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LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message One

The Kingdom of God— the Realm of the Divine Life and of the Divine Species

Scripture Reading: John 3:5-6; 18:36; 1:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:4

I. The kingdom of God is the realm of the divine life—John 3:3, 5, 15-16; 18:36; 1:12-13:

- A. The New Testament regards the life of God as *the* life, that is, as the only life that is truly life and that can rightly be considered as life—Eph. 4:18.
- B. The Lord Jesus came that we might have life, and for this He laid down His soul-life to release the divine life from within Him, and in His resurrection He imparted the divine life into God's chosen and redeemed people—Matt. 16:24-26; Luke 9:24-25.
- C. The kingdom of God is an organism constituted with God's life as the realm for His ruling, in which He reigns by His life and expresses Himself as the Divine Trinity in the divine life—John 3:5; 15:1-8, 26.
- D. The kingdom of God is God in Christ as the totality of life with all its activities—11:25; 10:10b; 14:6.
- E. The unique way to enter into the kingdom of God is to receive God as life and gain God Himself; this is regeneration—3:5, 16; 1 John 5:11-12:
 - 1. The kingdom of God is a divine realm to be entered into, a realm that requires the divine life; hence, for us to see or enter into the kingdom of God, God requires regeneration—John 3:3, 5.
 - 2. Because through regeneration we receive the divine life, the life of God, regeneration is the unique entrance into the kingdom of God—vv. 3, 5, 15.
 - 3. We have been born into the kingdom of God, and now the divine life in our spirit knows the kingdom of God—vv. 5-6.
- F. The sense of life is the feeling, the consciousness, of the divine life within us—Rom. 8:6; Eph. 4:18-19:
 - 1. The source of the sense of life is the divine life, the law of life, the Holy Spirit, Christ abiding in us, and God operating in us—Rom. 8:2, 10-11; Phil. 2:13.
 - 2. The sense of life involves both the feeling of death and the feeling of life and peace—Rom. 8:6; Isa. 26:3.
 - 3. The sense of life makes us know whether we are living in the natural life or in the divine life and whether we are living in the flesh or in the spirit—Rom. 8:6.
 - 4. In living a grafted life, we should live according to the principle of life, not according to the principle of right and wrong—Gen. 2:9, 16-17; 2 Cor. 11:2-3.
 - 5. If we would follow the sense of life, we need to live in a calm, steady, and unhurried way, living an ordinary life in the divine dispensing—John 14:27; 16:33; 1 Thes. 5:23; 2 Thes. 3:16; Isa. 30:15; 32:17.
 - 6. The sense of life guides us, governs us, controls us, and directs us—Luke 1:79; Rom. 3:17; Prov. 21:1.

- G. The believers receive the divine life by believing into the Son, in whom the divine life is and who Himself is life, and by being born of God, they are born of the Spirit—John 3:6.
- H. The believers have life not in themselves apart from God but in the organic union with the Lord; that is, they have life only in Christ—15:4-5; Rom. 8:2.
- I. The divine life in the believers is the life of the Body of Christ, and thus it is not an individual life but a corporate life, Christ as the life of the Body experienced and enjoyed in the Body—1 Cor. 12:26-27; Col. 3:4.
- J. For eternity the believers will experience and enjoy the life of God—Rev. 22:2.
- K. To grow in the divine life is the increase of the element of God, the increase of the stature of Christ, and the expanding of the Holy Spirit—Eph. 4:15-16.
- L. The growth in the divine life is the decrease of the human element, the breaking of the natural life, and the subduing of every part of the soul—1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; Col. 2:19.

II. The kingdom of God is not only the realm of the divine life and of the divine dominion but also the realm of the divine species, in which are all the divine things—John 3:3, 5; 18:36:

- A. In John 3 the kingdom of God refers more to the species of God than to the reign of God.
- B. God became man to enter into the human species, and man becomes God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to enter into the divine species—1:1, 12-14; 2 Pet. 1:4.
- C. In order to enter into the divine realm, the realm of the divine species, we need to be born of God to have the divine life and the divine nature—John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5-6; 2 Pet. 1:4:
 - 1. God created man not according to man's kind but in His image and according to His likeness to be God's kind, God's species—Gen. 1:26.
 - 2. The believers, who are born of God by regeneration to be His children in His life and nature but not in His Godhead, are more in God's kind than Adam was—John 1:12-13:
 - a. Adam had only the outward appearance of God without the inward reality—vv. 12-14.
 - b. We, the believers in Christ and the children of God, have the reality of the divine life, and we are being transformed and conformed to the Lord's image in our entire being—2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; 8:29.
 - c. Our second birth, regeneration, caused us to enter into the kingdom of God to become the species of God—John 3:3, 5-6.
 - d. All the children of God are in the divine realm of the divine species—1:12-13; 3:3, 5.
 - e. The believers are God-men in the divine species, that is, in the kingdom of God—1 John 3:1a; John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5.
- D. In the Gospel of John we see many aspects of the believers' living in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species:
 - 1. "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace"—1:16.
 - 2. "The water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life"—4:14b.

3. "He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me"—6:57b.
4. "As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love"—15:9.
5. "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full"—v. 11.
6. "He who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be manifested that they are wrought in God"—3:21.
7. "An hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness"—4:23-24.
8. "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you"—15:7.
9. "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you"—14:20.
10. "Love one another even as I have loved you"—15:12b.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

LIFE AND THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:20, 48; 7:21; 19:23-26; John 3:3; Rev. 22:1-2

The Scriptures, from beginning to end, associate life with authority. When man is first mentioned, these two matters are both introduced. In the first chapter of Genesis the question of authority is brought up. When God created man, He said, "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (v. 28). As soon as God created Adam, He bestowed on him the right to govern the entire earth. But Genesis 1 does not tell us all that transpired between God and man when man was created, so Genesis 2 supplements the record. Genesis 1 tells us that God wanted man to exercise dominion over the earth on His behalf, and it tells us also what sort of man this man must be who is to wield authority for God. He must be "in the image of God" (v. 27). The man who is to rule the earth for God must be a man according to God's "likeness" (v. 26)—that is, like God—so that when you have seen this man who is in dominion, you have, as it were, seen God Himself. The man who is to govern the earth for God is not merely one who wields authority; he is one who wields authority as God's representative. That is a tremendous thing. That is a transcendent thing, and it demands a transcendent life for its accomplishment. A supernatural task requires a supernatural life. It is necessary for us to grasp this point—that if man is to represent God and to exercise dominion for God on the earth, then man must possess a supernatural life. He cannot possibly bear so lofty a responsibility in the strength of his own natural life. If he is to wield divine authority and be a divine representative, he must possess the divine life.

Therefore, as soon as Genesis 1 has presented a man in the divine likeness and in the exercise of divine authority, Genesis 2 presents the tree of life. God was indicating that He would have man partake of the tree of life so that he might possess the divine life and thereby be enabled to fulfill the responsibilities of his ministry. If only the uncreated life of God could enter a human creature, then that human creature would be able to represent the Lord of creation, and that human creature would be able to rule the earth on behalf of the Lord of creation.

Do you see that at the very outset the Bible has linked authority and life? And at the end of the Bible these two are still linked. In the final two chapters of Revelation you see life issuing from the throne—and the throne represents authority (22:1-2). This matter of authority is entirely a matter of life. If you have the life, you have the authority. "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). If we are to have part in the kingdom, we must be born anew. We must become possessors of a life other than the life we have by nature. To use the Old Testament illustration, the Adam of Genesis 1 with his earthly life must receive the heavenly life of Genesis 2. Do not think that we must be born again because we have sinned. We must be born again because we need to possess a life that we do not possess by natural birth. Of course, sinners need to be born again, but even if man had not fallen, the new birth would still be necessary. Our Lord told Nicodemus he needed to receive the life of God so that he might become a partaker in the kingdom of God. Do you see that here again life and the kingdom are linked together?

You may say, "Oh, it's all very good, but it's all beyond me. I truly want to submit to the authority of God, but I simply can't. I'm too weak." Yes, we are all too weak, for we are all children of Adam; we are all children of dust; we are all very earthy. And earthen things are so fragile. With just a little knock they go to pieces. That is what we are like. And we are not just feeble creatures; we are fallen creatures. We are rebels by nature. We have no strength when it comes to submitting to God, but we have lots of strength when it comes to rebelling against Him. We have to confess that our natural life is a rebellious life, and it cannot possibly submit to God. The life we have by our natural birth is totally incapable of yielding to His authority. Our natural life is incapable, totally incapable, of coming under the government of God. When the disciples heard the Lord speaking about the kingdom, they heaved a sigh and said, "Who can?" And the Lord answered, "With men this is impossible."

Let me use an illustration here. A dog cannot fly. To a dog, flight is a sheer impossibility. But what a dog cannot do, a bird can do with ease. It is the simplest thing for a bird to soar up into the sky. The life of a dog is a life that cannot fly; the life of a bird is a life that flies with ease. The bird has the kind of nature that flies, and it would suffer intensely if you did not let it fly. As for the dog, if you want it to crawl into a hole, it can do that, or if you want it to climb up a hill, it can do that too. But if you ask it to fly, it simply cannot. It is a matter of life. Our corrupt natural life cannot be subject to God. We need another life for that. We need the life of God. The new birth is the coming of God into man so that what before was impossible to man now becomes possible. "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). Our problem with authority is no problem to God. When we have His life, it is the most natural thing to come under His authority. It is as spontaneous as for a bird to fly. If we suppress the divine life within us and do not let it submit to the divine authority, then we will suffer as a caged bird suffers. But when we submit to the divine control, we are wonderfully released. The more we submit, the more released we are until, as Isaiah puts it, we can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31). Brothers and sisters, do you see that the whole question of the kingdom is a question of life?

The demands of the kingdom are terrific, but the provision of the divine life is equal to all its demands. A full gospel presents the kingdom with its requirements. It also presents the precious blood to cleanse from defilement and the life to supply the power that makes us partakers in the kingdom. The gospel presents these three things—the kingdom, the blood, and the life. The kingdom makes its demands, but by virtue of the cleansing that comes through the precious blood and the power that comes through the divine life, even we who by nature are fallen creatures can live the kingdom life. Praise God, the very source of life is within us—even God Himself! The God on the throne who issues His demands is the One who meets His

own demands. From the throne He requires that we be subject to Him, and from within He supplies the life that can be subject to Him. This takes no toll of our strength, but it does require our cooperation. There is no need for us to do, but there is the need for us to let Him do. Otherwise, how could the demands of the kingdom ever be met? Listen to these lofty demands: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist him who is evil; rather whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to him who wishes to sue you and take your tunic, yield to him your cloak also" (Matt. 5:38-40). In my youth, when I read those words, I thought, "Oh, I could not possibly do that. And never in all my life will I be able, so I'll have to give up being a Christian. I can't be a false Christian, and I can't be a true one, so I can't be one at all. There's no way out." But a voice within me said, "You can't help being a Christian." I wanted to draw back, but I could not draw back; I wanted to go forward, but I could not go forward. Oh, the misery of it! For a long time I was in great perplexity, but one day God showed me that what I was trying to do was an utter impossibility, and He had never meant me to try. Imagine trying to attain to this: "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48). That day light dawned, and I was able to praise God that He was my Father, and that the Father's life in me could enable even me to be perfect. The question is not one of our ability to do but of giving our consent to His doing. He is impotent if we refuse consent. And that is where the trouble often lies—He is willing, but we are unwilling.

Do you see? The requirements of the kingdom can never be met by man, and God never expected man to meet them. The demands He makes, He Himself meets—and that is the grace revealed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament the law made its demands on man, but in the New Testament it is the kingdom that makes its demands. The demands of the kingdom are far more exacting than the demands of the law. The demands of the law proved how utterly impotent man was; now the demands of the kingdom prove, not how unable man is, but how able God is. There is no need for the demands of the kingdom to prove man's inability, for that has been conclusively proved by the demands of the law. Today the requirements of the kingdom serve to demonstrate the infinite ability of God. He has become our life that in us He may meet all the demands His kingdom makes upon us.

It is important to realize that God's life has been given for the sake of His kingdom. If we do not let Him set up His throne in our lives and assert His authority over us, His life cannot operate in us. God has put His life in us for the specific purpose of meeting the demands of His kingdom, and unless we allow Him to establish His kingdom in us, His life within us cannot function.

