

# LIFE AND SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

## Message One

### Introduction and Being Watchful in Life

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:1-13

#### I. Introduction:

- A. A Christian needs to pay attention to, to focus on, both life and service:
- B. We need to be balanced in our focus—e.g. the two aspects of the Spirit:
  - 1. There is the danger of extremes in both aspects.
  - 2. We need both life and service to build up the Body of Christ and end this age.
- C. The Lord will evaluate all of us at His judgment seat, regarding both life and service.

#### II. Being watchful in life—Matt. 25:1-13:

- A. The first parable in Matthew 25, concerning the ten virgins, stresses life:
  - 1. Virgins love the Lord, fellowship with Him, and live a pure life.
  - 2. They take their lamps and go out of this dark age to meet the Bridegroom.
- B. Five crucial matters in this parable:
  - 1. “Lamps” (v. 1) signify the spirit of the believers to contain the Spirit as the oil.
  - 2. “Vessels” (v. 4) signify the soul of the believers to be saturated with the Spirit.
  - 3. “Oil” (v. 4) signifies the Spirit of God to shine as light from within the believers.
  - 4. “Buy” (v. 9) means to pay a price for the filling of the Spirit in the believers’ soul.
  - 5. “Watch” (v. 13) means to be filled with the Spirit—all day long, continually.
- C. God’s economy involves dispensing, mingling, and expression:
  - 1. We need to continually receive the dispensing of the Spirit as the oil—cf. Eph 3:16.
  - 2. God will mingle Himself with us (Christ making His home [v. 17]) for His expression.
- D. We can practically remain in the dispensing and be watchful in life by:
  - 1. Being revived every morning; we need a fresh start every day.
  - 2. Praying unceasingly throughout the day (1 Thes. 5:18) to supply the church for building.

### **Ministry Excerpts for Message One**

Before God, a Christian needs to pay attention to growth in life and usefulness in service. These are two important matters. In Matthew 25 there are two parables: the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the master distributing talents to his slaves. The parable of the virgins is related to life, whereas the parable of the talents is related to service. When we live before the Lord, we love Him, pursue Him, follow Him, fellowship with Him, and await His return; in this respect we are all virgins. According to chapter 25, the ten virgins have two characteristics: first, they have oil in their vessels with their lamps (v. 4); second, they go forth out of the world of darkness to meet the bridegroom (v. 6). Spiritually speaking, a believer should be full of oil, the Spirit, and apart from the world. We should be those who are going out of the dark world to meet our Bridegroom.

The parable of the talents is related to our need to be slaves who are faithfully serving the Lord. We are a virgin to the Lord on the one hand, and we are a slave to the Lord on the other hand. We are a virgin-slave. According to our life, our love for the Lord, and our relationship with Him, we are a virgin. According to our service to the Lord and our commission from Him, we are a slave. We should receive His commission faithfully, because He has delivered His possessions to us. (*Taking Christ as Our Person for the Church Life*, ch. 13)

#### **PARABLE FOR WATCHFULNESS**

We Christians firstly are virgins. Being a virgin is not a matter of work, service, or activity, but a matter of life. Moreover, we are not only virgins, but chaste, pure virgins. Being a virgin is not a matter of what we do or are able to do; it is absolutely a matter of what we are. Whether we are male or female, we are virgins. Although I am an old man, I conduct myself like a virgin. I would never sell my status as a virgin. Even before the enemy, I am a virgin.

Verse 1 says that the virgins took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. Lamps signify the spirit of the believers (Prov. 20:27), which contains the Spirit of God as the oil (Rom. 8:16). The believers shine with the light of the Spirit of God from within their spirit. Thus, they become the light of the world, like a lamp shining in the darkness of this age (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15-16) to bear the testimony of the Lord for the glorification of God. Thus, as virgins we do not take weapons for fighting or sports equipment for playing, but lamps for testifying, shining, and enlightening. In our hand is a lamp shining for the Lord's testimony.

#### **THE FIVE PRUDENT ONES TAKING OIL IN THEIR VESSELS**

Verse 4 says, "But the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Man is a vessel made for God (Rom. 9:21, 23-24), and man's personality is in his soul. Hence, vessels here signify the soul of the believers. The five prudent virgins not only have oil in their lamps, but also take oil in their vessels. Having oil in their lamps signifies that they have the Spirit of God dwelling in their spirit (Rom. 8:9, 16), and taking oil in their vessels signifies that they have the fullness of the Spirit of God saturating their souls.

