beloved husband passes away, those around her may criticize her, saying, "What kind of a heart does she have!" Is it wrong for her to dress well and eat well? It is not wrong, but since her husband is not here anymore, her heart should no longer care for these things. It is not that these things lose their taste in themselves, but they no longer have the same taste within her. It is not that the world has become more unattractive, but that we do not have a heart to love it anymore.

Among the vast sea of humanity, I feel lonely because He is not here. When I am alone, my heart is on fire because I think of Him. When I walk by the seashore, see the waves, and hear the sound of the tides, I do not feel lonely or isolated because He comforts me. Brothers and sisters, there may be many things in the world which can attract you, but if the Lord fills your heart, all those things will be counted as nothing.

When He was in the world, He was killed by men. He left only a cross and an empty grave. Our Lord has died; therefore, we are widows. It is not that the world is evil or unattractive, but that He is not here. Brothers and sisters, we are truly widows in this world. Our Lord is not on this earth anymore. As a result, the world can no longer attract us. If there is a brother or a sister who feels no need for the Lord to satisfy their heart, I do not know what kind of heart they have. In Luke 18 the Lord says, "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Avenge me of my opponent." Our

condition in this world is that of a widow, one who is being ridiculed and insulted by others.

In Revelation 18 Babylon typifies the fallen church. She says in her heart, "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow, and I shall by no means see sorrow." Only fallen ones do not consider themselves as a widow. Whenever you become fallen, you will lose the characteristics of a widow. Oh, if we want to serve the Lord faithfully in this world, we have to be a widow with respect to the world. We have to maintain a widow's attitude toward the world daily. Once the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast?" (Matt. 9:14). Jesus said unto them, "The sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them, can they? But days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (v. 15). Oh, today He is no longer here. This is the time for us to fast. Are we fasting with respect to the world? This earth is not our home; we have no happiness on this earth because He is not here.

Today the bread of the Lord's table tells us that He is not here. The cup also tells us that He is not here. The bread tells us that He was killed. The cup tells us that His blood was shed. Because He is not here, our heart is not here. What can replace Him in our heart? Nothing can replace Him. We want to be free from the world because the One we love is not here, not because the world is unattractive. For where our treasure is, there our heart is. Since my treasure is not here, my heart is not here.

II. WIFE

"For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law regarding the husband. So then if, while the husband is living, she is joined to another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead (pay attention to this phrase), that we might bear fruit to God" (Rom. 7:2-4).

The Bible not only tells us that we are a widow in the world; Romans 7 also says that every Christian is like a wife. I wonder if we know the difference between a widow and a wife. A widow does not have a husband; she has nothing to rely on. A wife has a husband and someone to rely on. Who should bear a family's financial responsibility? It is the husband, not the wife. It is not normal for a husband to rely on his wife to support the family. A widow has lost her support in the world. A wife, however, receives all of her supply from her husband. Brothers and sisters, do you know that our relationship with Christ is one of a husband and a wife? All our needs are supplied by Him. We do not have to worry about how we can receive our supply for the month. We can receive all of our supply from Christ. We may have a bad temper. We may be proud and cannot forgive others. We may be weak in our work and have no burden to pray or any taste for the Word. But, brothers and sisters, let me say that all these problems can be solved by Christ. Through the power of His resurrection, we can bear fruit.

It is a universal custom that as soon as a woman is married, she immediately uses her husband's name. I wonder who can use Brother Chang's name. Not his brothers, his children, or even his parents can use his name. Only his wife can have the same name. Many Christians do not see the preciousness in the words "in My name." We do not realize how much blessing there is in the phrase "in My name." We can receive whatever we ask in His name. We can cast out demons in His name, anoint patients in His name, forgive sins in His name, and preach in His name. What does this mean? Who can use the Lord's name? Some may think that when they cast out demons, all they have to do is say the Lord's name, and the demons will be chased away. Others may think the name is used only as a formality when they perform baptism. Let me ask: Can we go to the bank and draw money in the name of Brother Chang? This name is his, not ours. We can only use our name. But praise and thank God that every Christian can do things in the Lord's name because we belong to Him, and all that He has is ours. He is the Christ, and we are His people. Brothers and sisters, every Christian has the right to use His name. The day we believed in the Lord, we were united with Him. Therefore, His name is ours. This is why we can pray in His name. We can do things in His name because we have been joined to His resurrection. There is nothing that we cannot acquire from God. Just as a husband loves, cherishes, supplies, and supports his own wife, Christ does the same for us.

Let us remember that with respect to the riches of Christ, we are not a widow, but a wife.

III. VIRGIN

"For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

The Bible not only tells us that our attitude toward the world is one of a widow, and that our position with respect to the riches of Christ is that of a wife, but it also tells us that in waiting for the Lord's return, we are a virgin. This means that we need to keep ourselves chaste while waiting for His return. Paul said, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God." We know the meaning of jealousy. Because of Christ, Paul was jealous over the fact that some others had won their hearts. We belong to the Lord, and no one should snatch us away. Suppose I have a friend who is engaged to a girl. While he is away, his fiancée turns her love to someone else. As his friend, I would surely become jealous. She should not have done this to my friend. For my friend's sake, I would become jealous over the fact that someone has taken away her heart.

Paul was afraid that their hearts would be corrupted from the simplicity and purity toward Christ, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness. Every Christian should have an undefiled heart, one that has not been touched by anyone else. Let us check ourselves today before God and see if we have lost the simplicity and purity toward Christ. If there is a believer whose desire is not Christ but his own enjoyment, his Lord will not be pleased.

Brothers and sisters, today we need to say, "Lord, I am Yours. May You preserve my garment, my heart, my thoughts, and my everything as undefiled and pure. Oh, may I be touched by nothing." This is like the words in the Song of Songs, which say, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (4:12). The words "enclosed" and "sealed" are used again and again because no one should get into our garden. Our garden is opened to our Beloved only. None can draw water from us and be satisfied. None can draw water from us and quench his thirst. The well and the spring within us are kept for Him. Brothers and sisters, day by day we ought to

maintain such an attitude. We are for the Lord, and no one should touch us. Paul said, "Henceforth let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the brands of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). Oh, we bear the marks of the cross, and no one should trouble us anymore.

CHAPTER FIVE

A NOBLE DEED

CWWN, The (Set 1) Vol. 19:

Notes on Scriptural Messages (3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:1-9

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

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

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

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

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

ointment was also very precious. We can offer to the Lord only what is most precious.

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

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

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

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

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

The ointment is for sanctification. The tabernacle with all its utensils was anointed. The word Christ means the "Messiah," which is the Anointed One. We should sanctify this anointed Christ as Lord. We should anoint Him and own Him as Lord, even as our Lord. We should offer up everything to Him and should heap everything upon Christ. We should not be afraid of following Him too foolishly or loving Him too fervently. When a young Christian bade farewell to an older man, the latter said, "I have only one wish, that you be a fervent lover of Christ!" There cannot be a limit to our loving the Lord, our

serving Him, obeying Him, and our allegiance to Him; we can never overdo these things. The Lord loves to see us loving Him in a reckless way. He loves to see us loving Him beyond reason and against human affection. To Him, the gospel should result in men's being constrained by His death to love Him, consecrate to Him, and fully obey Him to the point that others would consider them extreme.

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

What did the disciples do when Mary acted this way? "But there were some who were indignantly commenting among themselves: Why has this waste of the ointment been made?" (Mark 14:4). They thought that this was a waste. But on whom was the ointment poured? Was the One being anointed not worthy of the ointment? This ointment was poured on the Lord. If this was a waste, it would mean that the Lord was not worthy of it. Was the Lord indeed not worthy of this ointment? Can anything be called a waste when it is applied to the Lord? Those who have never loved the Lord with a single heart think that too much consecration and obedience is a waste. In man's eyes, obeying the Lord, loving Him, and giving up everything for Him may sometimes be too much and may be a waste, but such criticism only shows the degree of love that the criticizing ones have.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"She has done a noble deed on Me" (v. 6). The Lord was opposed to the disciples' concept, who thought that such an anointing and consecration to Him was a waste. The Lord said that it was a noble deed and not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him too much, to obey Him too much, and to be spent on Him too much; it is not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we forget about the criticism of those who are older in the Lord. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we forget about the need of the poor outside. It is not a waste. It is a noble deed to love Him to the extent that we waste everything on Him. This is not a waste. The Lord thinks that we can never be too much in the way we treat Him. Our love to Him can never be too much. Our obedience to Him can never be too much. No matter how man sees it, and no matter how those who serve together criticize, the Lord says that this is a noble deed. The result of the preaching of the gospel is not only to send sinners to heaven but to make every saved person a lover of Christ. This is why the Scripture says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed!" (1 Cor. 16:22).

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

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

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

but we think it is a waste to give even a few coins to the Lord. What a pity this is!

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER SIX

WASTE AND PRAGMATISM

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 21:

The Christian, Issue No. 1

Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:6-13

We have spoken twice on this passage. There are many significances to this portion of the Scripture, and I will not repeat what I have said. Last Monday evening during the Bible study meeting, I said that, the Lord willing, we would specifically speak on this passage on the Lord's Day. Hence, we will spend some time on this passage.