Let me use one or two illustrations. A sister came to me with her troubles, and after talking for a while, she said something like this: "I have really no problem except the problem of my own bad temper. I keep losing my temper with my husband and with my children. I have prayed and prayed about it, but the more I pray for victory, the more my temper gets the better of me. Why is it? I know that the Lord is my Savior; why doesn't He save me from my bad temper? I know the Lord hears prayer; why doesn't He hear my prayers about my bad temper? I know His life is mighty; why can't His mighty life overcome this little temper of mine?" All that she said was very reasonable. The Lord's life within us is a mighty life, and the Lord is a hearer and answerer of prayer. Why then is that little temper not overcome? Please do not misunderstand me when I say that the life of the Lord has been put within you and me to meet the needs of God's great kingdom, not to meet the need of our little temper. So I said to that sister, "Who is Lord of your life, you or the Lord? Is the authority in your hands or in His?" And when she reasoned again about her temper, I asked again, "Who is on the throne of your life, you or God?" When I pressed the point and refused her a loophole to escape, at long last the answer came: "I am in charge of my own life." Then I said, "Sister, what need

is there to say anything more? You are on the throne, and you want the Lord to help you. If He is not in the place of authority in your life, how can He do anything for you?"

That is our whole trouble today. Why cannot God's mighty life deal with our little temper? The question is not one of little problems or big problems; the question is this: Who is on the throne? You are always hoping that God will confine Himself to the throne in heaven while you occupy the throne in your life. Then you are bothered by your weaknesses and sins, so you call upon Him to help you. You cry out to Him, "Are You not the mighty One? Have You not promised to answer prayer? Can You bear to see Your child living a life of defeat?" Yes, He can bear to see you defeated, and He will let you go on being defeated until you realize that He has put His life within you in order to establish His kingdom within you.

You must let Him have the throne. Let Him take control. Let Him establish His kingdom in your life. Then every foe will be overcome. There will be no need then to pray about your weaknesses, for if He has His place on the throne of your life, every foe will be vanquished. In the Old Testament days, when Jehovah had His place as King over His people, all their enemies were subject to them, but when they refused to let Him have dominion, the enemies gained the ascendancy. Then all their cries were unavailing. Their enemies took the holy city, destroyed the temple, carried off the Ark, and took God's own people captive.

A brother once came to me and said something like this: "Why is it that my platform ministry is so weak? I pray a great deal about it. I sometimes fast and pray, and at times I spend a night in prayer before accepting a speaking invitation. Why am I still powerless?" My answer was the same as before: "Who is in control of your life?" That is the whole question. If you try to restrict God to the throne in heaven and refuse Him the throne in your life, all your cries for help will avail nothing. The question is not one of weakness or power; the question is one of the throne.

We read of the river of living water that "on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month" (Rev. 22:2). Wherever this river flowed, every need was met. But where did the river come from? "And he showed me a river of water of life, ...proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (v. 1). Life is always associated with the throne. When we yield to God's authority and let Him establish His kingdom in our lives, then we are maintained in victory and in fullness of life, for then we too are in authority. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1957, vol. 3, "The Kingdom and the Church," pp. 255-260*)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

Living the Kingdom Life by Living a Hidden Life

Scripture Reading: Isa. 45:15; 37:31;

Matt. 6:2-4, 5-15, 16-18; 14:22-23; Psalms 42:7; S. S. 4:12

I. We need to learn from the pattern of the Lord living a hidden life in His going up to the mountain privately to pray—Matt. 14:23; cf. Luke 6:12:

A. The Lord did not remain in the issue of the miracle with the crowds (the miracle of feeding five thousand men, apart from women and children), but He went away from them privately to be with the Father on the mountain in prayer—Matt. 14:14-23:

1. The Lord compelled the disciples to leave Him in order that He might have more time to pray privately to the Father—vv. 22-23.
2. He needed to pray privately to His Father who was in the heavens so that He might be one with the Father and have the Father with Him in whatever He did on earth for the establishing of the kingdom of the heavens; He did this not in the deserted place but on the mountain, leaving all the people, even His disciples, so that He might be alone to contact the Father.

B. We should treasure three phrases—*to be with the Father, on the mountain, and in prayer*:

1. To pray with others is good, but often we need to pray by ourselves; when we pray with others, we cannot enjoy the Lord as deeply as when we pray to the Lord privately.
2. Even the Lord Jesus told us that when we pray, we should shut our door privately and pray to the Father who sees in secret (6:6); then we have the sensation of how intimate He is to us and how close we are to Him.
3. We have to learn to leave the crowds, our family, our friends, and the saints in the church to go to a higher level on a "high mountain"; we have to get to a higher level, separated from the crowd and the earthly things, to be with the Father privately and secretly to have intimate fellowship with Him.

II. The principle of the kingdom people is that they live a hidden life, not performing their righteous deeds before men—deeds such as giving (vv. 2-4), praying (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18):

A. Regarding each of the three illustrations, the Lord used the word *secret* (vv. 4, 6, 18); our Father is in secret, and He sees in secret; the kingdom people, as children of the heavenly Father, must live in and care for the Father's secret and hidden presence.

B. The kingdom people, who live in an emptied and humbled spirit and walk in a pure and single heart under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, are not allowed to do anything in the flesh for the praise of men but must do all things in the spirit for the pleasing of their heavenly Father—5:3, 8.

- C. The effect of doing our righteous deeds in secret is that the flesh and the self are killed; if people in society and even in degraded Christendom are not allowed to make a show of their good deeds, they will not do them; the self loves to be glorified, and the flesh loves to be gazed upon.
- D. The saints who grow openly do not grow in a healthy way; we all need some secret growth in life, some secret experiences of Christ; we need to pray to the Lord, worship the Lord, contact the Lord, and fellowship with the Lord in a secret way.
- E. We should pray much yet not let others know how much we pray; if we pray every day without telling others or letting them know about it, it means that we are healthy and that we are growing.
- F. The kingdom people must have some experience of prayer in their private room, contacting their heavenly Father in secret, experiencing some secret enjoyment of the Father, and receiving some secret answer from Him—6:6.
- G. Any time we exhibit ourselves in our righteous deeds, we are not healthy; such an exhibition greatly frustrates our growth in life.
- H. Our human life loves to make a display, a public show, but God's life is always hidden; a hypocrite is one who has an outward manifestation without having anything within.
- I. We can never practice living a hidden life in secret in our natural life; it is possible only in the divine life, the life that does not enjoy making a show; if we are serious about being the kingdom people, we must learn to live by the hidden life of our Father.
- J. The universe indicates that God is hidden, that God is secret; if we love others by the love of God, this love will always remain hidden.

III. "Surely You are a God who hides Himself, / O God of Israel, the Savior"—Isa. 45:15:

- A. Believers may know God as the almighty One, as the righteous One, as the One full of grace and compassion, but as the One who hides Himself, He is unknown to them.
- B. God does countless things in the midst of His people and countless things in their personal lives, yet He conceals Himself:
 - 1. God likes concealment, but we like display; God does not crave outward manifestations, but we cannot be content without them.
 - 2. God was obviously with Elijah on Mount Carmel, but when God withheld His manifest presence, Elijah could not bear it—1 Kings 19:9-18:
 - a. God knew that Elijah wanted Him to be a God who would manifest Himself; he had not realized that God is a God who hides Himself.
 - b. God was not in the great and strong wind, He was not in the earthquake, and He was not in the fire; instead, God spoke to Elijah in a "gentle, quiet voice"—v. 12.
 - c. The fact that God spoke to Elijah in a gentle, quiet voice indicates that God was ushering Elijah into the New Testament age, in which God speaks to His people not by thundering but gently and quietly—cf. 1 John 2:27.
 - d. Elijah said to God that he was the only faithful one left, but God very gently answered Elijah by saying that He had reserved for Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal—1 Kings 19:18; cf. Rom. 11:2-5.

- e. Elijah had reckoned the situation only with what he could see, but God is a God who hides Himself; He had secretly reserved for Himself seven thousand overcomers who had not bowed the knee to Baal; God's activity was so hidden that not even the prophet Elijah knew anything about it.
- C. The Scriptures reveal that God has the kind of temperament that dislikes ostentation; He likes to work secretly rather than openly—Matt. 17:1-9; John 20:14-17; Luke 24:13-37; John 20:24-29; Isa. 39:2-8:
 - 1. "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"; it is a wonder and a mystery that the believers love One whom they have not seen—1 Pet. 1:8.
 - 2. Since the resurrection of the Lord, the chief discipline for His followers has come along the line of knowing Him as a God who hides Himself.
 - 3. Everything of God's economy with Christ as its centrality and universality is not in the seen realm but in the unseen atmosphere and realm of faith—2 Cor. 4:13, 16-18; 5:7; Heb. 11:1; Eph. 3:17a; 1 Tim. 1:4b.

IV. Psalm 42:7 says, "Deep calls unto deep":

- A. Others can respond deep within to only what issues from deep within us; anything that is not from the depths will never reach the depths of others.
- B. The kingdom life is a life in the depths, a life that can "take root downward and bear fruit upward"—Isa. 37:31; cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20.
- C. Because we have been planted in Christ as the reality of the good land, we need to take time to absorb Him (especially in our times with Him in the morning):
 - 1. Roots are the hidden life, whereas leaves are the manifest life; the trouble with many Christians is that, while there is much apparent life, there is very little secret life; in other words, there is the lack of a hidden life.
 - 2. If all your experiences are manifested, then all your growth is upward; there is no downward growth; if this is the case, you are a person who has only leaves without root, and you are on shallow ground.
 - 3. The Christian who parades all his virtues before men and who does not have anything in the depth of his being has no root; he will not be able to stand in the day of trial and temptation; may God work in us so that we can take root downward—Matt. 13:20-21; Luke 8:13.
- D. We need deep experiences of Christ like that of the apostle Paul—2 Cor. 12:1-4:
 - 1. Paul was caught away to the third heaven and caught away into Paradise, but he did not divulge this experience until fourteen years later; Paul's roots were deep beneath the soil.
 - 2. If we want to have Paul's work, then we need to have Paul's "root"; if we want to have Paul's outward conduct, then we need to have Paul's inner life; if we want to have Paul's manifest power, then we need to have Paul's secret experience.
 - 3. To be without root is to be without any hidden treasure; it is to be without any hidden life or hidden experiences; it is essential that some of our experiences remain covered; to uncover everything is to lose everything—cf. Isa. 39:2-8.

4. If our life has no depth, our superficial work will only affect other lives superficially; only "deep calls unto deep."
- E. A pure and beautiful spiritual life is derived from inward, hidden, and uninterrupted fellowship with God; hence, "He will bud like the lily / And will send forth his roots like the trees of Lebanon" (Hosea 14:5); this kind of life is capable of bearing much fruit (vv. 5-7).
- F. In order to live a life in the depths, it is necessary to have direct and intimate fellowship with the Lord; Song of Songs 4:12 says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, / A spring shut up, a fountain sealed":
 1. At this point in her spiritual progress, the Lord's loving seeker has become a garden for Christ's private satisfaction.
 2. She is not an open garden but an enclosed garden; all that she has is for her Beloved's delight and for no one else.
 3. If today's believers would close up a little more and seal up tighter, their work would become more prevailing.
 4. May the Lord grant us grace and do a deeper work in us through the cross so that we may strike deep roots and live a hidden life in the depths to fulfill God's requirements and satisfy His heart.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

TRAINING HIS DISCIPLES TO LEARN FROM HIM IN THE MIRACLE OF FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE

Taking the Five Loaves and Two Fish, Looking Up to Heaven, and Blessing Them

In the performing of the miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, He trained His disciples to learn from Him. In Matthew 11:29 the Lord told the disciples that they needed to learn from Him, indicating that He was their pattern.

Matthew 14:19 says that He took the five loaves and two fish and when He was going to bless them, He looked up to heaven. In other words, He blessed the food by looking up to heaven. *Looking up to heaven* indicates that He was looking up to His Father in heaven. This indicates that He realized the source of the blessing was not Him. He was the sent One. The sent One should not be the source of blessing. The sending One, the Father, should be the source of blessing.

Here is a great lesson for us to learn. Most readers of the Bible would pay attention to the miracle of creating something from nothing performed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 14. But we need to see the pattern that the Lord set up for us here. We need to remember that He looked up to the Father in heaven and blessed the five loaves and two fish in front of His disciples. After His blessing in this way, He told the disciples what to do. No doubt, what He did was a pattern for the disciples to learn from Him. According to this pattern, we have to realize that we are not the Sender but the ones sent by the Sender. Regardless of how much we can do, we should realize that we still need the blessing from the source, from our Sender, that we can pass on to the benefited ones. This is a big lesson that I want to stress.

A co-worker who is invited to speak somewhere may think that since he has been speaking for the Lord for many years, he knows how to speak. All of us need to drop this kind of attitude and realize that we are not the source. No blessing is of us. Regardless of how much we can do or how much we know what to do, we must realize that we need the Sender's blessing upon our

doing by trusting in Him, not in ourselves. Even when we take our meals, we should learn of the Lord to look up to the Father as the source. When we bless our food, we should bless it by looking up to the source of blessing.

Being One with the Father

His looking up to the Father in heaven indicated that as the Son on earth sent by the Father in heaven, He was one with the Father, trusting in the Father (John 10:30). This is a very important principle. Whenever I speak for the Lord, I must have the sensation that I am one with the Lord, trusting in Him. What I know and what I can do mean nothing. Being one with the Lord and trusting in Him mean everything in our ministry. We should never go to minister the word by remaining in ourselves and by trusting in what we can do. If we trust in what we can do, we are finished. The blessing comes only by our being one with the Lord and trusting in Him.