We need to be very clear about the lamps and the vessels. According to the Hebrew text, Proverbs 20:27 says that the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord. Within the lamp is the oil, the Holy Spirit. The New Testament reveals that our spirit is the place the Holy Spirit indwells. According to Romans 9, we are vessels made by God. Our being, our personality, is in our soul. Therefore, the vessel in this verse signifies our soul. Through regeneration we have the Spirit of God in our spirit. This causes our lamp to burn. But the

question is whether or not we have the extra portion of the Holy Spirit filling our soul. Although we have the oil in our lamp, we need the extra portion of the oil in our soul. This signifies that the Spirit must spread from within our spirit to every part of our soul. Then in our soul we shall have an extra amount of the Holy Spirit. If we have this extra portion, we are prudent. If we do not have it, we are foolish. In other words, if we are indifferent to the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we are foolish. If we are wise, we shall pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I want to have Your Spirit not only in my spirit, but also in my soul. Lord, I need the infilling of the Spirit. I need the extra portion of the Holy Spirit to fill my entire being." Without this extra portion of the Spirit, we cannot be watchful or ready. In order to be watchful and ready, we need the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the spreading of the Spirit Himself from our spirit to every part of our inward being.

#### **THE FOOLISH WANTING TO BORROW OIL FROM THE PRUDENT**

Verse 8 says, "And the foolish said to the prudent, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." This word implies that even after resurrection the foolish believers will still need the fullness of the Spirit of God. "Going out" proves that the lamps of the foolish virgins are lighted, having oil in them, but not having an adequate supply. The foolish virgins represent the believers who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God dwelling in them, but who are not filled with the Spirit of God so that He may saturate their whole being.

#### **THE ANSWER OF THE PRUDENT**

Verse 9 says, "But the prudent answered, saying, Lest there be not enough for us and for you, go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves." This indicates that no one can have the fullness of the Holy Spirit for others. We may borrow many things, but we cannot borrow the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This is like eating. No one can eat for you.

The prudent virgins told the foolish ones to go to those who sell and buy for themselves. Those who sell oil must be the two witnesses during the great tribulation, the two olive trees and the two sons of oil (Rev. 11:3-4; Zech. 4:11-14). During the great tribulation, the two sons of oil, Moses and Elijah, will come to help God's people.

To buy indicates the need of paying a price. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is obtained at a cost, such as giving up the world, dealing with the self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss for Christ. If we do not pay this price today, we must pay it after resurrection. Those who do not pay the price do not have the extra portion of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, the foolish virgins will realize that they need to love the Lord with all their heart and soul. They will see that they need to give up the world and deal with the self.

#### **WATCHING**

Verse 13 concludes, "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour." Chapter 24:40-44 refers to the rapture only of the living believers who are ready. Chapter 25:1-13 is needed to cover the rapture of the dead and resurrected ones. When we read this portion of the Word, we see how watchful we need to be. To be watchful and ready is a very serious matter.

No other book warns us as often as the book of Matthew does. I can testify before the Lord that for more than forty years I have been warned by this book. Whenever I have been a little careless, I have remembered the warnings contained in Matthew. Yes, we all are virgins, but are we foolish or prudent? We all need to answer this question for ourselves.

Whether we are prudent or not depends on whether or not we have the extra portion of the Holy Spirit in our vessel. (*Life-study of Matthew*, ch. 64)

## LIFE AND SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

### Message Two

#### Being Faithful in Service

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:14-30

#### III. The second parable in Matthew 25, concerning the distribution of talents, stresses service:

- A. "Slaves" in this parable (vv. 14-30) signify believers viewed from the aspect of service:
  - 1. "Talents" (v. 15) signify spiritual gifts, skills, abilities; we all have gifts and are gifts.
  - 2. The filling of the Spirit in life enables us to use our spiritual gift in service (work).
  - 3. "Trading" with the talents (v. 16) signifies using the gift the Lord has given us.
  - 4. At the end of this age, the Lord will "settle accounts" (v. 19) with us at His judgment seat.
- B. "Economy" and "stewardship"; God's purpose and His need; His operation and our cooperation.
- C. God loves men (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4), and this God is in us; thus we should and can love men!:
  - 1. Men are the living stones for God's building, the living members of Christ's Body.
  - 2. So, we should contact unbelievers, new believers; our hands should be filled with people.
  - 3. And there is a connection here with the Lord's coming back—Matt. 24:14; cf. Rom. 11:25.
- D. A sobering, God-ordained criterion for the Lord's judging, at His coming back:
  - 1. Some questions He may ask us, which we should be governed by today.
  - 2. The "deeds done in our body" now (2 Cor. 5:10) are meaningful to the Lord.
- E. The importance of prayer and the practicality of consecration for being faithful in service:
  - 1. Persevering prayer is the practical base for our service; this gives the Lord the "tracks" to carry out His work of increase and spread for the building up of the Body; we must pray, then go.
  - 2. Regarding consecration, our spirit and soul go wherever our body goes—Rom. 12:1-11.
  - 3. As both virgins and slaves, we must renew our loving consecration daily, presenting our bodies.
  - 4. There is a danger, however, especially for the one-talented slave:
    - a. He hid his talent in "the earth" (Matt. 25:25), thus becoming involved with the world.
    - b. Depositing the master's money with the "money changers" (v. 27) signifies using the Lord's gift to save people and to minister His riches to them.
    - c. The Lord is a businessman; "interest" is the profitable result of the faithful use of our gift.
  - 5. Whoever we are, may we prayerfully and consecratedly be faithful in service for God's building.