This portion of the Word is on the story of Mary. But in this Gospel, her name is not mentioned. In the other Gospels, her name is mentioned; therefore, we know that this woman is Mary. Why does Matthew mention her only as a woman? It shows us that what she did can be done by any ordinary woman; it was not something that could be done only by someone called Mary. The use of the word woman means that it does not refer to any person in particular. Moreover, the fact that she is only mentioned anonymously as a woman shows that the person does not mean much; it is the Lord who is worthy of our attention.

We know that Mary did not have a servant at home. There was no one else in her house except her sister, Martha, and her brother, Lazarus. She served the Lord personally. We also know that she did not have a rich family. But it is an amazing thing that she bought a pound of ointment of pure nard (we are told of this in the other Gospels), and the pure nard was "very valuable" (John 12:3). Hence, this ointment must have been very expensive. Perhaps one cannot even find such expensive ointment today. When she poured the ointment on Jesus' head, she was criticized by many. They murmured that it was a waste of three hundred denarii to anoint the head of the Lord, and that the money could have been given to the poor and taken care of many people. But the Lord said, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (Matt.

26:13). Therefore, I believe that wherever the gospel is preached, the story of Mary is to be preached also. It would not be proper to preach the gospel without speaking about the story of Mary. As long as there is the gospel, there should be the story of Mary. In other words, after a man understands the gospel, he should also know the story of Mary. Unfortunately, the gospel is preached in many places, but the story of Mary is not preached.

Some wonder why three hundred denarii are so important. Since the Lord was sold for three hundred denarii, Mary's three hundred denarii had a tremendous significance. (Do not misunderstand when I say that the gospel was worth three hundred denarii and the enemy's valuation of the Lord Jesus was also three hundred denarii. The Lord was worth three hundred denarii only in the eyes of the enemy.) Since a flask of ointment was worth three hundred denarii, Mary sold herself for three hundred denarii worth of ointment. Putting it in another way, Mary was that flask of ointment; she put herself into that flask and sold herself to the Lord.

The story of Mary must be spoken of wherever the gospel is preached because every time the gospel is preached, there is the need of the story of Mary to maintain the balance of the truth. If there is a place which only preaches the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary, the truth is unbalanced. It is easy for men to preach the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary. It is possible for the gospel to be preached too much without having the proper balance. Preaching the gospel is easy today. The gospel preached among us and everywhere in the world is a gospel that satisfies men. A man believes in the gospel because he wants to profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something. If we profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something, we feel satisfied. Many people believe in Christ only to be saved from death and hell and to receive eternal life and go to heaven. Many people have not believed in Christ to the extent that they give themselves to the Lord. Many preach the gospel by telling others that they can pass from death to life, and from judgment to eternal life and salvation. Men like to hear this kind of gospel. But if you tell them that after they have believed, they should offer themselves to God, obey God, and be His prisoners and slaves, they would refuse to accept. Many people see salvation only as deliverance from judgment; they have not seen that salvation is also deliverance from self. The salvation of many people is merely a salvation from hell; they have not seen that salvation is also a deliverance from the world. Many people only see that being saved is receiving eternal life and blessing; they have not seen that being saved is for

the Lord to gain them. If they realized that salvation is a matter of putting oneself absolutely in the hand of the Lord, many would turn away.

This distinction was present at the time of Jesus. It was recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which speaks of a man preparing a great feast and asking servants to invite the lame and crippled to come to the feast. This is the feast of the gospel, and many people came to the feast. The Lord spreads a feast before man, and whosoever will may come. Indeed men came. The Bible says that many people walked with Jesus. They thought that the gospel was wonderful because it was a word of grace out of the mouth of the Son of God. But the Lord told them that if they would not take up their cross to follow Him, they could not be His disciples, and that if they loved their parents more than they loved Him, they were not worthy to be His disciples, or if they would not leave behind everything in this world, they could not be His disciples. The Lord mentioned His relationship with us immediately after He preached the gospel. Many people consider salvation as merely a deliverance from judgment and hell; they do not have Christ's concept. Many believe in Christ, not because Christ is believable, but because He is one of the ways for them to be saved. Many believe in Christ, not because they realize that Christ is the goal, but because they think that through Christ they can go to God and heaven. The Lord Jesus says that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Many believe that Christ is the way, the method. But they do not see that Christ is the life. They think that they should trust in Christ because He is a wonderful way for them to be saved. Many people want to come to God, go to heaven, or be saved through Christ; but they have not seen that Christ is the life and the goal. Many people want to go to heaven, be delivered from punishment, and be saved, but they cannot do it on their own. Therefore, they ask Christ for help. Christ is the means and not the goal for them. In other words, Christ is the means of salvation through which they reach their goal. The person, Christ, is not their goal. Believing in Christ and being saved are only means, not the goals, for them. They do not understand what Christ wants to accomplish. This is the danger of the gospel among us. This is why there is the need to speak of the story of Mary. It is not enough to hear and believe in the gospel; we must smell the aroma of the ointment. Salvation is not for ourselves but for Christ. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

In a Sunday School, a man asked a group of children once: "Who among you would want to be Lazarus? Who would want to be the rich man?" Some children said that they wanted to be Lazarus because they would enjoy the

blessing in the future. Some said that they wanted to be the rich man because they did not know what would happen in the future anyway. One child said that he wanted to be the rich man when he was alive and Lazarus when he died. Many Christians think this way. They want to enjoy blessing while they live on earth, and enjoy blessing when they die. They want to come out ahead in both worlds. This is the way many Christians want to take today. But those who are like Mary are a Lazarus when they are alive and Lazarus when they are dead. They draw near to God after they die in the same way that they drew near to Him when they were alive. Just as they put the world aside when they die, they put the world aside while they are yet living. They are Lazarus when they die, and they are Lazarus when they are alive. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

We are not neglecting the preaching of the gospel. We know that we should pay attention to the preaching of the gospel. But the Lord Jesus said if there are thousands or tens of thousands of places where the gospel is preached, the story of Mary should be told also. A danger exists if one only preaches the gospel. This is why the story of Mary must be told. On the one hand, we have to preach the gospel, but on the other hand, we must offer up everything to the Lord. Paul said, "We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). This is the gospel. But it does not stop here. Following this, Paul said, "And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised" (v. 15). This was what Mary did. The Lord is the One who has died for us. The purpose of His death and resurrection for us is that we may live for Him. No Christian can just be saved, but not have to suffer tribulations. Paul said that we are not only appointed to believe in the Lord Jesus; we are also appointed to suffer for Him. We should know that we have been set apart to believe in the Lord and also set apart to suffer for Him. Many believe in the Lord Jesus only to the extent that they receive happiness from Him. They have not believed to the extent that they will suffer for His sake. Many people do not know what it is to believe in Christ. To believe in Christ is to believe in Him to the extent that we suffer for Him. But thank the Lord that this suffering is precious! Many have believed in the Lord Jesus only for the purpose of going to heaven; they have not believed to the extent that they go out of this world. They have believed only to the extent that they are accepted by God; they have not believed to the extent that they are rejected by men. But a perfected believer, one who belongs absolutely to Christ, is one who believes in the Lord to the

extent that he is both accepted by God and rejected by men. This is why the story of Mary must follow the preaching of the gospel. We must speak of the story of Mary today. There are many who have believed in the gospel today, but there are not many who are like Mary. May there be not only those who believe in the gospel, but those who believe in the gospel as Mary did.

"A woman came to Him, having an alabaster flask of ointment of great value, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table" (Matt. 26:7). According to Mark, she broke her alabaster flask and anointed the Lord's head. After she did this, Judas took the lead to condemn it as a reckless waste of God's gifts. She had wasted three hundred denarii. He thought this sum of money could be used for the poor. The ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii. What kind of intention was this? What was the motive behind this? Mary poured the ointment on the Lord instead. What kind of intention was this? And what was the motive behind this?

WHAT MARY DID

Let us consider Mary first. Her pouring of ointment on the Lord's head and body was for His burial. Mary thought: "I have seen my brother being raised from the dead, and He has stayed in our house many times. He comes frequently to Bethany. He is indeed my precious Savior. He has told His disciples four times that He will die (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2), but the disciples did not understand what He meant. But I know that His death is for me. After He dies, men will surely anoint Him with ointments, frankincense, and myrrh. But I do not want to wait until He dies. I will anoint Him with the ointment, the frankincense, and the myrrh before He dies. I will pour out everything on Him. What is the use of pouring out all these things on Him after He has died? It is better to pour them on Him while He is living!" An alabaster flask of ointment worth three hundred denarii was very expensive. Even now we cannot find ointment more expensive than this. Therefore, at that time, this must have been the most expensive ointment.

When did she do this? She did it while the Lord was reclining at the table. In other words, she did it secretly while the Lord was rejoicing and taking no notice of her. She did not tell the Lord ahead of time and did not let Him know what she was doing. She did it secretly to the Lord while nobody was watching. What does this mean? Many people want salvation, but they do not want the Savior. They treasure salvation, but do not treasure the Savior. Many

people treasure Christianity, but they do not treasure Christ. Many treasure the work of redemption, but do not treasure the Redeemer. Many people love the cross of Christ, but do not love the Christ of the cross. The first thing many people ask is what profit they will receive if they believe in the Lord. They do not ask what kind of love they will have for the Lord if they believe in Him. But Mary knew, and this is where the difference lies. She knew that the Lord died for us and resurrected for us, and that we should offer Him our love and everything. Although she did not come from a wealthy family, she exchanged everything she had for the ointment of pure nard, and poured it on the Lord. Mary poured out all she had on the Lord. Only she understood the Lord's death. On the first day of the week, several women went to the Lord's grave to anoint His body with ointment and myrrh. But they were too late! Only this woman made it; all the other women missed it. Only she understood the Lord's death, and only she had the offering and sacrifice.