Not Doing Anything from Himself

The Lord did not do anything from Himself (5:19). This was also a pattern to the disciples. He was the One through whom the entire universe was created, but He would not do anything from Himself. This is the denying of the self, which He taught so much. He said that anyone who follows Him must take up his cross and deny himself (Matt. 16:24). He lived a life of denying Himself.

The learned professors in the universities do many things in order to attract people's attention, displaying what they know and can do. But we are not today's professors; we are today's God-men, the duplication of Jesus. We should deny ourselves and not have the intention of doing anything from ourselves but have the intention of doing everything from Him. This is to practice the teaching of denying the self by doing things with the Lord.

Not Seeking His Own Will

The Lord did not seek His own will but the will of Him who sent Him (John 5:30b). First, He denied Himself; second, He rejected His idea, His intention, and His purpose. He would only seek the will of the One who sent Him. All of us should be on the alert for this one thing—when we are sent to do some work, we should not take that chance to seek our own goal. When we go to perform God's work, do we go by seeking our purpose or God's purpose? Brother Watchman Nee was always concerned that when he sent a brother out for the Lord's work, that brother would take the chance to perform his own purpose.

One day I was preparing to go from Shanghai to Hangchow. Then Brother Nee asked me, "Witness, for what purpose are you going to Hangchow?" I responded that I was going to visit the brothers there. He said that this was a wrong answer. Instead, I should say that I am going to perform the Lord's purpose. If you merely go to visit the brothers, you can do many things for yourself. You may take your visit to them as a chance for you to accomplish your purpose instead of seeking the Lord's will. It is not easy to have a pure heart, without having our purpose, our goal, and our idea. We should just go seeking the idea, purpose, goal, and intention of the sending Lord. This requires much learning on our part.

At times certain brothers may ask me how I feel about their accepting the invitation to a certain place. My basic consideration is, "Are you going just to fulfill the Lord's purpose, the Lord's aim, the Lord's goal, the Lord's idea, the Lord's intention, that is, the Lord's will, or would you take the chance to accomplish your intention, your will?" To seek our intention is absolutely impure. We need to be purified by the cross. We should pray, "Lord, save me from going out to accomplish something according to my intention and idea." The Lord Jesus never

sought His own idea, His own purpose, His own concept, or His own intention. He purely sought only the Father's will.

Not Seeking His Own Glory

The first God-man did not seek His own glory but the glory of the Father who sent Him (7:18). I was with Brother Nee for about twenty years. What bothered him the most about the co-workers was that it was hard to see one who was not ambitious. To be ambitious is to seek your own glory. In the service we render to the Lord in the church life, there is always our ambition. A brother may have the ambition to be an elder. In order to become an elder, he feels that he must first become a deacon. To him being a deacon is a step toward being uplifted to the eldership. We should not think that we are absolutely not ambitious in this way. We are all fallen descendants of Adam and sick of the same disease, the same sin. The rebellion that occurred among us seven years ago was altogether due to ambition. Through the years I have seen a number of co-workers among us spoiled by ambition. By the Lord's mercy I have learned the secret of dealing with my self and my intention, and this has helped me to deal with my self-glorification.

In John 7:18 the Lord told the Pharisees, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him." The Pharisees were seeking their own glory. According to the context of this verse, the Lord indicated to them that if they were not seeking their own glory, they would know that He was sent by His Father.

We need to see that our self, our purpose, and our ambition are three big destroying "worms" in our work. If we are going to be used for the Lord always in His recovery, our self has to be denied, our purpose has to be rejected, and our ambition must be given up. We should not have our own purpose; instead, we should have only the Lord's will. We all have to learn of these three things: no self, no purpose, and no ambition. We should only know to labor, to work for Him, by denying our self, rejecting our purpose, and giving up our ambition. Self, purpose, and ambition are like three snakes or scorpions in us. We must learn to hate them.

Going Up to the Mountain Privately to Pray

After performing the miracle, the Lord went up to the mountain privately to pray (Matt. 14:23; cf. Luke 6:12).

Not Remaining in the Issue of the Miracle with the Crowds

The Lord did not remain in the issue of the miracle with the crowds but went away from them to be with the Father privately on the mountain in prayer. If we go to a certain place and have a great success, would we leave right away, or would we remain in this big success to enjoy it? We need to see and follow the pattern of the Lord Jesus. He did not remain in the issue of the great miracle that He performed. Instead, He went up to the mountain privately to pray. The word *privately* is very meaningful. This means He did not let the people know that He was going to pray. Otherwise, they would have followed Him. He went away from them to be with the Father privately in prayer. I like these three phrases: *to be with the Father, on the mountain, and in prayer*. We should learn from the Lord's pattern here by exercising to be with Him on the mountain in prayer. His looking up to heaven means that He had no trust in Himself. His going up to the mountain means that He wanted to be with the Father in prayer.

To pray with others is good, but often we need to pray by ourselves. When we pray with others, we cannot enjoy the Lord as deeply as when we pray to the Lord privately. Even the

Lord Jesus told us that when we pray we should enter into our private room and shut our door and pray to the Father who sees in secret (Matt. 6:6). Then we have the sensation of how intimate He is to us and how close we are to Him. We have to learn to leave the crowds, our family, our friends, and the saints in the church to go to a higher level on a "high mountain." We have to go higher, far away from the earthly things on a lower level. We need to get to a higher level, separated from the crowd, to be with the Father privately and secretly to have intimate fellowship with Him. This is the significance of being on the mountain in prayer.

Asking the Father to Bless All Those Who Participated in the Enjoyment of the Issue of the Miracle

We need to consider why the Lord Jesus went to the mountain right after this miracle. John 6:27 gives us the reason. This verse says that after performing the miracle, the Lord said, "Work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you; for Him has the Father, even God, sealed." The Lord told the ones whom He fed not to seek the food that perishes but to seek the food that abides unto eternal life. I believe the Lord Jesus went to the mountain to pray in this way: "Father, I pray to You under Your blessing. Through Your blessing, You fed the five thousand, but Father, they are just seeking for the food that perishes. I do look unto You that You would bless them that they would seek the food that abides unto eternal life. Father, You know that I am Your sent One. Only I can give them the food that abides unto eternal life, but they do not know Me in this way. They know only that I can perform a miracle to feed them with physical food. But they do not know that it is only I who can give them food that is of the eternal life." I believe that the Lord prayed to bless them further in this way.

His going up to the mountain privately to pray indicated His asking the Father to bless all those who had participated in the enjoyment of the issue of the miracle that they would not be satisfied with the food that perishes but that they should seek for the food that abides unto eternal life and recognize that He was not only the Son of Man but also the Son of God who was sent and sealed by the Father and who could give them eternal life. When the five thousand were being fed by Him, they recognized that He was the capable Son of Man, but they did not realize that He was actually the Son of God who was not only sent but also sealed by the Father. He was the One who could give them the very bread that is related to the eternal life. For this reason He had another teaching in John 6. In John 6 the Lord revealed that He is the bread out of heaven, the bread of life. Eventually, He said that this bread is just His word. "The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (v. 63). John 3:34 says that He is the One who speaks the word and gives the Spirit not by measure. To know Him in this way requires a revelation, so He prayed for them privately on the mountain.

Receiving Some Instruction from the Father

His going up to the mountain privately to pray also indicated that He wanted to receive of the Father some instruction concerning how to take care of the five thousand people fed by His miracle.

In this crystallization-study of Matthew 14, we can see how much we need revelation from the Lord to see the intrinsic significance of His word. To see the miracle of feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fish is easy, but to know the deeper lessons that we have to learn from the Performer of this big miracle requires revelation. These lessons are intrinsic, deeper, and of life. To know the great miracle the Lord performed does not give us any life. We can only admire the Lord's outward doing. But to see all the detailed points concerning the lessons of life in order to learn from the Lord in His way of performing the miracle imparts

life to us. We need to learn these living lessons from the Lord so that we can enter into the God-man living. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997, vol. 3, "The God-man Living," pp. 561-566*)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

The Kingdom and the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Mark 4:26-29; Rom. 14:17;
1 Cor. 4:20; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 4:11; Rev. 11:15; 12:10

I. The church today is Christ's increase in life, but the eternal kingdom of God is Christ's increase in administration—Dan. 2:34-35; Mark 4:26-29:

- A. In life Christ increases to become the church; in administration Christ increases to become the kingdom—John 3:15, 29a, 30a; Dan. 2:34-35, 44.
- B. Christ is not only the church but also the kingdom of God; both the church and the kingdom are His increase—1 Cor. 12:12; Luke 17:21; Mark 4:26-29.

II. The Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; the presence of the kingdom produces the church—Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19:

- A. The life of God is the kingdom of God; the divine life is the kingdom, and this life produces the church—John 3:3, 5; Matt. 7:14, 21; 19:17, 29; 25:46:
 - 1. The kingdom is the realm of life for life to move, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose, and this realm is the kingdom.
 - 2. The gospel brings in the divine life, and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom; the divine life with its realm produces the church—2 Tim. 1:10.
 - 3. The gospel of the kingdom brings forth the church because the kingdom is the life itself, and the church is the issue of life—Matt. 4:23; Acts 8:12.
- B. The kingdom is the reality of the church; therefore, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life—Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19; Rev. 1:4-6, 9:
 - 1. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7) is the content of the church life; without the reality of the kingdom, the church is empty.
 - 2. Since the kingdom life issues in the church life, as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life—Rom. 14:17.
 - 3. A believer who does not live in the reality of the kingdom cannot be built into the structure of the church—Eph. 2:22.
- C. Without the kingdom as the reality of the church, the church cannot be built up—Matt. 16:18-19:
 - 1. The church is brought into being through the authority of the kingdom.
 - 2. The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible—v. 19; 18:18; cf. John 20:23.
 - 3. When the kingdom of the heavens is able to assert its authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16.

III. The genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age; today the believers live the kingdom life in the church—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 13:44-46; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6:

A. Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom; this indicates how intimately the kingdom and the church are related—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18:

1. Romans 14:17 proves that the church in this age is the kingdom of God.
2. *The kingdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 4:20 refers to the church life (v. 17), implying that in the sense of authority, the church in this age is the kingdom of God.
3. The term *fellow citizens* in Ephesians 2:19 indicates the kingdom of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His authority.
4. What Paul and his fellow workers were doing in the gospel work for the establishing of the churches was for the kingdom of God—Col. 4:11.
5. The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; the church represents the kingdom.

B. In the Lord's recovery, at the same time we are both in the kingdom and in the church, in the treasure and in the pearl—Matt. 13:44-46.

IV. In the church as the kingdom, we are under the kingdom's rule, government, discipline, and exercise—1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5:

A. Although the church today is God's kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in our natural man—Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25.

B. As those who are under the dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we need to live a kingdom life in the church, growing and developing in the divine life until we reach maturity—2 Cor. 13:14; Rom. 14:17; 2 Pet. 1:5-11.

V. The church brings in the kingdom—Matt. 6:10; 12:22-29; Rev. 11:15; 12:10:

A. The church was brought into being for the purpose of bringing in the kingdom—Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; Rev. 1:6, 9; 11:15:

1. The church's responsibility is to perpetuate Christ's victory and to bring in God's kingdom—12:10-11; 11:15.
2. The work of the church on earth is to bring in the kingdom of God; all the work of the church is governed by the principle of the kingdom of God.
3. The church is responsible for bringing heaven's will down to earth and for carrying it out on earth—Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50.

B. The church, which comes into being under the rule of heaven, by reason of her submission to the heavenly rule, deals with God's enemy—16:18-19; Eph. 6:10-18:

1. In order for the kingdom of the heavens to be established, there is the need of spiritual fighting—Matt. 12:22-29.
2. The responsibility of the church is to continue the warfare Christ fought on earth; the church must continue the victorious work that Christ has carried out against Satan—Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8b; Col. 2:15; Psalms 149:5-9.

VI. The church should pray to bring in the kingdom of God—Matt. 6:10:

A. Although the kingdom is here in the church life today, the manifestation of the kingdom is yet to come.

B. The coming of the kingdom is not automatic; if there is no prayer, the kingdom cannot come; thus, we must pray for the coming of the kingdom.

- C. The prayer of the church is the most effective means of conquering Satan—16:19; 18:18.
 - D. The church must be the outlet of heaven, allowing heaven's authority to be expressed on earth—16:18-19; 18:17-18.
 - E. Genuine prayer is a joint labor with God to bring His kingdom to the earth and to carry out His will on earth; hence, prayer is a spiritual battle—6:10; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12.
- VII. Those who always put God's kingdom before them—that which touches God's will and His enemy—are the most useful workers in the hands of God—Matt. 6:33; 7:21; 25:21, 23; Col. 4:11.**

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18-19; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 2:19

The opening proclamation of the New Testament is this: "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). The New Testament calls immediate attention to the matter of the kingdom. But after a while, when the disciples had come to know Him, the Lord raised the question of the church. The church was a mystery that had been hidden throughout all the generations of the past, and it was not until the Lord Jesus had brought His disciples to the point of recognizing Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," that He spoke openly of the church. When Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord came in at once with the word: "Upon this rock I will build My church" (16:16-18). It was as though He was saying, "I am the Son of God, the Christ, for this purpose—the building of My church. As the Son of God and as the Christ, I am a rock, the foundation stone of a building that is to be built, and that building of which I am the foundation is the church."