## Ministry Excerpts for Message Two

### THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

The principle related to function in this passage of the Word is that because we have been saved, we have received something, perhaps not five talents but two, or perhaps not two talents but one. If you say that you have not received even one, then you must not be saved. If we are saved, we have received at least one talent. Now we must go to trade, to use what we have received. This will produce something more. Five will produce five, and we will have ten. Two will produce two, and we will have four. At least one will produce one, and we will have double. The principle here is simply to function.

However, the one who received one talent did not function. Verse 18 says that he dug in the earth. Do you like to trade, or do you like to dig? It is easy to trade, but to dig is rather hard. Many brothers and sisters who do not function do a hard job day by day. They do the digging, not the trading. Those who do the digging are very busy not in the heavens but in the earth in order to hide their talent. The reason many Christians do not function is that they hide what they have. In their school they may never tell people what they have received of the Lord, and in the church meetings they also hide what they received of the Lord. The principle here is that we need to use the function that we have received. It should be normal for us to use it, not to hide it. We must encourage all the brothers, even the younger ones and the new converts, to use what they have received of the Lord and not to hide it. (*Functioning in Life as Gifts Given to the Body of Christ*, ch. 1)

### CONTACTING PEOPLE

The first item of service in the new way is to contact people, that is, to pay the price to contact people for the Lord. First, we must shepherd and feed the Lord's sheep. The Lord asked Peter three times in John 21:15-17, "Do you love Me?" When Peter answered, "Lord, I love You," the Lord replied the first time with "Feed My lambs." Then the second time He replied, "Shepherd My sheep," and the third time He replied, "Feed My sheep." To shepherd is to care for in a general way, like the shepherd caring for the flock. To feed is special; it is like the mother taking care of her child. Perhaps there is a person that is very young or is involved in difficulties. There is the need to take care of him in a special way. When we preach the gospel by visiting people and bring people to salvation, they become the Lord's lambs, and there is the need for feeding. For those saints who have been around longer, who are more mature, there is the need of shepherding. Then there are those who are involved in special difficulties; they need the special feeding.

In the church there is a great need for people to rise up to do the work of shepherding and feeding. This does not mean that we have to find some clergy-like pastors or preachers to do the job while all the other saints remain in their own jobs, raise their families, come for worship on Sunday, and contribute a little money. If that is the case, what is recorded in Ephesians 4 where all the saints participate in the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ will never be realized. To build up the Body of Christ, all the members have to exercise their functions. This is the new way that we are taking. I hope that, as the Bible shows, every brother and sister would bear some responsibility. At present there are over six thousand people meeting in the district meetings in Taipei. But there are over twenty thousand that need to be cared for. If everyone would care for one person per week, every week we could care for six thousand

people. In a month with four weeks, we could care for all twenty thousand people. This is very effective. We would like to present this burden before all of you. Let us take up this burden before the Lord together.

When you go to shepherd and to visit others, there are proper ways to do it. You should not go just to socialize. For this reason, you yourselves must first be experienced in life. Second, you must study the truth well. This is not too difficult among us. Every week we are handling the truth. As long as we would learn, we can all pick up something. With the experience in life and the expression in truth, you are well equipped to visit people. When you go to visit people, you will know where they are immediately after talking to them. Perhaps a certain one has only believed in the Lord in an outward way; within he has not touched the Lord and has no experience of salvation. He is like the electric light bulb that is installed but not connected; there is still no electricity. You have to be like an electrician, helping him to connect the electricity. You must help him to touch the Lord within and to have the experience of salvation. Then you have to help him to know how to call on the Lord, how to pray-read the Lord's Word, how to have fellowship with the Lord, how to love the Lord, how to remember the Lord by breaking bread, how to consecrate himself, etc. You must help him item by item. All these require that you have the experience and the truth.

Paul said in Acts 20, "How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and to teach you publicly and from house to house....For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God....Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears" (vv. 20, 27, 31). Here Paul set up a good example for us. I hope that we all would receive the burden to visit people from house to house, supplying people on the one hand, helping them to grow in life, and teaching people the truth on the other hand to show them according to the Bible what kind of life God wants us to live. Although a Gentile person may repent, believe, be baptized, and be saved, yet he still knows nothing concerning the spiritual things. There is the need for some to teach him. It is not enough for him to come only on Sunday to listen to a message. This is not to mention the fact that sometimes he does not even come at all. This is why we need to care for and to teach people so that they can be brought on step by step. (*The Perfecting of the Saints and the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, pp. 41-48.)

#### FOOTNOTES FROM THE RECOVERY VERSION OF THE HOLY BIBLE

**Matt. 25:14, footnote 3 "slaves"** Slaves signify believers viewed from the aspect of service (1 Cor. 7:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:1; James 1:1; Rom. 1:1). The believers' status in relation to Christ is of two aspects: in life they are virgins living for Him; in service, in work, they are His purchased slaves serving Him.