THE DISCIPLES' ATTITUDE

The disciples thought that Mary's act was a waste and a throwaway. They thought that it was better to give the three hundred denarii to the poor. The same two principles exist in the church today. There is one group of people who, like Mary, give everything to Christ. They consider Christ to be worthy of everything, and their love for Christ prompts them to give everything to Him. Another group of people are more pragmatic. On the one hand, there are Mary's, who are governed by their hearts. On the other hand, there are other ones, who are governed by their reason. On the one side, we have the ones who follow their hearts. On the other side, we have the ones who follow ways and methods. Objectively speaking, what Mary did was a waste and a throwaway. But we have to realize that not many believers are attracted by love. Not many consider love as their life, destiny, and everything. For those who love Him, three hundred denarii are nothing. Even three thousand or three million denarii are nothing. The question is not how much something itself is worth, but how much the person to whom it is directed is worth. The issue is not the thing, but the person. Man treasures only the things he loves. The worth of the thing he offers to the Lord speaks of the worth of the Lord to him. When many people offer money to the Lord, they carefully calculate over and over again. Actually, they are not calculating the amount they should offer; they are calculating the worth of the Lord. The amount you offer to the Lord speaks of the amount that He is worth to you. If you cannot give Him very much, it means that He is not worth very much to you. One alabaster

flask of ointment of pure nard tells us of the worth of the Lord. This flask of ointment does not speak of Mary's consecration, but of God's worth and Christ's worth. A person's sacrifice to the Lord tells us not of his generosity, but of Christ's worth. A martyr is able to sacrifice his body because the Lord is worth more than his life, not because he is able to renounce everything. Every suffering and consecrated believer tells us the worth of Christ, and every person who is willing to offer up his time to the Lord tells us how much the Lord is to him. The only reason a Christian is willing to sacrifice everything is that Christ is worth everything.

Let me illustrate this further by considering the price of a piece of merchandise. The amount you are willing to pay for a piece of merchandise is the worth of that piece of merchandise to you. The price always matches the worth. The price one pays is the worth of the goods that one receives. If a watch is worth five dollars, you will not want to spend six dollars on it; you will pay only five dollars and no more. Therefore, the fact that you have spent five dollars on the watch means that the watch is worth five dollars. The five dollars you put out equals the five dollars the watch is worth. The price always matches the worth. The price of an article determines its worth. The price you are willing to pay for the Lord determines the Lord's worth to you.

The disciples thought that the three hundred denarii could be given to the poor; that amount could have helped many poor ones survive for a few months. To do that would be the pragmatic and practical approach. There are these two groups of people in the church today. One group sees the love of the Lord and considers it worthwhile to offer everything to the Lord and give Him everything. They are not concerned about right or wrong, gain or loss, success or failure; they care only for the Lord's pleasure. They are willing to make the most uneconomical move. Another group considers it more appropriate to put everything in the most profitable area. They invest in areas that are profitable and generate results. "If you do this, you will save more souls, and if you do that, you can help more people. If you do such and such, your work will expand." Friends, this kind of pragmatism is actually the principle of Judas!

"Why this waste? For this could have been sold for much and given to the poor" (vv. 8-9). Judas was the first to say this, and the disciples followed and echoed his words. The record about Judas in the Gospel of John is not found in the other Gospels. Judas was a true economist. Whenever economy enters

our heart, love leaves. If the relationship between Christ and us becomes a matter of economy, love is gone. The concern of many people today is, "What result will I get if I do this? Will I be of greater use if I will do that?" But the Lord's question is, "Was this done for My sake?" He is telling us one thing: "For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me." This is a very serious word. In other words, He is telling us that there will be much time for us to work, but the opportunity to love Him is only here while the Lord is living. Today is the only time for us to express our love to Him. In the millennium, there will be plenty of opportunity for us to work. Matthew 25 tells us that if a man is faithful in the small things, the Lord will entrust great things to him. The kingdom is the time when we will do great things. Many poor people are with us, and there are many works waiting for us. But where is our love for the Lord? I am not saying that we will not love the Lord in eternity anymore, but I am saying that the opportunity to demonstrate our love to Him is today. In that day, it will not be a thing of surprise for us to see the Lord and love Him. What is precious is for us to love Him today without seeing Him. We have not seen the Lord, yet we believe in Him and we love Him. How wonderful this is! In the eyes of love, nothing that we do is too much if we are doing it for the Lord; nothing that we sacrifice or spend is a waste. In the eyes of the world, it was impractical, wasteful, and foolish for Mary to throw away three hundred denarii in an instant. Judas was more down-to-earth, practical, wise, and thoughtful about humanity. But the Lord would rather see the church filled with foolish Mary's than see one wise Judas. Once and for all the Lord laid down the rule of judgment for the church. Should the principle of the church life be one of loving Christ or one of pragmatism?

There is another thing which we should consider. We should be careful not to exercise our soulish power or fleshly energy. We should restrict and control ourselves, not working according to our own wisdom or strength in order to expand or prosper our work. Many people are doing things which are seemingly for the Lord, but are actually not. It seems that their work is for the hastening of Christ's kingdom; actually it is not. It is a pity that many such works are done in the principle of selling the ointment to give to the poor. What use is it if we can give to fifty, five hundred, five thousand, or even fifty thousand poor, but the Lord's head remains without the ointment? Men today like to care for the poor (the sinners, the church, the work, etc.) and are negligent of the ointment on the Lord's head. How much of our work is done

to please the Lord? How much of our work is done because of need? There is a lack of talented ones who are being wasted on the Lord. Thank the Lord that since the time of the Lord Jesus until now, there have been many who are willing to waste themselves. Paul was one. He reached prominence in Judaism at a very young age. He would surely have gone down in Jewish history as a bright star of Judaism. But he ended up being a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. Was that not a waste? He was taught by Gamaliel and well educated in philosophy. He could have studied more philosophy, and could very well have become one of the most famous philosophers. Yet he chose to become a disciple of a Galilean carpenter. Was that not a waste? We find many men like him throughout the history of the church. If we had put these talented, knowledgeable, eloquent, and thoughtful people into politics, literary work, commerce, philosophy, and science, they would surely have become outstanding people. But they did what the world considered as a waste. Thank the Lord that Christ is worthy of all their waste! These people are just flasks of ointment poured out on the Lord's head. The world says that these people have been wasted, and some in the church also consider them as wasted.

It is possible to be in the so-called churches today and be a person who is not "wasted." Many people have introduced pragmatism into the church. They calculate cost and talk about profit. Their thoughts are on the work and not on the Lord. Their concern is the need and not the Lord's heart. Their eyes are on the result, the number of souls saved, the number of people helped, and not on strict obedience to the will of the Lord. The Lord has to open our eyes to see that pragmatism is something the Lord rejects. Thank the Lord that while we are living today, we do not have to be concerned with the poor or everything represented by the poor; all we have to be concerned about is the Lord's pleasure. Otherwise, it would be hard for those who are not wise and calculating.

The great danger of pragmatism is that it replaces the Lord's pleasure. It is a little better than the unclean things of the world, but it falls short of the Lord's desire. Ignorant ones can easily be led to believe that pragmatism is a philosophy that pleases the Lord.

The concern among the churches today is how great can a work become, how much work can be shown in a report, and whether or not there are substantial benefits. In the eyes of worldly economics, Judas was better than

Mary. In their eyes, Judas's way would take care of the poor, help them survive for months, and bring profit to many. Judas was for pragmatism, and he was better than Mary. But the goal of salvation is not that we would go to heaven, but that we would be brought into a proper relationship with Christ. It does not concern our earthly relationships, but our relationship with Christ. It is possible for a man to save many souls, give much to the poor, and render help to many, yet be rebuked by the Lord as having lost the first love. A man can have work, labor, and good conduct yet, at the same time, lose out on one thing, which is love.

Suppose a wife is busy all day long for her husband and submissive to him, yet at the same time, she loves another man. Would you want to have such a wife? You would probably rather have a wife who is slower and sloppier at her work but who is fully for you. You will not be pleased if she works for you while her heart is for someone else. Similarly, God is not pleased with our giving money to thirty or fifty poor ones. He is not pleased with our great works and numerous services to the Lord. God only wants us to pour out our hearts to the Lord. We should realize these two great principles: one involves the highest joy of those who pour out everything, heart and soul, to the Lord; the other involves those who say that they are for the Lord, but whose hearts are for the work and their "usefulness." Today men want to be "useful"; they are afraid that they will lose their "usefulness." Thank the Lord that there are some on earth today who are not "useful." Thank the Lord that some have wasted their "usefulness" so that Christ would gain something in them.

I have mentioned Miss M. E. Barber many times. To me, no one living on earth today is as much like Mary as she was. She indeed wasted herself. When she was carried to the grave at her burial, one brother spoke on the story of Mary and said that Miss Barber, like Mary, had done all that she could. I agree with that brother. She was indeed a Mary. I know of very few people in this world like her. While she was still alive, I asked her once, "What is the qualification to work?" She answered, "The qualification to work is to be willing to not work for the Lord." When a man is willing to be "shut behind doors," to be insignificant for the Lord's sake, he is worthy to work for the Lord.