Let us bear in mind that the first mention of the church is in Matthew 16, and Matthew is the book that proclaims the kingdom. The Lord's second mention of the church is still in the book of Matthew—chapter 18. The four Gospels record only two occasions when our Lord on earth made reference to the church, and both of these are in the book that specifically proclaims the kingdom. From that fact we may know how intimately the kingdom and the church are related. Throughout the New Testament we find these two advancing together in the closest connection. When the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church," He immediately added, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." The keys of the kingdom are given to make the building of the church possible. Where the authority of the kingdom is absent, there the building of the church will be lacking. Anyone who refuses to submit to the authority of the kingdom can at best be a saved person; he will never be built into the structure of the church.

The Bible first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church. Where the kingdom of the heavens is in authority, there a church will be built up. A church comes into being where a company of people accept the government of heaven. So it would appear to be the presence of the kingdom that produces the church. But the New Testament goes beyond that. That is only one half of the New Testament revelation; the other half is this—the church brings in the kingdom. The church that comes into being under the rule of heaven, by reason of her submission to the heavenly rule, deals with God's enemy. It is the presence of God's enemy that hinders God's will from being done on the earth, and it is the exercise of God's authority by

the church that casts him out. Then the New Jerusalem appears, and in the New Jerusalem you see the kingdom and the church blending into one. The New Jerusalem is the bride, which according to Ephesians 5 is the church. It is also a city, which speaks of government, and in this center of government there is the throne of God and of the Lamb. The New Jerusalem combines in itself both the church and the kingdom. And in saying this, we have summed up in a sentence the entire content of the New Testament. We might express it in three statements—the kingdom produces the church, the church brings in the kingdom, and the ultimate issue is the kingdom and the church. The New Testament opens by presenting the kingdom and thereafter presenting the church. But how does the church become an actuality? It is through the exercise of kingdom authority. When the church has ceded to the kingdom the right to rule and has submitted to its sway, the church then brings the dominion of heaven to the earth. All the way through the New Testament we see the church blending with the kingdom and the kingdom blending with the church, until eventually this blending issues in the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem, where you can detect the nature of the church and the conditions of the kingdom, God is able to express His sovereignty fully and can therefore execute His will and display His glory.

With that summary in mind, let us now inquire: Why is the church needed? We can only indicate the answer in a few words. God has a purpose concerning the universe, but for its accomplishment it was necessary for Him to wield authority, because as we pointed out earlier, no plan can be carried into effect where authority is lacking. Whether or not God would be able to implement His purpose hinges on this matter of authority. So when God's enemy sought to frustrate God's purpose, he did a crucial thing—he violated God's authority. How did God seek to meet the situation? He did so by securing another creation through whom He could exercise authority. He sought a company of men who would give Him the right of way on the earth to carry His will into effect. If only He could secure a band of men on the earth who would let Him wield dominion over them, then He could accomplish His purpose concerning Christ in and through them. It was for this reason that God needed the church. He wanted to have the church in order to bring His kingdom from heaven to earth.

The question that now arises is this: How is the church secured? We might answer, "The Lord Jesus shed His blood for the remission of our sins and gave His life that we might be born again and thereby constitute the church." This is true enough, but it is a very superficial aspect of the truth. The Scriptures present this far more profound aspect—that the church has been secured through the sovereign rule of heaven. Because the kingdom of heaven is able to assert its authority over a company of men, that company of men can be built up into a church. It is necessary at this point to recapitulate. Why was the church brought into being? It was for the purpose of bringing in the kingdom. How was the church brought into being? It was by means of the authority of the kingdom. God's purpose was to bring His heavenly dominion to the earth, and apart from the church His goal could not be attained. He needed a people who would subject themselves to the dominion of heaven so that under that dominion they might be built up into the church. That is what Matthew 16 reveals. Do not imagine that by our salvation alone we become the church. We who are saved are in the church, but our salvation alone does not constitute us the church. The church is a Body; therefore, there is the need of relatedness, and there is the need of building up.

Let me illustrate. Our body has very many bones, but do many bones constitute a body? Let the Old Testament book of Ezekiel supply the answer. Ezekiel says that the children of Israel were in the sight of God like a heap of dry bones. One day the breath of life came into them, and the bones were knit together, and they became one body (Ezek. 37).

To illustrate again, the church is a house. It is God's dwelling, God's temple. Now the Bible

says that we who are saved are "living stones" and are built together into a "spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5). We admit that a house is built of stones, but a heap of stones is not a house. Brothers and sisters, do not take for granted that if a thousand brothers and sisters come together here, it means that the church is here. What is the church? It is the saved assembled together. But what kind of an assembling together is it? A great number of stones heaped up together is not a house. What then is a house? It is stone built upon stone—this one set on top of that one, that one set beside the other one, above and beneath, to the left and to the right, before and behind, all perfectly placed in relation to one another. Apart from a building together of the stones, there can be no house. There might be a thousand brothers and sisters together, and all are saved, but we would still ask whether they have been built together or not. They are certainly church material, but whether they are the church or not depends on whether they have been built together. Without building there is no church.

Perhaps some would ask what it really means to be built. Regrettably, although the word *build*, as used in Matthew 16, is found very often in the New Testament, it is frequently rendered "edify." So we read of believers being "edified" and of the church being "edified." But the original language does not imply (as does the word *edify*) to "improve morally," or to "benefit spiritually" but truly to "build." How do we build? Well, here is a stone. Along comes a workman, tool in hand, and he applies the tool to the stone until its surface is perfectly even. But that stone has to fit into a certain space in the building. The stone is triangular. The space is rectangular. So the stone has to be chipped and chipped and chipped until the shape of the stone and the space in the building perfectly correspond. Then into the space the stone is fitted. The stone is not there to be ornamental; it is there to be part of the building. It is not a lot of ornamental stones that are needed. In many gatherings there is quite a display of beautiful stones, but I am afraid there has not been a building up of the stones into a house. What God wants is not a lot of precious stones; He wants a spiritual house.

We often meet brothers who are delightful Christians. Their lives are well ordered; they are careful about the early morning watch and earnest in evangelistic work; they have attended many meetings for spiritual "edification" and have become so truly "edified" that they call forth the commendation of others; yet they remain individualists who cannot be "built." They are precious stones, so precious they cannot be fitted together with common clay or stone. They are too beautiful to be built up into one building with others, so they remain individual Christians, lovely for display but no good for building. What God desires is a house, not a lot of separate stones, however beautiful they may be. He wants a complete church, not numbers of scattered Christians.

One sister, speaking to me of another, said, "Oh, she's such a precious sister, so spiritual." When I asked more about her, she said, "Oh, she's so humble, so quiet, so gentle; we have never known her to be irritated." And again she added, "She's so spiritual." I asked, "Who is she spiritual with? Is she an isolated spiritual sister, or has her spirituality related her to others?" "Oh," replied the sister, "singers who strike such high notes as she find few who can sing with them." Alas! that sister was so spiritual that no one could be her spiritual companion. Such a sister is all right for display purposes, but she is of no use for church building. The kind of sister needed in the church is one who can have another placed behind her and another in front, another to her left and another to her right, and one below her and one above. That is the kind of Christian God is seeking today.

During the past two thousand years one of the greatest hindrances to the purpose of God, and the main reason why our Lord has had to delay His return, is the lack of Christians who have been built together. You can find Christians all over the world, and you can find spiritual Christians too; but where in any one place has a spiritual house been built? There are

lots of stones that have been wrought upon until they are very beautiful, but where is the building? May the Lord have mercy upon us.

Brothers and sisters, there is a condition to be fulfilled if there is to be a building. The one indispensable condition is submission to the authority of the kingdom. Our Savior has been exalted to be Head of the universe, and all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. God has put all things under His feet and has made Him Head over all things to the church. In the first place this implies that the church must come under His headship. What is headship? It is the government of the Head. We need to realize that in order for the church to be built up, we must submit to the authority of the Head. Where there is no Head, there is no authority, and there the question of church building cannot even arise. In Ephesians 4:15-16, which speaks throughout of the building of the church, it is shown to be of primary importance that we "grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." In how many things are we really growing up into Him? Even our humility, even our love, and even many of our other good qualities are not necessarily a growing up under His headship. We have not yet understood what it means to have our affections governed by Christ and to have all those other desirable qualities developed under His headship. Where there is truly a growing up in all things into the Head, there will follow the building up of the Body as these two verses show. "All the Body, being joined together and being knit together...causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Colossians 2:19 speaks of "holding the Head." What does that mean? It means that in all things we submit to the authority of the Head. Note that it does not say, "Holding the Savior," nor does it say, "Holding the life." It is when we submit to the government of the Head that there will be the building of which the same verse speaks—"All the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." If we have subjection to the authority of the Head, we have the building up of the Body. Where the government of heaven is secured, there the church is secured. The extent to which the church is built up in our midst will depend entirely upon the place given in our midst to the church's Head.

"All the Body, being joined together and being knit together"—that is church building. But how does it happen? "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together." It happens as each member submits to the Head; it happens as each accepts the government of the kingdom of heaven. Only through those who come under the control of the Head can the building of the church be secured. So the question as to whether or not the church will be built up becomes a question of whether or not you and I can accept the authority of the kingdom. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1957, vol. 3, "The Kingdom and the Church," pp. 261-266*)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building Up of the Church

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:16-18, 21-28

I. Matthew 16 reveals the way to build up the church and also reveals the enemy of the building:

- A. Christ, the Son of the living God, builds the church on Himself as the rock, with stones such as Peter, a transformed person—vv. 16-18.
- B. The gates of Hades, Satan's authority or power of darkness, attack the church to frustrate the Lord from building up the church—v. 18.
- C. In order to build the church, the Lord had to pass through death and enter into resurrection—v. 21:
 - 1. The church was produced through Christ's death and resurrection—John 12:24.
 - 2. The way to build up the church is to be crucified and resurrected—cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-12; Gal. 2:20.
 - 3. The church exists and is built up only in the realm of resurrection through crucifixion—Gen. 2:21-22; cf. Eph. 4:15-16.
- D. Peter, with a good heart, rebuked the Lord and tried to prevent the Lord from going to Jerusalem to be crucified—Matt. 16:22:
 - 1. It was not Peter but Satan who came out through one of the gates of Hades, the gate of Peter's self, to try to frustrate the Lord from building up the church—v. 23.
 - 2. The self, the mind, and the soul-life are the main gates through which Satan comes forth to attack and damage the church—vv. 23-26.

II. The building up of the church depends on the shutting up of the gates of Hades through the exercise of three keys—vv. 24-26:

- A. We need to learn to exercise the key of denying the self—v. 24:
 - 1. The flesh is the created body corrupted by sin, the nature of Satan (Rom. 6:12, 14; 7:8, 11, 17, 20); the self is the created soul plus the satanic mind, the mind of Satan.
 - 2. When the mind, the thought, of Satan was injected into the human soul, the human soul became the self, the embodiment of Satan—Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 16:22-23:
 - a. Before Eve took the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into her body, the thought, the mind, of Satan was injected into her soul.
 - b. After Eve's mind was poisoned by Satan's thought, her emotion was aroused, and then her will was exercised to make a decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.
 - c. By this time every part of the soul—the mind, the emotion, and the will—had been poisoned.