**Matt. 25:15, footnote 1 "talents"** In the parable of the virgins, oil signifies the Spirit of God (vv. 3-4), whereas in this parable, talents signify spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4; 1 Pet. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:6). For life we need oil, the Spirit of God, even His filling, that we may be enabled to live the virgin life for the Lord's testimony; for service, for work, we need the talent, the spiritual gift, that we may be equipped as a good slave to accomplish what the Lord intends to accomplish. The filling of the Spirit in life enables us to use the spiritual gift in service (work), and the spiritual gift in service matches the filling of the Spirit in life, that we may be a perfect member of Christ.

**Matt. 25:18, footnote 1 “one”** The main emphasis in this parable is on the one-talented one, who received the smallest gift. It is very easy for the least gifted to mistreat or ignore their gift.

**Matt. 25:18, footnote 2 “dug”** The earth signifies the world; thus, dug in the earth signifies becoming involved in the world. Any association, any involvement, with the world, even a little worldly talk, will bury the gift we have received from the Lord.

**Matt. 25:18, footnote 3 “hid”** Hid his master's money signifies rendering the Lord's gift useless, letting it lie waste under the cloak of certain earthly excuses. To make any excuse for not using the Lord's gift is to hide the gift. This is always the danger with the one-talented ones, those who consider their gift to be the smallest.

**Matt. 25:21, footnote 4 “joy”** The joy of your master signifies the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming kingdom. This refers to inward satisfaction, not to outward position. To participate in the Lord's joy is the greatest reward, better than the glory and position in the kingdom.

**Matt. 25:23, footnote 2 “well”** This is the same reward the Lord gave to the five-talented one. Although the gift given to the two-talented one was smaller than that given to the five-talented one, the Lord's appraisal and reward were the same in both cases. This indicates that the Lord's appraisal and reward are not related to the size and quantity of our work, but to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent. The same appraisal and reward would have been given to the one-talented one if he had been as faithful.

**Matt. 25:27, footnote 1 “deposited”** This signifies the use of the Lord's gift to save people and to minister His riches to them.

## LIFE AND SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

### Message Three

#### Abiding in the Vine and Bearing Fruit in John 15

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-11

#### IV. We need to see the whole picture in John 15:

- A. Abiding in the vine is the crucial base and foundation, but it is not the goal:
  - 1. The root and the sap of the vine are the source and the supply of life.
  - 2. Staying with the Lord to enjoy Him as the bountiful supply is for our growth in life.
  - 3. The ultimate goal is to bear fruit for the glorification of the Father (“the Husbandman”); much fruit brings much glory; and the ones brought forth are for the glorious building.
- B. A striking word: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit”—v. 2:
  - 1. There is the possibility of abiding, “enjoying” but not bearing any fruit.
  - 2. There can be a problem with our enjoyment of Christ:
    - a. If we are not bearing fruit, this is evidence that we have lost our enjoyment.
    - b. Consequences will result now and in the next age; the “outer darkness”—Matt. 25:30.
  - 3. What is “My joy” and “your joy made full” in John 15:11—cf. Matt. 25:21, 23.
- C. The example of the apostle Paul—Eph. 3:2, 8; Phil. 1:7; 1 Cor. 15:10-11; 1 Thes. 2:19-20.
- D. Barrenness is a very subtle enemy to us in the Lord’s move today:
  - 1. Do not spiritualize “fruit.”
  - 2. If we do not bear fruit, beget spiritual children, there is not much meaning to our church life; without fruit-bearing there is no practical church life.
  - 3. Many do not have real joy because they are barren; they are saved, yet “cut off.”
  - 4. Barrenness can be conquered only in desperation, which is a life-or-death attitude.
  - 5. With the kingdom in view, we would never settle for mere status quo and barrenness!
  - 6. Thank the Lord for a frank word; but we should not be condemned; we should be honest; we should open to the Lord, enjoy Him, pray much, and simply allow Him to flow out to all men.
- E. “Lord, bring us into the complete circuit of John 15:1-11”: abiding (especially through prayer), bearing fruit, the resulting joy for the Lord, His joy for us, and much glory for the Father.

### Ministry Excerpts for Message Three

If we do not bear fruit, there is a danger that we will be cut off from the vine tree. This does not mean that we will suffer eternal perdition but that we will lose our enjoyment of Christ as our portion. This proves that if we do not bear fruit, there is a problem with our enjoyment of Christ. This is just like a couple who cannot bring forth children. They may say that they do not feel anything is wrong with them, but actually something is wrong that is preventing them from having children. They may even go to some doctors to find out what is wrong with them. This is an illustration of our problem of barrenness. We may feel there is nothing wrong with us, but based upon the fact that we have not borne fruit, we must realize that something is wrong with our enjoyment of Christ. If we do not have fruit, our so-called enjoyment of Christ can be a self-deceiving matter. It is not so real.