"She has done a noble deed to Me" (Matt. 26:10). "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). In other words, Mary laid down all that she had. We need to calculate the cost and spend everything on Christ. In other words, we

should waste everything on Him. If we have not wasted ourselves completely on Him, we have not done enough yet. Thank the Lord that many people could have been very useful if they had not wasted themselves on the Lord. They could have become a famous writer, scientist, or doctor. But they wasted themselves totally on Christ. God is calling men to waste themselves on Christ! Friends, have you done all that you can do? The Lord said that Mary had done what she could! Have you done what you can? Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, the waste is also proclaimed. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, many useful and great works of men will be stripped away for the Lord's sake, and the desire for result and fruit will be lost. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, everything is poured on Christ. Whatever is poured on Christ is not a waste, but will bring genuine fruit. Thank the Lord that the poor and works count little. The point is not how much the poor will benefit or how much society and the nation will benefit, but what the Lord will gain. Today in the church, men ask what the poor, the society, and the nation will gain. But we should ask what the Lord will also gain. May the gospel be preached here and the story of Mary also be preached here, and may more Mary's be raised up here.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GOAL OF THE GOSPEL

The Normal Christian Life, Ch. 14

In this chapter we will take as our starting-point an incident in the Gospels that occurs under the very shadow of the Cross—an incident that, in its details, is at once historic and prophetic.

"And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster cruse of ointment of spikenard very costly; and she brake the cruse, and poured it over his head... Jesus said... Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:3, 6, 9).

Thus the Lord ordained that the story of Mary anointing Him with that costly ointment should always accompany the story of the Gospel; that what Mary has done should always be coupled with what the Lord has done. That is His own statement. What does He intend that we should understand by it?

I think we all know the story of Mary's action well. From the details given in John chapter 12, where the incident follows not long after her brother's restoration to life, we may gather that the family was not a specially wealthy one. The sisters had to work in the house themselves, for we are told that at this feast "Martha also served" (John 12:2 and compare Luke 10:40). [18] No doubt every penny mattered to them. Yet one of those sisters, Mary, having among her treasures an alabaster cruse containing 'three hundred pence' worth of ointment, expended the whole thing on the Lord. Human reasoning said this was really too much; it was giving the Lord more than His due. That is why Judas took the lead, and the other disciples supported him, in voicing a general complaint that Mary's action was a wasteful one.

WASTE

"But there were some that had indignation among themselves, saying, To what purpose hath this waste of the ointment been made? For this ointment

might have been sold for above three hundred pence and given to the poor. And they murmured against her" (Mark 14:4, 5). These words bring us to what I believe the Lord would have us consider finally together, namely, that which is signified by the little word "waste".

What is waste? Waste means, among other things, giving more than is necessary. If a shilling will do and you give a point, it is a waste. If two ounces will do and you give a kilogram, it is a waste. If three days will suffice to finish a task well enough and you lavish five days or a week on it, it is a waste. Waste means that you give something too much for something too little. If someone is receiving more than he is considered to be worth, then that is waste.

But remember, we are dealing here with something which the Lord said had to go out with the Gospel, wherever that Gospel should be carried. Why? Because He intends that the preaching of the Gospel should issue in something along the very lines of the action of Mary here, namely, that people should come to Him and waste themselves on Him. This is the result that He is seeking.

We must look at this question of wasting on the Lord from two angles: that of Judas (John 12:4-6) and that of the other disciples (Matt. 26:8, 9); and for our present purpose we will run together the parallel accounts.

All the twelve thought is a waste. To Judas of course, who had never called Jesus 'Lord', everything that was poured out upon Him was waste. Not only was ointment waste; even water would have been waste. Here Judas stands for the world. In the world's estimation the service of the Lord, and our giving ourselves to Him for such service, is sheer waste. He has never been loved, never had a place in the hearts of the world, so any giving to Him is a waste. Many say: 'Such-and-such a man could make good in the world if only he were not a Christian!' Because a man has some natural talent or other asset in the world's eyes, they count such people are really too good for the Lord. 'What waste of a useful life!' they say.

Let me give a personal instance. In 1929 I returned from Shanghai to my home town of Foochow. One day I was walking along the street with a stick, very weak and in broken health, and I met one of my old college professors. He took me into a teashop where we sat down. He looked at me from head to foot and from foot to head, and then he said: 'Now look here; during your

college days we thought a good deal of you and we had hopes that you would achieve something great. Do you mean to tell me that this is what you are?' Looking at me with penetrating eyes, he asked that very pointed question. I must confess that, on hearing it, my first desire was to break down and weep. My career, my health, everything had gone, and here was my old professor who taught me law in the school, asking me: 'Are you still in this condition, with no success, no progress, nothing to show?'

But the very next moment—and I have to admit that in all my life it was the first time—I really knew what it meant to have the "spirit of glory" resting upon me. The thought of being able to pour our my life for my Lord flooded my soul with glory. Nothing short of the Spirit of glory was on me then. I could look up and without a reservation say: 'Lord, I praise Thee! This is the best thing possible; it is the right course that I have chosen!' To my professor it seemed a total waste to serve the Lord; but that is what the Gospel is for—to bring us to a true estimate of His worth.

Judas felt it a waste. 'We could manage better with the money by using it in some other way. There are plenty of poor people. Why not rather give it for charity, do some social service for their uplift, help the poor in some practical way? Why pour it out at the feet of Jesus?' (See John 12:4-6.) That is always the way the world reasons. 'Can you not do something better with yourself than this? It is going a bit too far to give yourself altogether to the Lord!'

But if the Lord is worthy, then how can it be a waste? He is worthy to be so served. He is worthy for me to be His prisoner. He is worthy for me just to live for Him. He is worthy! What the world says about this does not matter. The Lord says: 'Do not trouble her'. So let us not be troubled. Men may say what they like, but we can stand on this ground, that the Lord said: 'It is a good work. Every true work is not done on the poor; every true work is done to Me'. When once our eyes have been opened to the real worth of our Lord Jesus, nothing is too good for Him.

But I do not want to dwell too much on Judas. Let us go on to see what was the attitude of the other disciples, because their reaction affects us even more than does his. We do not greatly mind what the world is saying; we can stand that, but we do very much mind what other Christians are saying who ought to understand. And yet we find that they said the same thing as Judas; and they not only said it but they were very upset, very indignant about it. "When

the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor" (Matt. 26:8, 9).

Of course we know that the attitude of mind is all too common among Christians which says, 'Get all you can for as little as possible'. That however is not what is in view here, but something deeper. Let me illustrate. Has someone been telling you that you are wasting your life be sitting still and not doing much? They say, 'Here are people who ought to get out into this or that kind of work. They could be used to help this or that group of people. Why are they not more active?'— and in saying so, their whole idea is use. Everything ought to be used to the full in ways they understand.

There are those who have been very concerned with some dear servants of the Lord on this very ground, that they are apparently not doing enough. They could do so much more, they think, if they could secure an entry somewhere and enjoy a greater acceptance and prominence in certain circles. They could then be used in a far greater way. I have spoken already of a sister whom I knew for a long time and who, I think, is the one by whom I have been helped most. She was used of the Lord in a very real way during those years when I was associated with her, though to some of us at the time this was not so apparent. The one concern in my heart was this: 'She is not used!' Constantly I said to myself, 'Why does she not get out and take some meetings, go somewhere, do something? It is a waste for her to be living in that small village with nothing happening!' Sometimes, when I went to see her, I almost shouted at her. I said, 'No one knows the Lord as you do. You know the Book in a most living way. Do you not see the need around? Why don't you do something? It is a waste of time, a waste of energy, a waste of money, a waste of everything, just sitting here and doing nothing!'

But no, brethren, that is not the first thing with the Lord. He wants you and me to be used, certainly. God forbid that I should preach inactivity or seek to justify a complacent attitude to the world's need. As Jesus Himself says here, "the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world". But the question is one of emphasis. Looking back today, I realize how greatly the Lord was in fact using that dear sister to speak to a number of us who, as young men, were at that time in His training school for this very work of the Gospel. I cannot thank God enough for her.

What, then, is the secret? Clearly it is this, that in approving Mary's action at Bethany, the Lord Jesus was laying down one thing as a basis of all service: that you pour out all you have, your very self, unto Him; and if that should be all He allows you to do, that is enough. It is not first of all a question of whether 'the poor' have been helped or not. The first question is: Has the Lord been satisfied?

There is many a meeting we might address, many a convention at which we might minister, many a Gospel campaign in which we might have a share. It is not that we are unable to do it. We could labor and be used to the full; but the Lord is not so concerned about our ceaseless occupation in work for Him. That is not His first object. The service of the Lord is not to be measured by tangible results. No, my friends, the Lord's first concern is with our position at His feet and our anointing of His head. Whatever we have as an 'alabaster box': the most precious thing, the thing dearest in the world to us—yes, let me say it, the outflow from us of a life that is produced by the very Cross itself—we give that all up to the Lord. To some, even of those who should understand, it seems a waste; but that is what He seeks above all. Often enough the giving to Him will be in tireless service, but He reserves to Himself the right to suspend the service for a time in order to discover to us whether it is that or Himself that holds us.

MINISTERING TO HIS PLEASURE

"Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached... that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of" (Mark 14:9).

Why did the Lord say this? Because the Gospel is meant to produce this. It is what the Gospel is for. The Gospel is not just to satisfy sinners. Praise the Lord, sinners will be satisfied! but their satisfaction is, we may say, a blessed by-product of the Gospel and not its primary aim. The Gospel is preached in the first place so that the Lord may be satisfied.