- d. The self is the embodiment of the soul-life, which is expressed through the mind; thus, the self, the soul-life, and the mind are three-in-one.
 - e. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church—v. 23.
3. The self is the soul declaring independence from God:
- a. The Lord does not have regard for what we do; rather, He has regard for our dependence on Him—7:21-23; cf. Josh. 9:14.
 - b. The enemy of the Body is the self; because the self is something independent, the self is the greatest problem, the greatest frustration and opposition, to the building up of the Body.
 - c. We should depend not only on God but also on the Body, on the brothers and sisters—Exo. 17:11-13; Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33.
 - d. The Lord and the Body are one; hence, if we are dependent on the Body, we are also dependent on the Lord, and if we are independent of the Body, we are spontaneously independent of the Lord.
 - e. When we are dependent, the self is gone, and instead of the self, we have the Lord's presence and are full of peace.
 - f. Only when the self-life has been utterly dealt with by the cross are we able to touch the reality of the Body of Christ and come to know the Body.
4. The following are some expressions of the self (see *Hymns*, #866, stanzas 5 and 6):
- a. With the self there are ambition, pride, and self-exaltation—Matt. 20:20-28; 1 Pet. 5:5; Rom. 12:3; Num. 12:1-10; 16:1-3; Phil. 2:3-4.
 - b. With the self there are self-righteousness, self-justification, and exposing, criticizing, and condemning others—Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Pet. 4:8; John 3:17; 8:11; Luke 6:37; Matt. 7:1-5.
 - c. With the self there are introspection and self-despising—S. S. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:15-16.
 - d. When we are in the self, we can be offended by the church, the leading ones, or the saints—Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26; Col. 3:13.
 - e. With the self there are disappointment and discouragement—cf. Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 4:1.
 - f. With the self there are self-love, self-preservation, self-seeking, and self-pity—Matt. 13:5, 20-21.
 - g. With the self there are murmurings and reasonings—Exo. 16:1-9; Phil. 2:14.
 - h. With the self there is natural affection (friendship) based on natural taste and preference—Matt. 12:46-50; Phil. 2:2b; 1 Cor. 12:25.
 - i. With the self there are the matters of being opinionated and dissenting—John 11:21, 23-28, 39; Acts 15:35-39; cf. 1 Cor. 7:25, 40.
 - j. When we are in the self, we are individualistic and independent—16:12.
5. If we exercise the key of denying the self to lock up the self, it is impossible for us to be offended; blessed are those who are not offended—cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60:
- a. If we can be offended, it is proof that we are full of self.
 - b. If my self has been locked up, I will not be offended no matter what you do to me or how you treat me—Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60.

6. We need to learn to exercise the key of denying the self to lock up the self in every situation:

- a. Whether a situation is for us or against us, whether the brothers love us or hate us, we must lock up the self—2 Cor. 12:15.
- b. If the self is locked up, the church will be built up.

B. We need to learn to exercise the key of taking up the cross—Matt. 16:24:

1. To take up the cross simply means to take up the will of God; the cross is God's will—26:39; John 18:11:

- a. The Lord Jesus was not forced to go to the cross like a criminal; He was willing to go because the cross was God's will—Matt. 26:39.
- b. The Lord Jesus was willing to be crucified so that through His death, His life might be released to produce and build up the church—John 12:24.
- c. The cross was a great suffering to the Lord, but He cared not for the suffering but for the fulfillment of God's purpose—Heb. 12:2; Col. 1:24.

2. *Let him...take up his cross* (Matt. 16:24) means that we are not forced to bear the cross but that we willingly take it up:

- a. Our husband, wife, and children are God's will and are therefore our cross.
- b. The one church is God's will, and every brother and sister in the church is God's will; thus, to bear the cross is to bear the church and to bear all the saints so that we would have the genuine oneness—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3, 13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.

3. We need not only to take up our cross but also to carry our cross, that is, to remain on the cross, keeping our old man under the termination of the cross day by day—Luke 14:27; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:31:

- a. We have received the divine life through the Lord's crucifixion; now, in order to be built up in this life, we need to willingly and happily take up the cross.
- b. We should not care for our taste, feeling, or consciousness; rather, we should care only for God's will, which is that we would have the genuine oneness—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3, 13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.

C. We need to learn to exercise the key of losing the soul-life—Matt. 16:25:

1. To save the soul-life is to please the self by allowing the soul to have its enjoyment; to lose the soul-life is to lose the enjoyment of the soul:

- a. God created man as a soul (Gen. 2:7) with the need for enjoyment.
- b. Receiving God into man's spirit and expressing God through the soul should be man's joy and amusement—cf. Neh. 8:10; Rom. 14:17.
- c. The Lord Jesus lost the enjoyment of His soul in this age so that He might find His soul-life in the coming age (John 10:11; Isa. 53:12); we must do the same (John 12:24-26).
- d. If we save our soul-life in this age, we will lose it in the coming age, but if we lose our soul-life in this age, we will find it in the coming age—Matt. 16:25.
- e. We need to love the Lord Jesus and to hate and deny our soul-life, not loving our soul-life even unto death—1 Cor. 16:22; 2:9; Luke 14:26; 9:23; Rev. 12:11.

2. If we are willing to lose all our present soulish enjoyment for the Lord's sake, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of all the saints, others will be nourished by us and will be built up through us; this is not a suffering but a joy—Heb. 12:2.
3. The kingdom reward of sharing the King's joy in ruling over the earth in the manifestation of the kingdom depends upon whether we save our soul-life in this age or lose it—Matt. 16:25-28; 25:21, 23.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

DENYING THE SELF FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus spoke of the gates of Hades, which signify the power of darkness. In the Bible Hades is the place of death, where people are held in the power of death. Hence, it is a region where death prevails. After the Lord Jesus died, He took a tour of Hades. Acts 2:24 indicates that Hades tried its best to hold Him. However, because Christ is the resurrection, He could not be held by death. Death cannot overcome resurrection; on the contrary, resurrection always subdues death.

THE GATES AND THE KEYS

The gates are mentioned in verse 18 of Matthew 16, and the keys, in verse 19. The enemy has the gates, but we have the keys. The gates do not overcome the keys, but the keys control the gates. The enemy's gates are much bigger than the keys, but the gates are nonetheless under the control of the keys, just as the doors of a building are controlled by the keys that open and close them. Hallelujah, we have the keys! Satan has many gates, but we have the keys.

Now we need to consider what the keys of the kingdom are. Shortly after I was saved, I was taught by a great Bible teacher that the keys of the kingdom given to Peter were two in number. Peter used the first key to open the gate for the Jewish believers to enter the kingdom of the heavens on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42), and he used the other key to open the gate for the Gentile believers to enter the kingdom of the heavens in the house of Cornelius (10:34-48). I still believe that this teaching is correct. But, as we shall see, there is more to this matter of the keys than this.

In order to interpret the Bible, we must follow the basic principle of taking care of the context of every verse. In Matthew 16 Christ, the Son of the living God, the church, the kingdom, the gates of Hades, and the keys of the kingdom are all revealed. Verse 21 reveals what must take place for Peter to be transformed from a Simon to a Peter. For this, the Lord Jesus had to be crucified and resurrected. It was through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ that Simon, the son of Jonah, became Peter, a son of God. Without this transaction it would have been impossible for Simon Barjona to become Peter.

THE LORD AS THE PATTERN AND THE PATHWAY

Verse 22 says, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" With a good heart Peter was telling the Lord that God should be merciful to Him. This verse is difficult to translate. Some say it should be rendered, "Lord, pity Yourself." According to this rendering, Peter was telling the Lord to be merciful to Himself. Another translation is, "God be merciful to You, Lord." It is difficult to determine the subject, whether it is God or the Lord Jesus. At any rate, the emphasis is on the self. Whether the subject is God or the Lord Jesus, the self is emphasized.

Verse 23 says, "But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan!" Then in verses 24 and 25 the Lord said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." According to these verses, the Lord is the pattern and the pathway. If anyone desires to come after Him, that is, take Him as the pattern and the pathway, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him.

SATAN COMING OUT THROUGH THE GATES

Verses 21 through 26 are necessary for the interpretation of verses 16 through 19. As we have seen, verse 18 speaks of the gates, and verse 19, of the keys. In order to know what the gates and the keys are, we need to consider verses 21 through 26. Satan comes out through the gates. The first gate is the self. This means that we ourselves are one of the gates of Hades through which Satan comes out. Satan may come out through the gate of self even when we have a good heart. Whether our heart is good or evil, self is the first gate through which Satan comes out. In addition to the self, verses 21 through 26 also speak of the mind and the soul, both of which are also gates through which Satan comes out. Thus, the self, the soul, and the mind are the main gates through which Satan comes forth. Many times Satan has come out through your mind because your mind has been an open gate for him.

THE THREE KEYS

Verses 21 through 26 not only expose the gates but also reveal the keys. The first key is the denial of the self. Self is an open gate, but self-denial is the key that shuts it. The second key is the taking up of the cross. This means that the cross is a key to shut up the self, the soul, and the mind. The third key is the losing of the soul. Therefore, the three keys here are the denying of the self, the taking up of the cross, and the losing of the soul. Day by day we need to use these keys. Yes, Peter used the keys on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius. But we also need the three subjective keys found in this portion of the Word.

The principalities and powers in the heavenlies are gates. But in addition, the self, the soul, and the mind are three crucial subjective gates. If these subjective gates are locked, no principalities or powers will be able to come in.

THE CHURCH DAMAGED BY THE SELF

My burden in this chapter is not interpretation; it is application. Throughout history the church has not been damaged mainly by Judaism or Gnosticism; it has been damaged mainly by the self. Martin Luther once said that although he was afraid of the pope, he was more afraid of the stronger pope, the self, within his own heart. Nothing damages and frustrates the building up of the church more than the self. Self is the embodiment of the soul, which is expressed through the mind. Thus the self, the soul, and the mind are three-in-one. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church life. We all need to heed this word for ourselves.

Simply because of the self, certain saints have left the church life. In 1948 there was a certain brother in Shanghai who was full of self and whose soul was an open gate that no one could lock. He was ambitious to be an elder, and he often complained about the situation in the church. One day he stood up in a meeting to speak many negative things. After his negative speaking, I said, "Brother, there is no need for us to waste our time. If you can find a better place, please tell me about it, and I'll go there with you. But if you cannot find a better place, please be quiet and remain here." He had nothing more to say. A short while later, he stopped coming to the church meetings, began a meeting in his home, and hired a traveling

preacher. With the financial support of this dissenting brother, this preacher wrote a long article opposing Brother Nee. No doubt, this brother damaged the church life. At the same time, he himself lost the church life. This was due to the self. With this brother there was no building, for he did not become a Peter but remained the son of Barjona. This was the result of Satan coming out through the self.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF BEING OFFENDED

Let me honestly and lovingly say a word to you all: It is a very serious matter to be offended. Do not casually say, "I have been offended in the church life. The elders and other leading ones have offended me." Although others may offend you, you will always be the first to suffer. On the one hand, I condemn all the offenses; but on the other hand, I must say that there is no excuse for your being offended. If we were not in ourselves, we could not be offended. If I exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self, it will be impossible for me to be offended. The reason we are offended is that the self is so open and prevailing. Through the open gate of the self, Satan comes forth, and we are offended.

Perhaps in certain matters the church may be wrong. Do not think that the church is no longer the church because it is wrong. For example, when your child makes a mistake, he is still your child. Whether the church is right or wrong, it is still the church. Although you may be offended by something or someone in the church, do not make any excuses for yourself. This frustrates the building up of the church.

USING THE KEY OF SELF-DENIAL

As we have seen, Matthew 16 speaks about the building up of the church and also about the gates of Hades and the keys of the kingdom. Without the keys to lock the gates, the church cannot be built. Because there has been so little exercise of these keys, the church has not yet been built. We may talk a great deal about the building. However, when certain things take place to touch us, the self is open. Because we are open to Hades, something from Hades—Satan—comes out. How we need to use the key of self-denial to lock the self! The way to keep from being offended by others is to lock up yourself by denying yourself. Blessed are those who are not offended.

There is no excuse for being offended. When the Lord Jesus comes and sets up His judgment seat, He will tell us to settle our account with Him. He may ask us why we were offended in certain places. But if we make excuses for ourselves, the Lord will not accept them. The problem is not the offense—it is the self. Certain viruses are very contagious. However, no virus can cause a table to be sick. If you can be offended, it is a proof that you are full of self. If my self has been locked up, I will not be offended no matter what you do to me or how you treat me.

NO NATURAL AFFECTION

I have spoken about being offended. Now I wish to say a word about natural affection. In the church life there should not be any natural friendships. If you regard certain ones as your special friends, it also is an indication that you are full of self. Certain ones match your taste, and you fit their taste. You feed one another's taste. This is very damaging, and it hinders the building. Among the brothers and sisters in the church, there should be a pure divine love, but there should not be any personal affection. If any personal affection creeps into your relationship with the saints, it proves that you are full of self. In the church life there should be no such affection. To me, all the brothers and sisters are the same. To have a favorite among

the brothers and sisters is to be full of self. It is not to be a Peter but a son of Jonah. This damages the building.

We need to receive the mercy of the Lord to regard all the saints as our brothers and sisters but none as our friends. For the Lord's building in the church life, everything natural must be extracted. There should be no natural affection, relationship, or feeling. Rather, we all must be fearful of natural affection and shun it. Whenever a brother loves me in a naturally affectionate way, I am frightened. That is the time for me to exercise the key to deny the self. I will lock myself and avoid that brother's affection. Whenever you discover that you are feeding a brother's self and that he is feeding yours, you must use the key to lock the gate of the self. If you do not lock up the self, Satan will come out through the door of the self. Then you and others will remain sons of Jonah. You will not be Peters, and it will be impossible for the Lord to build the church with you.

THE HIDDEN SELF

More than nineteen hundred years ago, the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would build the church. But why, after so many centuries, do we not yet have the building? It is because the key of self-denial has been neglected. In these chapters I have no desire to talk about doctrines, but I do have a heart to fellowship with you all. Oh, the hidden self! Peter had a good heart, but within him there was the hidden self that became the gateway for Satan to come out. I appreciate the Lord's discernment. If I had been the Lord, I would not have had the discernment but would have appreciated Peter's concern. However, the Lord Jesus immediately discerned that Satan had come out through the gate of the self.