We need to get some companions, at least two or three, with whom we can labor in the gospel. We should never work by ourselves. Instead, we should work by fellowshiping with our companions. The trouble is that we do not like to have fellowship with others. We are self-contented, and some of us may think that we are omnipotent and all-capable. But according to my over sixty years of experience, none of us is omnipotent. Each of us is very limited in his capacity and ability. You need the help, and I need the help. My helpers in the work know how much I need them. I purposely fellowship with them and ask them questions that I may learn. I want to be taught by them. If there is no fellowship among us in our work, there cannot be the real one accord. We need to labor in oneness through thorough fellowship. Because of our unwillingness to have thorough fellowship, we are dead, lukewarm, and barren. We must get some companions and open up ourselves to fellowship with them to the uttermost.

We should fear to be cut off from the enjoyment of Christ's supply in this age (John 15:2a). If we are barren, we should not believe that we are continuously enjoying Christ. We may feel that we are, but actually we are not. Our enjoyment of Christ has become stale. We are enjoying Him in the same way that we were years ago with no improvement. The Lord said that if a branch does not bear fruit, the Father will cut it off. We should have some fear regarding this.

We must carry out the practice of the vital groups in desperation. We should pray desperately for the Lord to give us some fruit and remove our barrenness. This should be a matter of life or death with us. If we are desperate, I believe that the fish will come to us. The Lord will send them to us. But if we are indifferent, no fish will come to us. The hardest thing is for us to be made desperate. The most crucial thing for us today is to be desperate to conquer the deadness of Sardis, the lukewarmness of Laodicea, and the barrenness dealt with by the Lord in John 15. (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, pp. 36-38, 40-42)

Many Christians love John 15 because it teaches us how to abide in the vine, how to enjoy the riches of Christ. However, in verse 16 the Lord says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." The Lord did not choose us without a purpose. His choosing was for His appointing. He has appointed us for three things: first, we should go forth; second, we should bear fruit; and third, our fruit should remain. In this matter we have no choice; the Lord requires that we accept our appointment.

Some say that they are busy and do not have any time. This is not true. If our house were on fire, we would not say: "I am too busy. I do not have time to take care of the fire." What we have time for depends upon what we consider is more important. But regardless of

whether we have the time or not, whether it is in season or out of season, we have no choice. It is not up to us. He is the Master, and He has charged and is still charging us to go forth and bear fruit. He will not let us go. This is very serious. If we do not bear fruit, we will be cut off from the enjoyment of the riches of the vine (John 15:2a, 6).

#### BEING SERIOUS AND DESPERATE TO GO FORTH AND BEAR FRUIT

If we see that we have been charged by the Lord, we will have a heart to carry out a successful contact with the sinners. We must be serious, earnest persons. We all have to do a job to make a living. The sisters, as wives and mothers, have to take care of their households. But if they have seen that they have been charged by the Lord, their hearts will not be fully occupied with their households. Although they take care of their responsibilities properly, their deep desire should be to go out to visit people with the gospel, to contact and gain sinners.

The Lord is hungry for sinners. In John 4 He told His disciples: "I have food to eat of which you have no knowledge" (v. 32). The Lord's food was to gain the sinners. When He gained that immoral woman, she became His food. That satisfied His hunger. We all must realize that the Lord is hungry and is waiting to be satisfied.

We have to realize that we have been charged by our Master, and then we must be serious and desperate to go forth, to bear fruit, and to keep our fruit. This depends upon the Lord's appointment in John 15:16. This appointment indicates that He has prepared an environment to accommodate our every need so that we can bear remaining fruit. The Lord has prepared and arranged all of our situations so that we can carry out our appointment. Verse 16 is like a mother telling her children, "I have cooked that you should eat." If they do not eat, they will miss the opportunity. Today, many Christians are missing the opportunity. The Lord has appointed; He has arranged everything. Especially for those of us in the United States—what a good appointment we have received! We have not been appointed to live alone on a high mountain. People are everywhere. Furthermore, He has given many of us jobs for only eight hours a day, five days a week. Every evening we have three or four hours, and every weekend we have two days. This is according to the Lord's arrangement and appointment. In addition, the Lord has given us many relatives. There is an environment and situation that is just right for us to gain people. When we meet the Lord, we will have no excuse because, by His appointment, He has prepared the environment with all the situations that we need for bearing fruit. The only problem is that we would not go forth. We must take this very seriously. It is not a matter of merely fulfilling our duty; it is a matter of life or death. We must be serious, earnest, and desperate to go forth to gain people for the Lord. (*The Exercise and Practice of the God-Ordained Way*, pp. 39-43.)