I am afraid we lay too much emphasis on the good of sinners and we have not sufficiently appreciated what the Lord has in view as His goal. We have been thinking how the sinner will fare if there is no Gospel, but that is not the main consideration. Yes, Praise God! the sinner has his part. God meets his need and showers him with blessings; but that is not the most important thing. The first thing is this, that everything should be to the satisfaction of

the Son of God. It is only when He is satisfied that we shall be satisfied and the sinner will be satisfied. I have never met a soul who has set out to satisfy the Lord and has not been satisfied himself. It is impossible. Our satisfaction comes unfailingly when we satisfy Him first.

But we have to remember this, that He will never be satisfied without our 'wasting' ourselves upon Him. Have you ever given too much to the Lord? May I tell you something? One lesson some of us have come to learn is this, that in Divine service the principle of waste is the principle of power. The principle which determines usefulness is the very principle of scattering. Real usefulness in the hand of God is measured in terms of 'waste'. The more you think you can do, and the more you employ your gifts up to the very limit (and some even go over the limit!) in order to do it, the more you find that you are applying the principle of the world and not of the Lord. God's ways with us are all designed to establish in us this other principle, namely, that our work for Him springs out of our ministering to Him. I do not mean that we are going to do nothing; but the first thing for us must be the Lord Himself, not His work.

But we must come down to very practical issues. You say: 'I have given up a position; I have given up a ministry; I have foregone certain attractive possibilities of a bright future, in order to go on with the Lord in this way. Now I try to serve Him. Sometimes it seems that the Lord hears me, and sometimes He keeps me waiting for a definite answer. Sometimes He uses me, but sometimes it seems that He passes my by. Then, when this is so, I compare myself with that other fellow who is in a certain big system. He too had a bright future, but he has never given it up. He continues on and he serves the Lord. He sees souls saved and the Lord blesses his ministry. He is successful—I do not mean materially, but spiritually—and I sometimes think he looks more like a Christian than I do, so happy, so satisfied. After all, what do I get out of this? He has a good time; I have all the bad time. He has never gone this way, and yet he has much that Christians today regard as spiritual prosperity, while I have all sorts of complications coming to me. What is the meaning of it all? Am I wasting my life? Have I really given too much?'

So there is your problem. You feel that were you to follow in that other brother's steps—were you, shall we say, to consecrate yourself enough for the blessing but not enough for the trouble, enough for the Lord to use you but

not enough for Him to shut you up—all would be perfectly all right. But would it? You know perfectly well that it would not.

Takes your eyes off that other man! Look at your Lord, and ask yourself again what it is that He values most highly. The principle of waste is the principle that He would have govern us. 'She is doing this for Me.' Real satisfaction is brought to the heart of the Son of God only when we are really, as people would think, 'wasting' ourselves upon Him. It seems as though we are giving too much and getting nothing—and that is the secret of pleasing God.

Oh, friends, what are we after? Are we after 'use' as those disciples were? They wanted to make every penny of those three hundred pence go to its full length. The whole question was one of obvious 'usefulness' to God in terms that could be measured and put on record. The Lord waits to hear us say: 'Lord, I do not mind about that. If I can only please Thee, it is enough'.

ANOINTING HIM BEFOREHAND

"Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying" (Mark 14:6-8).

In these verses the Lord Jesus introduces a time-factor with the word 'beforehand', and this is something of which we can have a new application today, for it is as important to us now as it was to her then. We all know that in the age to come we shall be called to a greater work—not to inactivity. "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21; and compare Matthew 24:47 and Luke 19:17). Yes, there will be a greater work; for the work of God's house will go on, just as in the story the care of the poor went on. The poor would always be with them, but they could not always have Him. There was something, represented by this pouring out of the ointment, which Mary had to do beforehand or she would have no later opportunity. I believe that in that day we shall all love Him as we have never done now, but yet that it will be most blessed for those who have poured out their all upon the Lord today. When we see Him face to face I trust that we

shall all break and pour out everything for Him. But today—what are we doing today?

Several days after Mary broke the alabaster box and poured the ointment on Jesus' head, there were some women who went early in the morning to anoint the body of the Lord. Did they do it? Did they succeed in their purpose on that first day of the week? No, there was only one soul who succeeded in anointing the Lord, and it was Mary, who anointed Him beforehand. The others never did it, for He had risen. Now I suggest that in just such a way the matter of time may be important to us also, and that the whole question for us is : What am I doing to the Lord today?

Have our eyes been opened to see the preciousness of the One whom we are serving? Have we come to see that nothing less than the dearest, the costliest, the most precious, is fit for Him? Have we come to see that working for the poor, working for the benefit of the world, working for the souls of men and for the eternal good of the sinner—all these so necessary and valuable things—are right only if they are in their place? In themselves, as things apart, they are as nothing compared with work that is done to the Lord.

The Lord has to open our eyes to His worth. If there is in the world some precious art treasure, and I pay the high price asked for it, be it one thousand, ten thousand, or even a million pounds, dare anyone say it is a waste? The idea of waste only comes into our Christianity when we underestimate the worth of our Lord. The whole question is: How precious is He to us now? If we do not think much of Him, then of course to give Him anything at all, however small, will seem to us a wicked waste. But when He is really precious to our soul, nothing will be too good, nothing too costly for Him; everything we have, our dearest, our most priceless treasure, we shall pour out upon Him, and we shall not count it a shame to have done so.

Of Mary the Lord said: "She hath done what she could". What does that mean? It means that she had given up her all. She had kept nothing in reserve for a future day. She had lavished on Him all she had; and yet on the resurrection morning she had no reason to regret her extravagance. And the Lord will not be satisfied with anything less from us than that we too should have done 'what we could'. By this, remember, I do not mean the expenditure of our effort and energy in trying to do something for Him, for that is not the point here. What the Lord Jesus looks for in us is a life laid at His feet—and

that in view of His death and burial and of a future day. His burial was already in view that day in the home in Bethany. Today it is His crowning that is in view—when He shall be acclaimed in glory as the Anointed One, the Christ of God. Yes, then we shall pour out our all upon Him! But it is a precious thing—indeed it is a far more precious thing to Him—that we should anoint Him now, not with any material oil but with something costly, something from our hearts.

That which is merely external and superficial has no place here. It has already been dealt with by the Cross, and we have given our consent to God's judgment upon it and learnt to know in experience its cutting off. What God is demanding of us now is represented by that flask of alabaster: something mined from the depths, something turned and chased and wrought upon, something that, because it is so truly of the Lord, we cherish as Mary cherished that flask—and we would not, we dare not break it. It comes now from the heart, from the very depth of our being; and we come to the Lord with that, and we break it and pour it out and say: 'Lord, here it is. It is all Yours, because You are worthy!'—and the Lord has got what He desired. May He receive such an anointing from us today.

FRAGRANCE

"And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment" (John 12:3).

By the breaking of that flask and the anointing of the Lord Jesus, the house was pervaded with the sweetest fragrance. Everyone could smell it and none could be unaware of it. What is the significance of this?

Whenever you meet someone who has really suffered—someone who has gone through experiences with the Lord that have brought limitation, and who, instead of trying to break free in order to be 'used', has been willing to be imprisoned by Him and has thus learned to find satisfaction in the Lord and nowhere else—then immediately you become aware of something. Immediately your spiritual senses detect a sweet savour of Christ. Something has been crushed, something has been broken in that life, and so you smell the odor. The odor that filled the house that day in Bethany still fills the Church today; Mary's fragrance never passes. It needed but one stroke to break the flask for the Lord, but that breaking and the fragrance of that anointing abides.

We are speaking here of what we are; not of what we do or what we preach. Perhaps you may have been asking the Lord for a long time that He will be pleased to use you in such a way as to impart impressions of Himself to others. That prayer is not exactly for the gift of preaching or teaching. It is rather that you might be able, in your touch with others, to impart God, the presence of God, the sense of God. Dear friends, you cannot produce such impressions of God upon others without the breaking of everything, even your most precious possessions, at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

But if once that point is reached, you may or may not seem to be much used in an outward way, but God will begin to use you to create a hunger in others. People will scent Christ in you. The least saint in the Body will detect that. He will sense that here is one who has gone with the Lord, one who has suffered, one who has not moved freely, independently, but who has known what it is to let go everything to Him. That kind of life creates impressions, and impressions create hunger, and hunger provokes men to go on seeking until they are brought by Divine revelation into fullness of life in Christ.

God does not set us here first of all to preach or to do work for Him. The first thing for which He sets us here is to create in others a hunger for Himself. That is, after all, what prepares the soil for the preaching.

If you set a delicious cake in front of two men who have just had a heavy meal, what will be their reaction? They will talk about it, admire its appearance, discuss the recipe, argue about the cost—do everything in fact but eat it! But if they are truly hungry it will not be very long before that cake is gone. And so it is with the things of the Spirit. No true work will ever begin in a life without first of all a sense of need being created. But how can this be done? We cannot inject spiritual appetite by force into others; we cannot compel people to be hungry. Hunger has to be created, and it can be created in others only by those who carry with them the impressions of God.