I am glad that in the churches we have the brothers' houses and the sisters' houses. But, through experience, we have realized that there are two kinds of results from living in such a house. Some form natural friendships; others become dissatisfied and disappointed. However, no matter what the situation may be, you should not be disappointed. To be disappointed is a proof that you are in the self. The self of those who live in the brothers' and sisters' houses must be locked up. If the self is locked up, we shall have the building. If you exercise the key of self-denial, others may be offended, but you will not be offended. Instead, you will be built up because the self in you has been locked up. We all need to use the prevailing key of self-denial to lock the self, the soul, and the mind. Otherwise, the building up of the church will be frustrated.

CRUCIFIED AND RESURRECTED FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Verse 24 says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." The "Me" in this verse means a great deal. This "Me" is the pattern, the pathway. Furthermore, this "Me" is the crucified and resurrected "Me." If we are not crucified and resurrected, there can be no church. The church comes into existence through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Not only our self, which is defiled, but even the Lord's pure, sinless self had to be denied. If the Lord had not denied Himself and gone to the cross, He could not have been resurrected, and there would have been no church. We must follow after Him. This means that we must deny ourselves as He did and must allow ourselves to be crucified as He did. Without this, it is impossible for the church to be built up. Whenever we sense that we are feeding the self-life of another, we must say, "Lord, I will follow You. I will stop having so much contact with this brother." If you do this, the building of the church will proceed.

KNOWING CHRIST, THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

When you read this word, you may feel that you are not able to fulfill it. No, we cannot

do it. This is why we need to pay attention to Paul's word in Philippians 2:10: "To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Here we see that Paul desired to know three things: Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. The "Him" in Philippians 2:10 is the "Me" in Matthew 16:24. We are not able to deny ourselves and go to the cross. But by the power of Christ's resurrection, we can do these things. Furthermore, through His resurrection we can enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and be conformed to His death. Although in ourselves we cannot do this, we have One living within us who can do it.

WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION

In Philippians 2:12 Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In the New Testament the word *salvation* is used in various ways. Regarding our eternal salvation, we cannot work anything out. The Lord Jesus has done everything to accomplish this. But we do need to work out the salvation that enables us to be built up together. For the building of the church, we need to work out this salvation.

The entire book of Philippians is a book on the building. Among the Philippians there was division and the lack of building. Thus, the apostle Paul wrote this Epistle to help them to be built up. Paul was telling them to work out the building, for this building was their salvation. Many Christians today are missing the building. This indicates that they are not working out their salvation.

Suppose you are living in the brothers' house. When you first moved in, you thought that living with the brothers would be wonderful. However, after a short period of time, you found that you could not get along with certain brothers. There is nothing you should do about this. Rather, remain in that brothers' house to be killed. Although you cannot suffer this killing, there is One in you who can. You simply need to follow Him to work out your salvation.

GOD WORKING IN US

Philippians 2:13 tells us how to work out our salvation: "It is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure." God is in us doing this work. We simply need to exercise the key of self-denial and say Amen to the Lord. We need to exercise the key to lock up the self. If we all learn this lesson, we shall be built up together, and we shall become a strong testimony. We shall be able to testify that although we have different characters, dispositions, temperaments, and backgrounds, we can be one and can be built up together. This is precisely what the Lord is dealing with in Matthew 16.

LOCKING UP THE SELF FOR THE BUILDING

Matthew 16 has been veiled for centuries. Perhaps you have read this chapter again and again and again without knowing what the Lord was really saying. But now the Lord has given us further understanding to see how the church can be built up through the exercise of the keys. We need to be afraid of ourselves and use the key to lock up ourselves. We should do this not only in the church life but also in our family life. If you exercise the key to lock up the self, you will have no problems in your marriage. All the problems are from Satan who comes out through the gate of the self. When this gate is locked, Satan is confined, and there are no problems.

In these chapters I am not concerned with mere doctrine. Instead, I am presenting to you what I have learned through years of suffering. We need to find out how the church can be built up. If you say that the church is built up through the cross and the resurrection, that is still too doctrinal. We need to go on to learn to exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self in

every situation. Whether a situation is for you or against you, you must lock up the self. Whether the brothers love you and welcome you or hate you and do not welcome you, you still need to lock up your self. If you do this, there will be no problems, and it will be possible to have the building of the church. But without the locking up of the self, there is no possibility of having the building. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1978, vol. 1, "The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building of the Church," pp. 69-77*)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

Living under the Sovereignty of God and according to the Mercy of God

Scripture Reading: Rev. 4:11; Dan. 4:3, 34-35;
Rom. 9:15-16, 18-23; Heb. 4:16

- 1. It is crucial that we see a vision of God's sovereignty—Dan. 4:3, 34-35; Rom. 9:18-23:**
 - A. Sovereignty refers to God's unlimited authority, power, and position—Rev. 4:11; 5:13:**
 1. As the sovereign One, God is above everything, behind everything, and in everything—1 Kings 22:19.
 2. God has the full capacity to carry out what He wants according to the desire of His heart and according to His eternal economy—Dan. 4:34-35; Eph. 1:4-5, 9-11.
 - B. Romans 9:19-23 refers to God's sovereignty:**
 1. "For who withstands His will? But rather, O man, who are you who answer back to God? Shall the thing molded say to him who molded it, Why did you make me thus?"—vv. 19b-20:
 - a. We need to realize who we are: we are God's creatures, and He is our Creator—Isa. 42:5.
 - b. As His creatures, we should not resist His purpose or answer back to Him, the Creator—Rom. 9:20.
 2. "Does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?"—v. 21:
 - a. God is the Potter, and we are the clay in His hand; God, the Potter, is sovereign—Jer. 18:1-6.
 - b. As the Potter, our God has the absolute right over us; regarding us, He has the right to do whatever He desires—Isa. 29:16; 64:8.
 - c. If God wills, He can make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor—Rom. 9:21.
 3. Romans 9:21-23 reveals that God sovereignly created us to be His containers, according to His predestination—2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; Eph. 1:5, 11:
 - a. It is of God's sovereignty that He, the Potter, makes the riches of His glory known by creating vessels of mercy to contain Himself—Rom. 9:23.
 - b. Being vessels unto honor is not the result of our choice; it originates with God's sovereignty—v. 21.
 - c. God's sovereignty is the basis of His selection; His selection depends on His sovereignty—vv. 11, 18; 11:5, 28.
 4. "In order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory"—9:23:

- a. In His sovereignty God has the authority to make the ones He has selected and called vessels of mercy to contain Him in order that His glory might be manifested—vv. 11, 18, 23-24.
- b. According to His sovereign authority, He has prepared us unto glory—v. 23.

II. “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy’...So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”—vv. 15a, 16:

- A. Mercy is the most far reaching of God’s attributes, going further than His grace and love—Matt. 9:13:
 1. According to our natural condition, we were far removed from God, totally unworthy of His grace; we were eligible only to receive His mercy—Eph. 2:4.
 2. Man’s disobedience affords God’s mercy an opportunity, and God’s mercy brings man to salvation—Rom. 11:32.
- B. Our concept is that the one who wills will gain what he wills to obtain and that the one who runs will gain what he runs after—9:16:
 1. If this were the case, God’s selection would be according to our effort and labor.
 2. On the contrary, God’s selection is of God who shows mercy; we do not need to will or to run, for God has mercy on us.
 3. If we know God’s mercy, we will neither trust in our effort nor be disappointed by our failures; the hope for our wretched condition is in God’s mercy—Eph. 2:4.
- C. If we would serve God in His New Testament economy, we need to know that it is wholly a matter of God’s sovereign mercy—Rom. 9:15-16; Heb. 4:16:
 1. If we know God’s sovereignty, we will thank Him for His mercy, realizing that we are under His sovereign mercy—Rom. 9:15:
 - a. The expression *sovereign mercy* means that God’s mercy is absolutely a matter of God’s sovereignty.
 - b. Being a vessel of mercy is not the result of our choice; it originates with God’s sovereignty—v. 18.
 - c. God’s mercy to us is in His sovereignty; the only thing we can say to explain God’s mercy to us is that in His sovereignty, He has chosen to be merciful to us—vv. 15-16, 23.
 2. In God’s sovereign mercy, our hearts are inclined toward Him; because of His mercy to us, we seek Him day by day—Jer. 29:13; Deut. 4:29; Isa. 55:6.
 3. The more we see that everything related to us is a matter of God’s mercy, the more we will bear our responsibility before the Lord; however, even our willingness to bear responsibility is of God’s mercy.
 4. Because of God’s mercy, we responded to the gospel when others did not respond, we received a word about Christ as life when others refused to receive it, and we took the way of the Lord’s recovery when others drew back from taking this way.
 5. Regarding His recovery, God has mercy on whom He will have mercy.
- D. Romans 9 reveals the principle that everything depends on God’s mercy—vv. 15-16:

1. The apostle Paul applied this principle to the Israelites, showing us that everything that happened to them was of God's mercy—vv. 16, 23.
2. There must be at least one time when we see God's mercy and definitely touch His mercy—Eph. 2:4; Matt. 9:13:
 - a. Concerning this matter, our eyes need to be opened at least once; there must be at least one time when we see that everything depends on God's mercy.
 - b. Whether we see this all at once, or we realize it through a process, the minute we touch this matter, we touch not a feeling but a fact; this fact is that everything depends on God's mercy.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MERCY OF GOD

Everything Depending on the Mercy of God

When we read Romans 9, we have to pay attention both to its principle and to its application. This chapter reveals the principle that everything depends on God's mercy. The apostle applies this principle to the Israelites. He shows us that everything that happened to the Israelites was of God's mercy. Not only do we need to pay attention to the application today, but we also need to pay attention to the principle behind the application.

Romans 9:16 says that "it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." Zeal and pursuit are of no use. Neither is the absence of zeal and pursuit of any use. Waiting too long, not waiting long enough, being too quick, or not being too quick—none of these is of any use. Being in one place or another, hearing much or hearing little—none of these is of any use either. Everything depends on the mercy of God. Only the Holy Spirit is able to lead men to a proper standing. There must be at least one time that a person sees God's mercy. Concerning this matter, our eyes must be opened at least once. Of course, it is good if our eyes can be opened more than once. But there must at least be one time when we see that everything depends on God's mercy. Whether we see this matter all at once or realize it through a process, the minute we touch this matter, we touch the fact—not a feeling but the fact—that everything depends on God's mercy.

God's mercy is a fact. A fact is not dependent on feeling. Take the matter of regeneration as an example. We often tell sinners that they must have a one-time definite experience of repentance and believing in the Lord. To believers, we say that they must have a one-time definite consecration of themselves to the Lord. It is the same in principle in regard to man's understanding of God's mercy. There must be at least one time when a person definitely touches God's mercy.

THE NEED TO DEAL WITH THE MIND, THE EMOTION, AND THE WILL— BEING TEMPERED UNDER THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SPIRIT

Three kinds of people need God's dealings: those who are strong in their will, those who are strong in their emotion, and those who are strong in their mind. Many people are controlled by these three conditions. These three things must experience God's breaking. God deals with man's strong points more than He deals with his weak points. Man's strong points often hinder him from spiritual progress even more than his weak points. Unless a man is dealt with in these three areas, he cannot know God's mercy.

After a man has been dealt with by God, he will be tempered in his spiritual life. In many

things it is inappropriate to be either too much or too little. Some people wait too long, and others do not wait long enough. All these require tempering. Some people are not strong enough in their inner man; their outer man is too strong. This is like a man's head taking up one-fourth of his body or one-sixteenth of his body; neither is proportionate. The right proportion should be one-seventh of the body. Some people are too strong in their mind. Others are too strong in their emotion or their will. Their inner man is not strong enough. These conditions require tempering.

Once I took a leader of the China Inland Mission to hear Brother T. Austin-Sparks. After the message others usually would ask about the message that had just been given. But on my way home with this brother, I did not ask him anything. In the end he opened his mouth. He felt that Mr. Austin-Sparks was too strong in his will. I told him that my will was also quite strong. This leader, Mr. Baker, asked, "Then how are you able to get along with him?" Those who are outwardly strong in their will do not easily get along with others. But this brother did not realize that we are one because of our inner man, not because of our outer will. Today, in order for our inner man to match our outer man, our inner man must grow. When the inner man grows, it can control the outer man.

Some people are too strong in their mind. Their mind needs to come under the control of the inner man. I have read the New Testament a few hundred times. Although I cannot say that I have read it more times than everyone else, at least I can say that I have read it more than many people. I could find over one hundred passages that contradict each other. However, I have not done this, because my mind has been under the control of the Holy Spirit.