The Greek word for *go forth* means *to depart*, implying to leave for another place; hence, it is rendered *go forth*. It is the same Greek word as that for *go* in 14:4 and 16:5. The fruit borne by going forth in this way does not denote the virtues of the fruit-bearer's character, such as the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer's living, mentioned in Gal. 5:22-23, but it denotes the believers produced by the fruit-bearer. This corresponds with the subject of this section, 12:20—17:26, which is Christ's multiplication. The virtues we possess through our abiding in the Lord cannot be counted as Christ's multiplication. Only the believers that we produce in the Lord are the tangible multiplication of Christ. The Father's house in ch. 14, the true vine in this chapter, and the man-child in ch. 16 are all related to the multiplication of Christ. (John 15:16, footnote 2 from the *Recovery Version of the New Testament*)



## LIFE AND SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

### Message Four

#### Going Forth in Life to Bear More Fruit—the Increase and Spread of the Vine

Scripture Reading: John 15:12-17

#### V. The nature of the vine—to absorb riches, flourish, bear fruit, and spread:

- A. Peter's view in 2 Peter 1:5-8—growth issues in fruitfulness, work, movement.
- B. We have been “chosen” by the Lord and “set” in the vine (Himself) to “go forth and bear fruit”—John 15:16a:
  - 1. We have been chosen by the Lord for a specific purpose—to bear fruit.
  - 2. For this, we have been grafted (“set”) into Him as the rich supply, the true vine.
  - 3. However, we should not be stationary; we need to go forth and bear more fruit:
    - a. “Go forth” implies going to another place; the vine spreads, and we spread with it.
    - b. The Lord Jesus is the One who was always going out, going forth—Matt. 9:35; 13:3; Luke 4:43-44; John 10:16; cf. Matt. 8:20.
    - c. We go in His going, and He goes in our going; if we do not go, there is a controversy.
    - d. We need to avoid becoming a “Dead Sea,” with inflow but no outflow; it is our choice.
    - e. We also need to avoid becoming “land-locked” in one place, in our “comfort-zone.”
  - 4. We have been chosen to go forth and bear fruit because God desires a house and Christ wants a Body; for this, He needs many materials, many members to be gained as the very increase of Christ, and then to be built up.
- C. For this building work, the fruit we bear should “remain”—John 15:16b:
  - 1. Again, this requires our consecration and our unceasing prayer; this is not theoretical; our body, soul, spirit, time, and energy are all required.
  - 2. Our hands full of people will save us from the self, the world, and many other things.
  - 3. The place to carry on this building work with the remaining fruit is in the homes:
    - a. Ephesians 4:16 speaks of “joining” and “knitting” for the building up of the Body.
    - b. The home is the best place for the fine, intimate, and practical knitting to transpire.
    - c. The Lord needs a group of consecrated ones to pray, enjoy, grow, bear fruit, go, and build.
  - 4. May we be utterly and practically one with the Lord for the growth, increase, and spread of the vine for the building up of His glorious Body.

## Ministry Excerpts for Message Four

### OUTFLOW AND INFLOW

The saints in all the churches should be encouraged to migrate. If the saints in a certain locality do not migrate, eventually that locality will become a "Dead Sea." The Dead Sea is a reservoir for the water from the river Jordan. Once the water from the Jordan reaches the Dead Sea it does not proceed any farther. If the church in a particular locality is to avoid becoming such a Dead Sea, a "canal" must be dug to allow the "water" to flow out. Perhaps ten percent of the saints in a locality may migrate each year. This will allow for the necessary outflow without devastating the church. Furthermore, if water is allowed to flow out, more water will flow in.

Using the illustration of a hose, we may say that every church should be like a hose that is open at both ends. When a hose is open in this way, water is able to flow in and out. But if water is not able to flow out of a hose, nothing more will be able to flow in. How much water flows in depends on how much flows out. If we want the church to increase, there must be the outflow. Only when there is an outflow can the church in a certain locality be preserved from becoming a Dead Sea. (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 180-181)

### THE LORD'S PURPOSE AND HIS COMMAND

The Lord said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." This choosing transpired in eternity past. Before the foundation of the world, the Lord chose us in Himself (Eph. 1:4). Then in time we were born, and eventually we heard the gospel and believed. By this we know that we have been called, yet we must realize that we have also been appointed. In Greek the word "appointed" really means "set." The Lord set us in a certain position and in a particular environment. The Lord said, "I appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit." The Greek for "should" in this verse has two moods. One is the mood of purpose; the other is the mood of command. The word "that" denotes purpose, and the word "should" denotes command. We see the Lord's purpose, and we also have a command from the Lord. We should go forth, and we should bear fruit. These are commandments. The Lord set us in a certain position because He has a purpose—that we should go forth and bear fruit. Yet this is not only the Lord's purpose; it is His command—we should go forth and should bear fruit. Furthermore, the Lord continues, "and that your fruit should remain." How could our fruit remain? It depends upon us. We have to do a lot to carry out the Lord's commands. We should go forth, we should bear fruit, and our fruit should remain. Otherwise, the Lord's purpose cannot be accomplished, and His goal cannot be reached.