I always like to think of the words of that “great woman” of Shunem. Speaking of the prophet, whom she had observed but whom she did not know well, she said: “Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually” (2 Kings 4:9). It was not what Elisha said or did that conveyed that impression, but what he was. By his merely passing by she could detect something; she could see. What are people sensing about us? We may leave many kinds of impressions: we may leave the impression that we

are clever, that we are gifted, that we are this or that or the other. But no: the impression left by Elisha was an impression of God Himself.

This matter of our impact upon others turns upon one thing, and that is the working of the Cross in us with regard to the pleasure of the heart of God. It demands that I seek His pleasure, that I seek to satisfy Him only, and that I do not mind how much it costs me to do so. The sister of whom I have spoken came once into a situation that was very difficult for her: I mean, it was costing her everything. I was with her at the time, and together we knelt down and prayed with wet eyes. Looking up she said: 'Lord, I am willing to break my heart in order that I may satisfy Thy heart!' To talk thus of heart-break might with many of us be merely romantic sentiment, but in the particular situation in which she was, it meant to her just that.

There must be something—a willingness to yield, a breaking and a pouring out of everything to Him—which gives release to that fragrance of Christ and produces in other lives an awareness of need, drawing them out and on to know the Lord. This is what I feel to be the heart of everything. The Gospel has as its one object the producing in us sinners of a condition that will satisfy the heart of our God. In order that He may have that, we come to Him with all we have, all we are— yes, even the most cherished things in our spiritual experience—and we make known to Him: 'Lord, I am willing to let go all of this for You: not just for Your work, not for Your children, not for anything else, but for Yourself!'

Oh, to be wasted! It is a blessed thing to be wasted for the Lord. So many who have been prominent in the Christian world know nothing of this. Many of us have been used to the full—have been used, I would say, too much—but we do not know what it means to be wasted on God. We like to be always 'on the go': the Lord would sometimes prefer to have us in prison. We think in terms of apostolic journeys: God dares to put his greatest ambassadors in chains.

"But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place" (2 Cor. 2:14).

"And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment (John 12:3).

The Lord grant us grace that we may learn how to please Him. When, like Paul, we make this our supreme aim (2 Cor. 5:9), the Gospel will have achieved its end.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSECRATION

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 16

Date: November 17, 1935, afternoon
Place: Chuenchow

Scripture Reading: Rom. 12:1; 6:13; 2 Cor. 5:14-15

INTRODUCTION

God saves us for the purpose of living for the Lord. God has not saved us merely for the purpose of separating us from the world. He has saved us for the purpose of separating us from ourselves. In the end, we will be sanctified, that is, fully separated unto the Lord (cf. John 17:14-19). A Christian who has not overcome is not a happy Christian. He lives in defeat constantly and has conflict in his heart continually. This conflict and defeat occur because he has not consecrated himself in an absolute way to the Lord.

THINGS TO DO BEFORE AND AFTER OVERCOMING

The consecration that is spoken of in the Bible is an absolute consecration. If our consecration is not absolute, at the most we can be second-class Christians. There are two things that a Christian should do before he can overcome. The first is to let go, and the second is to believe. There are also two things that he should do after he overcomes. The first is to make confession for his sins, and the second is to consecrate.

We have already spoken of letting go, believing, and confessing. Today we will consider the matter of consecration. We possess many things which we are not willing to consecrate, such as our money, family, time, and career. We are unable to consecrate because we have not yet overcome. We can consecrate only when we stand on the ground of victory. Those who have not experienced victory cannot consecrate themselves. When we take the Lord as our victory, it is very easy for us to consecrate ourselves. If we have not taken

the Lord as our victory and then say that we cannot consecrate ourselves, I will say, "Amen, that is right. You can never consecrate yourself by yourself." Romans 6:13 says that consecration comes after the experience of dying and resurrecting with the Lord. We can consecrate ourselves to God only after we are "alive from the dead." Many people think that they are living a consecrated life. Actually, they have not even touched the entrance to such a life. Unless we first experience the victory of Christ, we cannot consecrate ourselves.

CONSECRATION BASED ON GOD'S SAVING GRACE

Romans 12:1 says, "I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God." The word "compassions" is plural in number; it refers to the multifarious grace mentioned in Romans 1 through 8. According to the sequence of teaching in the book of Romans, chapter twelve should immediately follow chapter eight. Hence, the compassions mentioned in chapter twelve refer to the things covered in chapters one through eight. The Son of God has died for our sins. He has died for us and saved us from the punishment of sin. He is now living for us and delivering us from the power of sin. God has shown all of these compassions toward us. Paul was not commanding us but exhorting us to present our bodies. In the first eight chapters, we are told that we were sinners and that the Son of God shed His blood to redeem us from sin. Chapters three and four speak of the blood, chapter five speaks of forgiveness, and chapters six through eight speak of the cross crucifying our old man and releasing us from sin. The Lord died for us once, and He is now living for us. Once we believe in the Lord's death and resurrection, we become the Lord's. Many people are willing to be delivered from hell, but unfortunately they are not willing to be separated from the world. They are willing to be delivered from sin, but they are not willing to be sanctified and separated absolutely to the Lord.

God has saved us, and we have believed in this saving fact. There was once a Christian girl from Abyssinia, Africa, who was sold as a slave. At the beginning of the auction, three men were bidding fiercely for her. All three were evil, and the girl knew that she would suffer greatly no matter whose hand she fell into. She was weeping and full of sorrow. Finally, a fourth man came and made the highest bid. As soon as he bought her, he sent for a blacksmith to break her chains, and said to the girl, "You are free." Then he turned around and walked away. At first the girl did not understand. Later

she came to her senses and shouted, "He has bought me! He has bought me. From this day forward until the day I die, I will follow him." This story is happening to us today. The Lord's love has constrained us, and we must tell Him that we will follow Him from now on.

A brother was once riding on a train and was invited to participate in a card game. He told those who invited him, "Sorry friends, I have not brought my hands along with me today." The others looked at him in surprise. He went on, "My two hands are the Lord's. The hands that once sinned and played card games are now crucified with the Lord." He saw that since he had consecrated himself to the Lord, his hands were the Lord's and no longer his own.

Once while waiting for a bus ride, I saw a book of a questionable nature in a shop, and I was tempted to look at it, but the Lord forbade me and I dared not open the book. My eyes have been consecrated to the Lord; they are no longer mine.

Today we need such a realization. We need to know that the Lord has purchased us and that we belong to Him. This feeling is indeed sweet and wonderful. Some may criticize us for being too narrow or stubborn, but while their mouths criticize us, their hearts admire us. Such Christians are the happiest people. Nothing can give us greater joy than consecrating ourselves absolutely to the Lord, for we are consecrating ourselves to the Lord who loves us most dearly.

FOUR THINGS THAT MUST BE CONSECRATED

Consecrating People

The first thing to do after overcoming is to consecrate. What is consecration? It is putting yourself and all that you have on the altar. Specifically, we should consecrate four things to the Lord. The first is people, that is, all the people who are related to us. If a man loves many people, the Lord will have no place in his heart. If you have consecrated yourself to the Lord, no one in this world will occupy your heart any longer, and no person can seize your heart away from Him. God saves you in order to gain full control of you. However, many tears are holding you back, many human affections are enticing you to turn, and many broken hearts are calling you to return. You have to say to the Lord, "Whom do I have in heaven but You?/And besides You there is nothing I

desire on earth" (Psa. 73:25). Such a consecration is not for the future, but for today; it is something that we can do today. Today we can cut off all human affections and human relationships and give the Lord the preeminent place.

Consecrating Careers

The second thing we should consecrate is our career. We do not need to consecrate ourselves to be preachers. Many preachers today are not consecrated. Rather, we need to consecrate ourselves to do God's will, to seek after His will, and to find out what His will is for us. A brother, as a high school student, was always the first in his class. He was determined to be the first in his final examination and would not settle for less. He devoted all his time and energy to his study, and his love for the Lord was diminished. Later, he had a breakthrough in the matter of overcoming and realized that it was wrong for him to have such an ambition. He prayed to the Lord, "If it is Your will, I am willing to even come last in the class." This student was a genuine brother in the Lord. In the end he overcame. He experienced the overcoming life in his academic pursuit. Brothers, if you have any aspirations in your business or career that you cannot let go and if there is anything that you insist on having, you have to consecrate yourself. You have to consecrate your career, aspirations, and ambitions totally to the Lord so that you can do God's will.

Consecrating Things

The third item we have to consecrate is things. It is easier for a rich man to forsake the Lord than for a poor man to forsake the Lord because the heart of a rich man is with his money. Nothing in this world belongs to us; everything belongs to the Lord. Therefore, we have to consecrate everything to the Lord and put everything we have on the altar (1 Chron. 29:12-16). Many people squander their money. This is not pleasing to God, of course, but some save up their money in a way that does not please the Lord either. For example, a sister would not spend even a dollar in fifty years. Squandering has no place before the Lord, just as thrift has no place before the Lord either. All of our saving and spending will be judged by the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. Whatever the Lord wants us to spend our money on, we should spend it accordingly. Offering in the New Testament is different from that in the Old Testament. The principle in the Old Testament is tithing, offering one-tenth. But the principle in the New Testament is offering up ten-tenths; it is offering

up all that we have into the hand of the Lord. God will not allow us to go hungry. We may worry about how we are going to support our living, but God wants us to first offer up everything to Him and then draw our needs from Him. The first day we take home our wages, we should say to the Lord, "All of this money is Yours. I offer it all up to You." After we have received our wages, we should first offer them up to the Lord and then use them according to His dispensing. When we receive our wages, it is wrong to first spend the money on what we need and then give the rest to God. Brother Witness Lee lives in a big family. He and his two brothers hand over all the money they earn each month to their mother, and then she dispenses it according to each one's need. This should be how it is between God and us. We should not offer to God what is left from our own spending. Rather, we should offer up everything to God and then allow Him to supply us with what we need.