If we want our spiritual life to be well tempered, we need to attune our condition to a proper balance. We must neither be too much nor be too little. This can be compared to shooting on a pinball machine; there are pins to the left and to the right, and the balls must be directed at the optimum angle before they can score. There are many pitfalls in our spiritual journey; our mind, emotion, and will can all become hindrances to us. If we are too much or too little, we fall into danger.

Everything depends on God's mercy. Before I was saved, I planned to go to America. If I had left two months earlier, I would not have met Sister Dora Yu, and I might never have been saved. Even if I had been given the chance later, I might not have believed. It was God's mercy that I met Miss Dora Yu at that time. It was neither too early nor too late.

Only God can do things in just the right proportion. We are prone to speak either too much or not enough. No one can preach a message that will meet everyone's need. Even the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter faced the same problem. When words come out of a person's mouth, it is difficult for the words to come out just right. This is why it is easy for people to misunderstand.

Only God can bring man to a state of true humility. Sometimes a little cross and a little dealing make a person proud instead of humble. Only severe crosses and severe dealings will make a person humble.

Some people are too spiritual; they think that the Lord dwells only in our spirit. But Ephesians 3 says that Christ dwells in our heart through faith. He dwells not only in our spirit but also in our heart. This is something that a person can feel. John 15 says that Christ abides in the believers, but it does not say that Christ abides in our heart. Only Ephesians 3 speaks of Christ dwelling in our heart. Some people are too spiritual. They think that the heart does not mean much. However, many of the psalms speak of the heart. In order to be tempered in spiritual matters, we need to pay attention not only to the spirit but to our heart as well.

THE WAY OF THE CHURCH—LOOKING TO GOD'S MERCY

The way of the church during the past two thousand years is a way of looking to the mercy of God. Only God's mercy can temper us. I have often told the young people that they may have to wait for five years before they will realize that everything is of God's mercy. A person has an average of one hundred forty thousand hairs. The Bible says that God has numbered every one of our hairs. He knows us more than we know ourselves. When God wants to save us, we are saved. If God did not show mercy, no one could be saved. Once D. L. Moody was preaching the gospel, and a lady was about to be saved. At that moment an umbrella fell and caused a distraction. In the end the lady was not saved. Whether or not a man can be saved is not the responsibility of the preacher. The responsibility of the preacher is simply to present the way to others. Only God's mercy can put a person on the way. It is God's work that puts a person on the way. It is also God Himself who takes men forward on the way. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 57, pp. 3-6)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

Being Watchful in Life and Faithful in Service

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:4, 9-10, 14-15, 20-23

- I. 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—Matt. 25:4, 9-10:**
- A. "At that time the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom"—v. 1:
1. Virgins signify the believers viewed from the aspect of life—2 Cor. 11:2.
 2. Believers, who are the kingdom people, are like chaste virgins, bearing the Lord's testimony (the lamp) in the dark age and going out of the world to meet the Lord; for this they need not only the indwelling but also the filling of the Holy Spirit.
 3. Lamps signify the spirit of the believers (Prov. 20:27), which contains the Spirit of God as the oil (Rom. 8:16):
 - a. The believers shine forth the light of the Spirit of God from within their spirit; in order for the divine light to shine into man's inward parts, God's Spirit as the oil must soak (mingle with) man's spirit as the wick (cf. v. 16) and "burn" together with man's spirit (12:11).
 - b. Thus, the believers become the light of the world and shine as a lamp in the darkness of this age (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15-16), bearing the testimony of the Lord for the glorification of God.
 4. The prudent virgins took oil in their vessels with their lamps—Matt. 25:4:
 - a. Man is a vessel made for God (Rom. 9:21, 23-24), and man's personality is in his soul; hence, *vessels* in Matthew 25:4 signifies the souls of the believers.
 - b. The five prudent virgins not only have oil in their lamps but also take oil in their vessels; that they have oil in their lamps signifies that they have the Spirit of God dwelling in their spirit (Rom. 8:9, 16), and that they take oil in their vessels signifies that they have the Spirit of God filling and saturating their souls (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25; Heb. 13:17).
 - c. The word *buy* in Matthew 25:9 indicates that a price must be paid; having the filling of the Holy Spirit is at a cost, such as giving up the world, dealing with self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss for Christ; if we do not pay this price today, we will have to pay it after we are resurrected—cf. Rev. 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:10.
 - d. Our urgent need is to gain more of the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God, to live a life of buying an extra portion of the Spirit to saturate our entire being—Matt. 25:9; cf. Dan. 5:27.
- B. Every day we need to be watchful by paying the price to buy the Spirit as the golden oil so that we may supply the churches with the Spirit for the testimony of Jesus and be rewarded by the Lord to participate in the marriage dinner of the Lamb—Matt. 25:9-10; Rev. 3:18; Zech. 4:6, 12-14; Judg. 9:9:

1. We need to love the Lord above all, having our eyes opened to see His supreme preciousness—Matt. 22:37; Phil. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:4, 6-7; 1:19.
2. We need to count all things as loss on account of Christ that we may gain Him, be found in Him, and know Him—Phil. 3:7-10.
3. We need to enjoy the Lord in the Word every day early in the morning to have a new start each day—Psa. 119:147-148.
4. We need to deal with sins thoroughly—1 John 1:7, 9.
5. We need to abide in the fellowship with the Lord daily and hourly—v. 6; 2 Cor. 13:14.
6. We need to redeem our time and spend our energy to be saturated and soaked with God's holy Word—2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:16.
7. We need to be watchful, on the alert, for our prayer life, redeeming our time to pray—Eph. 6:18; Dan. 6:10; Col. 4:2.
8. We need to redeem the time in these evil days to be filled in spirit by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, by giving thanks to the Lord at all times for all things, and by being subject to one another in the fear of Christ—Eph. 5:14-21.
9. We should not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by speaking corrupt, rotten (noxious, offensive, or worthless) words; instead, we should speak words of grace to give grace to those who hear—4:29-30.
10. We should not quench the Spirit; instead, we should always rejoice, unceasingly pray, and in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us—1 Thes. 5:16-19.
11. We need to live, act, behave, do things, and have our being according to the mingled spirit—Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:17.
12. We need to be filled with the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as the supply of the Body of Christ, to live Christ for His magnification—Phil. 1:19-21a; Psa. 133; 1 Thes. 5:25.

II. 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—Matt. 25:20-23; cf. 24:45-51:

A. "The kingdom of the heavens is just like a man about to go abroad, who called his own slaves and delivered to them his possessions. To one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability. And he went abroad"—25:14-15:

1. Slaves signify believers viewed from the aspect of service—1 Cor. 7:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:1; Rom. 1:1.
2. *His possessions* signifies the church (Eph. 1:18) with all the believers, who constitute God's household (Matt. 24:45).
3. Talents signify spiritual gifts (25:15-23; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4; 1 Pet. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:6-7); 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.
4. *The joy of your master* signifies the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming kingdom as a reward for our faithful service to Him (Matt. 25:21, 23); 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 coming kingdom.

5. In this age we must use the Lord's gift to save people and to minister His riches to them—v. 27.
- B. Our inward motive for serving the Lord is our love for Him—Exo. 21:5; Rev. 2:4-5.
- C. Our serving the Lord should always proceed out from Him as the source of blessing, be through Him as the means and the power, and be unto Him for His glory—Rom. 11:36; cf. Num. 18:1.
- D. We need to serve the Lord with our whole being according to the counsel of God by coordinating with the members of the Body—Rom. 12:1-2, 11; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 12:14-22.
- E. We need to use the Lord's gift to build up the church by serving others with Christ and ministering Christ as grace to them—Matt. 25:27; 1 Pet. 4:10; Col. 1:7; 4:12:
 1. We need to serve as laboring priests of the gospel of God, saving sinners to offer them to God as acceptable sacrifices and eventually present them full-grown in Christ—Rom. 15:16; 12:1; Col. 1:28.
 2. We need to supply others with Christ as their spiritual food at the proper time—Matt. 24:45:
 - a. We need to speak Christ to all kinds of people daily in season and out of season—Acts 5:42; 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:2.
 - b. We need to desperately endeavor to build up a habit of speaking in any meeting—1 Cor. 14:26, 4-5, 12, 31.
 3. We need to care for people with the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ; love is the most excellent way for us to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ—John 21:15-17; 1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13.
 4. We should not mistreat our fellow believers by criticizing, judging, or exposing them; instead, we should admonish the disorderly, console the fainthearted, the "little-souled," sustain those who are weak in spirit, soul, or body, or are weak in faith, and be long-suffering toward all—Matt. 24:49; 1 Thes. 5:14.
 5. Through any involvement in the world, we render the Lord's gift useless, letting it lie waste under the cloak of certain earthly excuses—Matt. 25:18-19.
- F. Our work and labor for the Lord in the gospel are not by our natural life and natural ability but by the Lord's resurrection life and power; resurrection is the eternal principle in our service to God—Num. 17:8; 1 Cor. 15:10, 58; 16:10:
 1. The life-giving Spirit is the reality of the Triune God, the reality of resurrection, and the reality of the Body of Christ—John 16:13-15; 20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Eph. 4:4.
 2. All those who know resurrection have given up hope in themselves; they know that they cannot make it; everything that is of death belongs to us, and everything that is of life belongs to the Lord—Num. 17:8; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; cf. Eccl. 9:4.
 3. We must acknowledge that we are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing; we must come to the end of ourselves to be convinced of our utter uselessness—Exo. 2:14-15; 3:14-15; Luke 22:32-34; 1 Pet. 5:5-6.
 4. The resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit lives in us, enabling us to do what we could never do in ourselves—1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:8-9, 12; 4:7-18.
- G. We should always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor for the Lord in His resurrection life with His resurrection power will never be in vain but will result in the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose—1 Cor. 15:58.

BEING WATCHFUL TO BUY THE OIL

Now we need to see how to be watchful, which means we need to see how to buy the oil. To be watchful is to take care of the oil. When I was a young Christian, I considered that to be watchful was to look to the heavens for His coming and even to figure out when He would come. Later, I began to realize that this understanding was altogether not practical. By reading Matthew 25:1-13 again and again, I discovered that to be watchful is to take care of the oil. A careless driver is not watchful about the gasoline in his tank. He may be driving to a certain destination and then suddenly runs out of gas because he did not watch the gas gauge. Because of his carelessness, he suffers. Today since you are driving your "Christian car," do you care for your "gasoline"? The gasoline in your car is the Spirit, the oil. All the time you have to buy the oil.

Some young Christians indicated to me that they wanted to have some enjoyment in the world, especially since the Lord was not coming back immediately. They also said that the Lord gave us the time to be joyful, which to them meant to enjoy the worldly pleasures. Perhaps when they were over forty-five, then they would begin to love Him, because they were not so sure that He would come back within twenty years. Even if the Lord does delay His coming back, though, do we know when we will die? Probably none of those dear ones who lost their lives when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded had any inkling that they would lose their lives that day. Does anyone know when he will die?

You may not believe that the Lord will come back in the next twenty-five years or that you will die within this time. Therefore, you may desire to live carelessly as a Christian, loving whatever you like and doing whatever is a pleasure to you. Even if your figuration is right, sooner or later you will die, and you will die in a situation in which you will have never accumulated enough oil in your vessel.

To accumulate a deposit of the extra portion of the Holy Spirit in your being is not an overnight job. In order to grow and develop properly, a human being should be exercised for at least eighteen years to take in the nourishing life supply and to study, learn, and be educated. The more one lives in a loose, unrestricted way, the more he loses the chance and the time to accumulate the proper education in every way, not only in school. To be a proper person, you need to learn things every day. As a man over eighty, I am still learning and acquiring new knowledge. I use my dictionary frequently to pick up new words. I told some of the young saints that I would hate to see that after ten years they are still the same. To pick up things that become a constitution of your proper being is not a matter of one day or even one year. It is a matter of daily business for a lifetime.

I am still concerned that when the Lord comes back or when I die, by that time I will have had a sufficient amount of oil deposited in my vessel. If I die before His coming back, I will go to Paradise in Hades to see Abraham, David, and Paul and to be happy with these brothers, yet some day I will rise up and go to the air to stand before the Lord. Whether or not I will be raptured early remains to be seen. If we are raptured late, we will miss the wedding feast (25:10). In so many things I have the assurance, but in the matter of attending the wedding feast I do not have the assurance.

To be watchful does not mean only to watch for His coming. To be watchful is to prepare yourself every day by buying the oil. Every day we need to buy some oil. Our spiritual transformation is a daily and lifelong matter. Every day there should be some accumulation, some deposit of oil added to our being. We have not been that much in the proper exercise every day to exercise ourselves even every minute to buy the oil. A baby becomes a big boy by his daily

eating. This boy is an accumulation, a constitution, of the food that he has eaten and assimilated. For us to be qualified to be raptured to enter into the Bridegroom's wedding feast requires our passing through a long period of accumulating the spiritual oil. From the time you become a Christian, you should buy the oil to be deposited in your vessel every day.