To bear remaining fruit is not easy, yet it is the Lord's command. If you do not go forth, you are disobeying the Lord's command. When the Lord comes, you will have to face Him and give Him an account. The Lord may ask, "How much fruit have you borne?" You may say, "Lord Jesus, it was too hard. I never went forth." In John 15, following abiding, that is, following the enjoyment of Christ, there is the matter of fruit-bearing. The Lord may say, "In John 15, I charged you that you should go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." If you do not go today, one day you will be judged by the Lord. Even if you do go forth, yet you would not endeavor to bear fruit, the Lord will condemn you.

To go forth is one thing; to bear fruit is another. To get married is one thing; to deliver a child is another. To get married is not hard; it is an enjoyment. But to deliver a child is a kind of suffering, travailing. The mother must suffer not only on the day of its

delivery; she has to suffer for nine months. After the child is born, she must spend all her time and energy so that it will grow and be healthy. Not only should her child “remain,” but it must remain in a proper way. The Lord Jesus spoke in a detailed way concerning bearing fruit because this is not a simple thing to do.

#### OUR PRAYER FOR REMAINING FRUIT

Now we must consider the remaining portion of verse 16: “That whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.” Again the Lord uses the word “that.” The Lord appointed us that we should go forth and bear fruit, that our fruit should remain, and that whatever we ask in His name, the Father may give us. The last point in this verse is to pray not merely in a general way but to “ask...in My name.” The Lord does not intend for us to ask for material things. The Lord’s intention is for us to pray purposely for remaining fruit. Even if we would go forth and bear fruit, and even if we were able to labor much to keep the fruit, our fruit still might not remain.

After doing so much, one thing remains—we have to ask. We may be able to preach, baptize, and bring people to the church meetings, but we cannot give life. Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow” (1 Cor. 3:6). We must admit our dependence upon the Lord. We can and should do a lot, but whatever we do will not produce the result. The result comes from the Lord’s direct work. However, His direct work depends upon our work. We have to go forth, we have to bear fruit, and we have to work that the fruit will remain. However, whatever we do without His additional doing means nothing.

The final thing that is needed is our asking. We have to pray in a particular way. To ask in His name is to ask for remaining fruit. We must pray: “Lord, I went forth. I worked hard. I preached the gospel to this one. I baptized him and visited him regularly for more than one year. I even brought him into the church meetings, but thus far, there is nothing promising that I can see within him. Lord, what is needed is Your work. I can do a lot, but I cannot give life. I may bring a hundred into the church life, but without Your additional work, the giving of life, my labor is vain.”

This does not mean our labor is not needed. Without Paul’s planting and Apollos’ watering, the Lord could not have given life. We must lay the base with our labor. Then the Lord can give life. We need to ask the Lord for remaining fruit. (*The Exercise and Practice of the God-ordained Way*, pp. 97-99)



## LIFE AND SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

### Message Five

#### The Ultimate Picture of Life and Service in Revelation 21-22 and Conclusion

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:1-3, 10-13, 21; 22:1-2, 14

#### VI. The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22, a sign for us today, is a city of life—with gates:

- A. God and the Lamb on the throne is the very source of life; He flows out as the river of water of life with the tree of life for the dwellers' enjoyable drinking and eating:
  - 1. It does not stop there; the Triune God wants to flow to them, through them, and out of them to all mankind, in every direction.
  - 2. There are three gates (God) on each of the four sides (mankind in the four corners of earth).
- B. The two significances of the gates are propagation and entering in:
  - 1. Before someone can enter in, someone must go out.
  - 2. The first to go out was God Himself; the Bible records His goings out to reach men.
  - 3. God has a big heart (1 Tim. 2:4); now, as the "mobile gates," we must go out with Him.
- C. God's desire for us is to grow, go out, bring in, build up, that He may be glorified:
  - 1. Eventually, the built-up New Jerusalem has the glory of God—Rev. 21:11.
  - 2. Haggai 1 shows the same progression; however, God's people got stuck.
  - 3. They cared for themselves and their houses, but had neither enjoyment nor profit.
  - 4. The prophet told them to consider their ways, remember God's unfinished house, go up to the mountain, get wood (men), and build His house for His glory; hallelujah, they acted!
- D. When we go out to bring men into the Triune God, they "enter the gates" to be built up with all of us as the jasper wall for God's glorious expression:
  - 1. Through regeneration and growth, we become God in life and nature.
  - 2. Through transformation and building, we become God in appearance.
  - 3. Through our going out with God, we become God in function—cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20.

#### VII. Conclusion:

- A. May we be a generation balanced in life and service, in life and numbers.
- B. As the Lord inwardly spreads within our being in life, may He outwardly spread around the earth through our service, thus gaining His glorious built-up Body.

### Ministry Excerpts for Message Five

**Rev. 21:12, footnote 2 “gates”** The gates are for communication, for coming in and going out. Twelve is the number of absolute perfection and eternal completion in God’s administration. Hence, twelve gates indicates that the communication in the New Jerusalem is absolutely perfect and eternally complete for God’s administration.