There is no need to dispose of all the possessions we own from the past. If God wants us to offer up everything, we should offer up everything. We may sell all our possessions and deposit everything in the bank, wait for God's future leading, and then offer it all up for the Lord's use. If we offer in this way, the bank which keeps our money will be blessed. It will not be foreclosed because God will guard His own deposit. In this world, five percent interest is considered to be high, but the Bible says that when we offer to the Lord, we will receive a hundredfold in this world (Matt. 19:29)! This is ten thousand percent interest! What a bargain! Brothers and sisters, God will not shortchange us. In the past we have passed up many God-given opportunities. In the matter of material offering, I have much experience. I have experienced many blessings that were brought in through offerings. A sister once offered the entire one hundred twenty dollars that she earned in a month to the Lord. When treasures are in our hand, they are either squandered or kept. But if we offer up everything to the Lord, we will not dare to spend loosely. After we consecrate our money to the Lord, everything will become the Lord's, and He will keep it or use it as He sees fit.

Consecrating Ourselves

Fourth, we have to consecrate ourselves. Not only should we consecrate people, careers, and things, but we also have to consecrate ourselves. Some think that after one has overcome he does not need to practice obedience anymore. Actually, our overcoming only makes us more able to obey the Lord. Formerly we did not have the strength to obey the Lord. Now that the Lord

has accomplished everything for us, we can spontaneously hand over our will and everything to the Lord and allow the Lord to strengthen us with the overcoming life for obedience. This is something that we have to do in a definite way. There must be a definite date to our consecration, in the same way that there is a definite date to a girl's marriage. A girl cannot say, "I think I was married on a certain date." In the same way, we cannot say, "I think I consecrated myself on a certain date." This is something that we need to do before the Lord in a definite way. We should be very clear about this date and never forget it. I consecrated myself to the Lord on February 13, 1922. We can announce our date to others. We can tell those who brought us to the Lord or those who have given us spiritual help. We can even put out an announcement and declare to men as well as to Satan: "I am married to the Lord." Paul said that he had betrothed the Corinthian believers as chaste virgins to the Lord (2 Cor. 11:2).

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 says that if we obey the Lord's word, the Lord will make us keep all His commandments and make us a holy people to Jehovah our God. Obedience to the Lord's word is our duty as Christians, while making us a holy people to Jehovah is God's duty. If we take care of our part, God will do His part.

OVERCOMING TO LIVE A CONSECRATED LIFE

If consecration is so intimately linked to overcoming, what then is the overcoming life? Is it merely a victory over all the evil things? No! If it were, there would be many people in this world who would not need the overcoming life. They have many natural virtues. They do not lose their temper and do not do many evil things. Are these people victorious? No! Victory does not mean just overcoming evil deeds. Victory means that we no longer live for ourselves but that we live for the Lord while we live on earth every day. We must have the realization that the Lord has purchased us, that we belong to Him, and that we have been married to Him. Those who live in this atmosphere will breathe the heavenly air of holiness.

Victory is not a practice of negating things. It is not just a passive deliverance from sin. Victory is an active consecration to the Lord and a fellowship with Him while living on this earth. Unless one reaches this stage, he is not overcoming. A Christian first overcomes and then consecrates. If we

have broken through in the matter of overcoming, all we have to do today is to consecrate ourselves.

GOD'S HEART BEING GOOD

Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as slaves for obedience, his slaves you are whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?" We consecrate to the Lord to be His slaves. When many people hear about consecration and being slaves unto God, they are afraid. They think that after they consecrate themselves, God will give them a hard time. However, only those who do not know God think in this way.

A certain mother did not understand the meaning of obedience and consecration. Someone explained this to her by way of an illustration: "Suppose you have a son who was very stubborn and disobedient. Later, he repented and told you that from then on he would obey you, that he would take your word, and that he would do whatever you wanted him to do. As a mother would you think of difficult things for him to do throughout the whole night so that you could give him a hard time the next day?" The mother said, "Of course not. I would just turn around and love him more." In fact, she would think of how she could make him new clothes or buy him candy. This is a mother's heart. This is also our God's heart.

When we consecrate ourselves to God, He will order everything and make it work together for us. Is He not satisfied and pleased with our obedience? Why should He be scheming to deal with us or to give us a hard time? God's heart towards us is nothing but goodness and kindness. It is true that He does not do everything according to our way, but we have to believe that His heart towards us is good and kind. Although a Christian may suffer tribulations in this world, he can still rejoice in his heart. We can have joy in the midst of our tears because we know that everything that comes upon us has been measured by the Lord's hand. We have to believe that the Father's intention is always good. The more we consecrate ourselves, the more the Lord will love us. Before we consecrate to the Lord, we are just one among many Christians. But after we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, we become totally different persons. We are special in His eyes, and He can have the full freedom to work on us according to His good will.

May every one of us place everything on the altar—the people who are related to us, our careers, our possessions, and even ourselves—sanctifying all these things to the Lord. May we understand that the goal of His salvation is for us to no longer live unto ourselves but to the Lord who died and has been raised for us (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

CHAPTER NINE

BEING BESIDE OURSELVES TO GOD

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 41:

Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (1), Chap. 26

Date: November 20, 1935, evening
Place: Chuenchow

BEING SOBER-MINDED FOR MEN AND BEING BESIDE OURSELVES TO GOD

Both our Lord and Paul were accused of being insane when they were on earth (Mark 3:21; Acts 26:24). All those who follow the Lord faithfully are likely to receive a similar label. Let me ask one question: Even though you are sober-minded before men, are you beside yourself to God? If you have never been beside yourself to God, you are only a half Christian. A Christian should be like Paul, who was sober-minded before men, but beside himself to God (2 Cor. 5:13).

For a Christian to be beside himself does not mean that he is beside himself with insanity. Rather, he is beside himself in a proper way. This kind of being beside oneself does not make one silly in actions and words; it is being beside oneself to God. Such a one is clear in his actions and words. He is sober-minded before men, but beside himself to God. The Bible tells us that both the Lord and the believers were considered by others to be crazy. Others may have felt sorry for Paul. He was educated, capable, and could do many things. Yet he chose to follow a supposedly dead man from Nazareth, and he preached that this One had risen from the dead. However, God was pleased with Paul because Paul was a man who was beside himself to God. Only such people can genuinely work for the Lord. Today the Lord is seeking for a group of men who are beside themselves for God's work. If there is not such a group of men, the Lord's work will not see any result. The Lord is after a group of people who are sober-minded before men but who are beside themselves to God. He can only use such men, and only such men can accomplish God's will and glorify His name. How many people in the church today are beside

themselves to God? The more people there are who are beside themselves in the church, the brighter the future of the church will be. The church surely needs a group of people who are beside themselves.

BEING BESIDE OURSELVES IN THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

What kind of people were beside themselves to God in the Bible? What were they like? The kind of men who were beside themselves were those who preached the Lord's resurrection from the dead. They were determined to die if need be. Whatever circumstance they faced, whether death, imprisonment, or beating, they were determined to speak about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Other men may have thought, "If others will not listen, why should we bother to speak? Should we not do something more proper and ordinary?" At that time, the Roman Empire was the greatest empire on earth, and it persecuted the so-called Galileans everywhere. However, the gospel had spread throughout Judea by 30 to 40 A.D., and it spread throughout the whole Roman Empire by 80 A.D. The Romans could not do anything about this group of Galileans. They were not wise. They were country folks, yet the gospel spread throughout the whole of the Roman Empire through these "foolish" ones. Hallelujah! This group of "foolish" ones, who were beside themselves, who did not love themselves, who did not care for themselves, and who were not in themselves, produced the church. The Lord often chooses men who are crazy in the eyes of men. Yet the Lord greatly uses them. In men's eyes, all the great servants of the Lord are crazy. When Paul was led before the rulers and the kings, he was not afraid. He began to speak to them. He had spoken already to the crowd outside. Now he spoke to the men inside. Thank the Lord. It was through such men that the church was started, and through them the church continues until today. But are there such men today? God does not want men who are afraid of many things. He wants men who are beside themselves to Him. Today God is calling for men who will be beside themselves.

At one time the Roman government was doing all that it could to persecute the Christians. However, the result of this persecution was the multiplication of the church. James was killed, but Christians continued to speak. The church in Jerusalem was persecuted, and the disciples fled for their lives, but they preached the Lord Jesus wherever they went (Acts 8:1-4). How different

the situation is today than in those days! Today we do not have any persecution from a Roman empire, yet neither do we have men who are beside themselves for the gospel. Today the church needs men who are beside themselves, like those in the book of Acts. It needs men who are not ashamed, who do not know what shame is, and who only know to risk their lives and their all to preach the Lord.

We see from the book of Acts that many disciples were beside themselves. Church history also shows us that many faithful followers of the Lord were beside themselves. They were used by the Lord to preach the gospel and save sinners. There has never been a shortage of such men throughout the ages. In North America there was a very brilliant preacher by the name of David Brainerd, who set out to preach the gospel to the Indians at an early age. He risked his life for the gospel. In five years, he traveled more than three thousand miles on horseback for the gospel. He died of exhaustion at the age of thirty, but he left behind countless fruit.