**Rev. 21:13, footnote 1 “east...north...south...west”** The city lies square (v. 16), with three gates on each of the four sides. The east side, at the front, toward the glory of the sunrise, ranks first; the north side, at the top, ranks second; the south side, at the bottom, ranks third; and the west side, at the rear, ranks fourth. The gates on the four sides face the four directions of the earth, signifying that the entrance into the holy city is available to all the peoples on earth. (Cf. the four heads of the river in Gen. 2:10-14.) That there are three gates on each side signifies that the three of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—work together to bring people into the holy city. This is indicated in the three parables in Luke 15 and implied in the Lord’s word in Matt. 28:19. To be baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is the real entrance into the holy city. That there are three gates on each of the four sides, three times four being twelve, also implies that the Triune God is mingled with man, the creature. (The number four signifies the creatures—4:6.)

**Rev. 21:21, footnote 2 “one pearl”** Each gate of the holy city is one pearl, signifying that the entrance to the city is unique and is once for all; that is, we can enter the city only through the once-for-all regeneration accomplished by Christ’s overcoming death and life-imparting resurrection.

#### THE REOPENED WAY TO PARTAKE OF THE TREE OF LIFE BEING UNIVERSALLY AVAILABLE TO THE FOUR DIRECTIONS OF THE EARTH

This entry reopens the way for the seekers to contact Christ as the tree of life. This reopened way to partake of the tree of life by entering into the New Jerusalem is universally available to the four directions of the earth with three gates on each of the four sides of the holy city, signifying that the processed and consummated Triune God is willingly open to receive the repentant sinners into the ultimate consummation of His eternal economy. We all have to learn to speak this kind of divine language. Such an entry today is available to all the people on this earth in four directions: east, north, south, and west. This is signified by the twelve gates. Three gates are on each of the four sides. The three gates signify the processed Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

In Luke 15 we see the operation of the Triune God to receive the repentant sinners to enter into the New Jerusalem. In this chapter the Son is the seeking One to seek the sinners, the Spirit is the sanctifying One to sanctify them unto God, and the Father is the receiving One. Right after receiving the repentant son in Luke 15, the father gave him the best robe, which signifies the objective Christ to cover us as our God-satisfying righteousness. He also gave his returning son a ring and sandals. The ring signifies the sealing Spirit to show that the accepted believer now belongs to the Triune God in His ultimate consummation of His eternal economy. The sandals signify the power of God’s salvation to separate the believer from the dirty earth. Finally, the father killed the fattened calf for his son. This calf signifies the subjective Christ for our enjoyment of Him.

This is why we have to go out with God to the four directions of the earth to be the gates, bringing God with us to present to people. This is why we have to go to Russia to the

north, to Africa to the south, to Malaysia to the east, and to South America to the west. The Lord is doing this among us to spread His economy. This Triune God today is willing to receive any repentant sinner to come and enter into the New Jerusalem through such an entry which was established by Christ through His death and resurrection. (*The Application of the Interpretation of the New Jerusalem to the Seeking Believers*, pp. 24-25)

#### **THE PURPOSE OF GOSPEL PREACHING BEING TO BRING MATERIALS FOR THE BUILDING OF GOD'S**

Haggai 1:7 through 9 says, "Thus says Jehovah of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it and will be glorified, says Jehovah. You looked for much, and yet it amounted to little; and when you brought it home, I blew on it. Why? declares Jehovah of hosts. Because of My house that lies waste while you each run to your own house." In Christianity there is much teaching to push people to do gospel work. However, the purpose of this gospel work is only to win souls. If we come back to the picture in Haggai, we will see that God's intention to bring in people is not merely on the negative side, to save their fallen soul from hell. Rather, it is something positive. God's intention is to bring more materials for the building of His house. We need God's salvation not only because we are fallen but because God has an eternal purpose to accomplish, and for this purpose there is the need for many persons as material. Therefore, we need to bring more people to the Lord as the materials.

The type of the temple is a clear picture of the building of the church. In the Old Testament time the people of Israel were charged to go to the mountain to bring material for the building of God's house. This type signifies that we must go out to reach unbelievers for the building of the house of God. If we have this understanding, aim, and burden in reaching people, our results will be one hundred percent different. We are not going out only to bring souls to be saved; we are going out to bring people as the dear, precious materials for the building of God's temple.

#### **OUR NEED TO BE BALANCED IN LIFE AND NUMBERS**

The brothers and sisters who have been raised up by the Lord in these days to take the way of His recovery must realize that we must always increase in two ways. We must increase in the measure of life, and we must also increase in the number of persons. This is to increase both in quality and quantity. To be increased in the growth and measure of life is to be increased in quality. However, quality always comes out of quantity. If we do not have the quantity, how can we have the quality? We need the quantity, the increase of numbers.

It is easy for Christians to be unbalanced and go to an extreme. We need to learn to be balanced in several directions. We need to grow in life, but we also must increase in number. Life always must grow in all the churches day by day, and our numbers also always must increase. Otherwise, we are unbalanced; we are a "cake not turned" (Hosea 7:8). (*Serving in the Meetings and in the Gospel*, pp. 53-54)