Henry Martyn wanted to go to India to preach the gospel. Before he left, a doctor examined him and said, "Your health is too poor. If you move to India, you may not adjust to the weather there, and you may not live long." He answered, "In your opinion, how many more years do I have?" The doctor said, "Seven years at the most." When Henry Martyn heard this, he was very happy, and he said, "I have seven more years to accomplish many good works!" In 1806 he set off for India. After preaching in Persia in 1811, he tried to return home via Asia Minor. He died instead in the city of Tokat, Turkey due to sickness in 1812.

One woman had six sons, five of whom had gone to India for the gospel and died there. When others asked what she would do with her sixth son, she answered that she would also consecrate him for the preaching of the gospel.

In China God has raised up some men who have risked their all to preach the gospel. We find such men in Foochow, in Chefoo, and in many other places.

BEING BESIDE OURSELVES IN OFFERING

The Bible also tells us about many people who were beside themselves in offering up their possessions and houses. Acts 4 mentions the disciples selling

their all and laying the money they received at the apostles' feet (v. 34). Many people agree that we should be zealous, but they say that we should be careful, balanced, and not go to extremes. Yet throughout the past two thousand years, all those who have truly consecrated themselves to the Lord were men who risked everything to offer up themselves. The more a person loves the Lord, the more he consecrates. One brother asked me, "How can you love the Lord so much, and why can't I love Him as much?" I said, "If you give your money to the Lord, you will love Him. The Lord said that where your treasure is, there is your heart also." If you want your heart to follow the Lord, your money must first go to the Lord. When your money goes into the offering box, and you say, "Amen," your heart will go with it as well.

In Shanghai two sisters who were nurses each earned less than a hundred dollars a month. They saved their wages in the bank. After they heard the Lord's word, they were moved in their heart, and one after the other offered up all their savings.

Today many people are planning too much for themselves. They are not willing to offer up their all. They make reservations for themselves. The result is that the gospel has lost its impact. During every great revival in history, we find men who were beside themselves in loving the Lord, who risked all to offer up themselves. I am not exhorting you to give everything to the Lord, but you must be a person who is fully consecrated to the Lord.

One elderly sister once came to Mr. George Müller and said, "My seventieth birthday is approaching. By that time I will have saved enough money to buy a coat. This has been my wish for many years. I have been saving since I was forty-two years old, and I have been looking forward to the day when I would have such a coat. I have waited twenty-eight years. Today I can finally buy it. However, the Lord is touching me to offer up these fifteen pounds." When Mr. Müller heard this, he felt that this would cost the elderly sister too much, and he wondered whether she would later regret it. He dared not accept that money. Yet the sister was quite resolute and determined to offer it up. Later, Mr. Müller testified that he had thought that it was difficult for poor people to love the Lord. But the Lord had died for all, and when one was touched by the Lord, even a savings of twenty-eight years meant nothing to her anymore.

A few years ago I was working in Southeast Asia for a period of four months. At the end of my visit, we had a meeting. After the meeting, two children came

to me while we were drinking tea. One was eight years old, and the other was twelve years old. They told me that they wanted to offer something. One handed me six dollars, and the other handed me eight dollars. This was the amount they had earned for their work during summer vacation. They intended to use that money to buy themselves a pair of shoes, but on that day they decided to offer it up for the Lord. I did not know if they were clear about what they were doing, and I asked their uncle if they were really offering this money. He told me that they were serious. It was hard for me to take that money. That money was the hard-earned money of the children. They had paid a great price to earn it. Since they were going to offer it to the Lord, I could not return it to them. I had to accept it, but I said to the Lord, "This is money from the children's sweat and blood. If I do not use it in the right way, I will be sinning before You."

Today we want all the young people to offer their time to the Lord. At the same time, we want them to offer themselves fully to the Lord. Some may have to give themselves to make money for the Lord. Such ones have to do their best to earn and offer. (Of course, we must earn our money through righteous means.) Some may have to offer themselves to serve the Lord full-time. We need both kinds of people. Does not the gospel need to be preached in many places? Is not the church taking the right path? If there were no need to preach the gospel, and if the church were on the wrong path, we could keep our money and save it for our own use. But if the gospel needs to be preached, and if the church is on the right path, we have to be beside ourselves for the Lord. We have to recalibrate the focus of our living. Formerly, we earned money for ourselves. Today everything has to be for the Lord. God's work in China should not be limited to the coastal regions or only to the Kwangtung and Kwangsi provinces. There are vast regions in the interior of China which have never heard the gospel. We have to rise up and be beside ourselves. We have to be beside ourselves in the preaching of the gospel and in offering up our all.

BEING BESIDE OURSELVES IN SUFFERING

Not only do we have to be beside ourselves in preaching the gospel and in offering our all, we must also be beside ourselves in suffering. Stephen was stoned to death. Paul and Silas were imprisoned for the Lord. The book of Acts, however, shows us that the disciples were rejoicing, even though they were suffering. After their release, they were not ashamed but exuberant.

They were truly beside themselves for the Lord. Nothing was too great, too difficult, or too hard for them when it was done for the Lord.

When Polycarp, the eighty-six-year-old bishop of Smyrna, was taken to prison, the executioners could not bear to see him be killed. They tried to be lenient with him and only asked him to say, "I do not know Jesus the Nazarene" so that they could release him. Yet he answered, "I cannot deny Him. I have served Him for eighty-six years. During these eighty-six years, He has never denied me. How can I love my body and deny Him now?" They took him to the stake. As the lower part of his body was being burned, he was still able to speak, and he said, "Thank God that I have the opportunity to be burned here today. Thank God that I can testify for Him with my life." He was truly beside himself in suffering.

One sister was persecuted for the Lord's sake. In the midst of her suffering, those who were persecuting her told her that if she would bow to the image of Artemis, they would let her go. Yet she said, "Should I choose Christ, or should I choose Artemis? From the first day I have chosen Christ. If you ask me to choose again, I will still choose Him." In the end she was killed. Two other sisters who were still alive said, "Many of God's children are taken away and martyred. Why are we still here?" Later, they were dragged into the prison. They saw many people being taken to the arena and fed to the beasts, but none of them had any regret. The two sisters said, "Many people have testified with their blood already. Why can we only testify with our mouth?" One of the two sisters was married, and the other one was engaged. Their parents, husband, and fiancé came and begged them to change. They even brought the little child of the married sister to plead with her to deny the Lord. But the sisters said, "What can you give to us in exchange for Christ?" In the end they were also taken away to the lions. While they were walking to their death, they were singing, and they did not stop singing until their bodies were torn into pieces by the lions.

In his book, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon spoke of an officer in the Roman army who sent word to Caesar that if they sent all the Christians in the Roman Empire to the lions, there would not be any citizens left. At that time the Christians in the Roman Empire did not testify with their mouth. They testified with their blood. As soon as one of them was martyred, more Christians would be produced. They were not afraid of death. Even though they were cruelly persecuted, they were still able to

testify strongly for the Lord. When others saw them taking turns being killed, they thought these ones were crazy! However, this is the power of the gospel. Today the Lord is calling men to forsake themselves to be martyrs for the Lord. The Lord is now asking, "Where are the ones who are beside themselves?" Can you answer, "Here am I. I am absolutely for You"?

CHAPTER TEN

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

CWWN, The (Set 2) Vol. 37:

General Messages (1), Chap. 16

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

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

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR

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

We need to realize that the power to offer oneself to God comes through His appearance; it comes from His revelation. Those who talk about consecration are not necessarily consecrated themselves. Not everyone who preaches consecration or understands the doctrine of consecration is a consecrated

person. Only those who have seen God are consecrated persons. God appeared to Abraham, and the immediate issue was that Abraham built an altar to God. The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and Paul immediately asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). A turning point in our spiritual life does not come through our decision to do something for God; it does not come as a result of our resolving to do this or that for God. It comes when we see Him. When we meet God, a radical change takes place in our life. We can no longer do what we did in the past. When we meet God Himself, we have the power to deny ourselves. The matter of denying one's self ceases to be optional when we have met God. His appearance makes a person unable to go on by himself; it forces him to not live by himself anymore. God's appearance brings with it inexhaustible power. Such an appearance will alter the whole course of a person's life. For a Christian, the power to live for God is based on his vision of God. Oh! It is not our decision to serve the Lord that enables us to serve Him. It is not our will to build an altar that produces an altar. An altar is built when God comes to a man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LIFE OF THE TENT

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

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

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

Some people ask, "If I give my all to God, do I have to sell all my possessions and dispose of all my money? If I consecrate myself to God, how many chairs and tables may I have in my home and how many garments in my wardrobe?" Some people are truly perplexed over such questions. But we need to remember that we have two lives. We have a life to live before God, and we also have a life to live in the world. In our life before God everything

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

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

THE SECOND ALTAR

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

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

have forsaken the altar and are no longer consecrated. We cannot return to the second altar and say to God that our life is being lived for Him.

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

THE RECOVERY OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

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

What happened to Abraham after his recovery? Genesis 13:18 says, "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord." Hebron is the place of fellowship with God; it is the place of eternal and continuous fellowship. Abraham dwelt in Hebron, and in Hebron he built another altar for God. If we want to be in fellowship with God, we can never forsake the altar. May He be gracious to us and cause us to see the importance of consecration so that we may live a life of the altar and the tent!