I went to a meeting of one particular group of Pentecostal Christians. During their meeting there was much so-called speaking in tongues and prayer, but after their meeting probably no one was watchful. In every way you could see their looseness. I exercised to be with them in my spirit, and our spirit always would restrict us in what we say and do. I believe that even in that meeting with them I gained more of the Spirit, because by His mercy I was watching by praying to be filled with the Spirit.

The Christian life is not a matter of legalities concerning watching television, reading the newspaper, going to sporting events, or indulging in worldly pleasures. It is not a matter of merely whether or not something is scriptural. The Christian life is a matter that concerns our buying of the oil. You may not pray, yet you will watch television. You may not pray, yet you will read the newspaper. You may not pray, yet you will play sports. There are a lot of "yets" in your daily life. You just do not pray. You may not do anything sinful, but this parable of the virgins does not indicate that the Lord will judge us according to how much sin we have committed but according to how much oil we have in our vessel. To receive the Holy Spirit into our spirit, our lamp, is free. But to have the Spirit saturating our soul is not free. If you are going to get the Holy Spirit to saturate your soul, you must pay the price in dealing with your soul.

I have had to deal with my soul in many ways to buy the oil. When it seemed like it was a good time for me to joke with a person and I joked with a few sentences, I got condemned. I am not a piece of marble but a living person. Every living person has his opinion, but many times when I tried to express my opinion, I was stopped by the buying of the oil. Many times this view has affected my daily living. Could I get more Spirit by exchanging words with my wife? Could I get more Spirit by going to a certain place? I may want to go to a certain place, but I do not have the peace within me. The point is this—every day should be a day for us to pick up the oil in every way. We need to pray from the time that we wake up every morning, "Lord, I do not like to do anything that is not under my being watchful, that is not under my buying of the oil. I like to buy the oil at any time and in any instance. Otherwise, that will be a waste of my time." This should be our prayer and even our prayerful attitude. Many nights I regretted that I did not spend all my time to be in the spirit.

WATCHING UNTO PRAYER

In the New Testament watchfulness is wrapped up with prayer. Ephesians 6:18 tells us that we should be those watching unto prayer. We need to be watchful, on the alert for our prayer life. *Watching unto this* in verse 18 refers to *prayer and petition*. There is no other way to get the oil except by praying. If you do not pray, it means that you do not pay the price to buy the oil. Through prayer we receive more Spirit. Every time we pray, we have the deep sensation that some amount of the Spirit has been gained by us in our prayer. To spend our time for prayer rather than for so many other things means to pay the price to get the oil.

BUYING THE OIL FOR OURSELVES

All ten virgins were raised up from the dead, but their rapture after their resurrection was according to how much oil they had in their vessels. Our initial receiving of the Spirit at regeneration is not a ticket for us to enter into the wedding feast. The sufficient oil, the adequate oil, will become our entry, our ticket, to the wedding feast. The foolish virgins discovered that

they did not have the adequate supply of oil, so they wanted to borrow from the prudent ones (Matt. 25:8). Then the prudent virgins indicated that what they had was sufficient only for themselves (v. 9). Here is a principle—we can never borrow others' spirituality. One's spirituality can qualify only himself. You cannot borrow another's eating, and another person cannot eat for you. It is impossible. You cannot even borrow another person's study. You cannot ask someone to go to school for you and borrow whatever he learns. The prudent virgins told the foolish ones they had to buy the oil for themselves. When they are going to buy, the ready ones who have the sufficient oil are raptured. No doubt, that is before the tribulation.

The foolish ones were charged to go to those who sell the oil. According to Zechariah 4:11-14 and Revelation 11:3-4, the two witnesses during the great tribulation, the two olive trees and the two sons of oil, will be the oil sellers. That means they will give people more Spirit. The foolish virgins have to go to these oil sellers in the great tribulation to buy the oil. At that time the entire world will be a place of tribulation. As long as you are there, you are suffering; you are passing through the tribulation. If the foolish ones do not go to these oil sellers in the tribulation, they could never get the oil. This shows us that the foolish virgins will have to pay some price in suffering to get the oil, a price that they had never paid in their entire Christian lives. Even after the resurrection, they will still have to go through the suffering to pay the price for the oil. Finally, the foolish ones came (Matt. 25:11), but their coming, their rapture, was too late. The point again is this—since the time we were saved, every day should be redeemed by us to buy the oil. We all need to rise up from today to buy the oil.

NOT GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

Ephesians 4:30 tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Do not make Him unhappy. The Holy Spirit who is now sealing us unto the redemption of our body is in us. We must make Him happy. Because He has really joined us with Him as one (1 Cor. 6:17), when we are unhappy, this indicates that He is unhappy. If you do not come to the meeting, or if you come and do not function, this makes the Spirit unhappy. At the end of the day you may not feel so good, but when you come to the meeting and function in it, you feel so happy. This means that the Holy Spirit is happy within you. If you do not feel happy, this is an indication that you have grieved Him. Why have you grieved Him? Because you did not buy Him. You did not pay the price for Him. He is the oil.

NOT QUENCHING THE SPIRIT

First Thessalonians 5:19 says, "Do not quench the Spirit." Sometimes we even go further not only to grieve Him but also to quench Him. Sometimes we may tell the Lord to tolerate us for a certain time and not to inspire us. We may know that the Spirit is moving within us, but we may not like it. To quench the Spirit is to reject the buying of the oil. In many things we do not buy the Spirit, so we miss the chance to accumulate more and more of the Spirit in our being.

WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

Nearly the last charge in the entire New Testament is to walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4), which is our human spirit mingled with God's Holy Spirit (cf. v. 16), our mingled spirit. *To walk* means "to live, to act, to behave, to do things, to have our being." We have to have our being according to the spirit, and this is to buy the Spirit. Our thinking and our speaking, the expression of our attitude, should be according to the spirit. If you are having your being according to the spirit, this is to buy the Spirit. But to walk, to have your being according to the spirit, needs you to pay a great price. You may need to stop your excessive talking on the telephone and stop your further reading of the newspaper from the first page to the next.

BUYING THE OIL TO ANNUL OUR BARRENNESS

The real revival is to be raised up. We do not need to resurrect in the future to discover that we need to go and buy the oil. We need to be raised up today, every day paying the price to buy the Spirit. This is real revival, and I do believe that by being such persons, we will be fruitful. Many of us have to admit that we are barren. I hate to see the barrenness. We can give many excuses for this, such as our having been defamed and criticized. But how much have we been doing in these past few years in the matter of contacting others and speaking the Lord Jesus?

The many missionaries over the past two centuries would never have gone out if they had made excuses. The dear missionaries who went to China could have said, "The Chinese are closed and are too conservative. Even if they would open up their doors, they would not listen to anyone from the West. If I go, I will waste my time." There are always excuses against the ministry going out. But thank the Lord, these missionaries went, and they went in all kinds of hardships. According to my observation, the Presbyterian missionaries who went to China one hundred years ago were some of the best. Even though they did not know as much truth as we do, have as much light as we have, or have as much growth in life as we have, they had a heart for Jesus, to preach Him to the poor ones. They made a big success, and even I am here ministering today due to their labor. They did everything to open the door for the preaching of the Lord Jesus. When we grew up, we were under their mission work, and I studied at schools established by the missions. They brought the Bible to China, translated it into Chinese, and passed it on to us. Furthermore, they preached the Lord Jesus. At least they could say in Chinese, "Jesus loves you." Sometimes children would mock them or throw stones at them. Some were really caught by them even though they could only say "Jesus loves you."

Saints, we have no excuse. We do not need to go that far to China. We are in our Jerusalem, which is our neighborhood. We have to go. At least we can go once a week or once every two weeks to a certain neighbor. You could go to visit the same neighbor twenty-six times within one year. I do not believe that nothing will happen if we visit our neighbors in this way. Something will happen. If we all get one this year, all the churches will double.

The increase of some of the churches in the past few years is too low. Is this not a shame? This is due to our not buying the oil daily. If we would buy the oil daily, this will issue in something that cancels or annuls our barrenness. We will surely be fruitful. Just to encourage the brothers to go out to distribute the books is a temporary thing.

LIVING A LIFE OF BUYING AN EXTRA PORTION OF THE OIL

My burden is to fellowship with you that you may rise up to live a life of always buying an extra portion of the oil by not wasting your time in doing anything. If you do something, and you feel that it is a waste of time, you had better stop doing it. Use that time to contact the Lord, to pray. This is to watch unto prayer. To be watchful is not to let your time go, not to waste your time, but to take every time as a chance to buy the oil. To buy the oil is the best way to redeem our time, for the days are short. We all must rise up.

I believe that I have given you enough deeper truths already. I feel burdened to fellowship with you in this way. All of us need to live such a life of buying the oil daily, even hourly. We need to buy the oil in the way we dress, shop, talk, and live. In everything we must be serious and consider the solemn parable given by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:1-13. Whether or not we will be raptured early to enter into the wedding feast depends upon our daily buying of the Spirit from this moment. This is a lifelong matter, not an overnight matter. To get the proper and adequate education is not an overnight matter. A person needs to begin his study from kindergarten and pass through many grades until he finishes college. Take this fellowship as

something serious and solemn. This is not just advice but my serious fellowship with all of you in love. I do hope that we all would rise up to live such a life. I do not like merely to stir up or move people, because that does not work. The one thing that the Lord needs and that we need is to rise up to pay the price to buy the oil all the time in all the matters in our daily life. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 5, "The Way to Practice the Lord's Present Move," pp. 526-533*)

LIVING IN THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Spiritual Warfare to Bring In the Kingdom of God and Living in the Kingdom of the Son of God's Love

Scripture Reading: Rev. 11:15; 12:10; 4:11; Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:26, 28; Col. 1:12-13

I. The purpose of spiritual warfare is to bring in the kingdom of God—Matt. 6:10:

- A. Spiritual warfare is necessary because Satan's will is set against God's will—Eph. 5:17.
- B. Spiritual warfare has its source in the conflict between the divine will and the satanic will—Matt. 6:10; 7:21; Isa. 14:12-14:
 - 1. Lucifer's pride in his high position and beauty gave rise to an evil intention, which became the satanic will—Ezek. 28:12-19; Isa. 14:12-15.
 - 2. Before the archangel of God rose up to contradict the divine will, there was no war in the universe; the rebellion of Lucifer was the beginning of all the fighting that is now taking place among nations, in society, in the family, and within individuals—cf. Rev. 12:3-11; Gal. 5:17.
- C. God wants His creature *man* to deal with His fallen creation *Satan*; for this, the human will must stand with the divine will—Gen. 1:26; Matt. 26:39; 12:30; 7:21.
- D. As the church, our fighting is to subdue the satanic will and defeat God's enemy—Eph. 6:11-13.
- E. Spiritual warfare is the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan—Matt. 12:26, 28:
 - 1. The kingdom of God is versus the kingdom of Satan—vv. 26, 28:
 - a. God's kingdom is eternal, both in time and in space; Satan's kingdom is not eternal.
 - b. God's kingdom is legal, whereas Satan's kingdom is not legal, for it was established by rebellion against God.
 - 2. The kingdom of God will not come automatically; in order for the kingdom of God to come, there is the need of spiritual fighting—vv. 22-29.
 - 3. The responsibility of the church is to continue the victorious work that Christ has carried out against Satan—Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8b; Col. 2:15; Psa. 149:5-9.
 - 4. The kingdom of God is the exercise of the divine will and the overthrowing of the power of Satan by the power of God—Matt. 6:10.
 - 5. Whenever the devil has been cast out and wherever the work of the enemy has been displaced by God's power, the kingdom of God is there—12:28.
- F. "Your people will offer themselves willingly / In the day of Your warfare, / In the splendor of their consecration"—Psa. 110:3a:
 - 1. In a spiritual sense, we are now in the day of Christ's warfare, and for Him we need to be a voluntary offering, a freewill offering—Lev. 22:18; Deut. 12:6.

2. In order to engage in spiritual warfare to defeat God's enemy and bring in the kingdom of God, we need an absolute and thorough consecration to the Lord; in the eyes of God, such a consecration is a matter of splendor—Psa. 110:3a.

II. The Father has "delivered us out of the authority of darkness" and has "transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"—Col. 1:12-13:

A. The authority of darkness denotes the authority of Satan; God is light, and Satan is darkness:

1. Satan's authority of darkness is the authority of evil in the heavenlies, in the air—Eph. 6:12.
2. The authority of evil, of rebellion, in the heavenlies is the kingdom of Satan, the authority of darkness—Matt. 12:26.
3. To be delivered out of the authority of darkness is to be delivered from the devil, who has the might of death—Heb. 2:14; John 17:15.
4. We have been delivered from the devil, Satan, by the death of Christ and by the life of Christ in resurrection—Col. 2:15; John 5:24.

B. The Father has "transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"—Col. 1:13:

1. The kingdom of the Son of God's love is the authority of Christ—Rev. 11:15; 12:10.
2. The Son of God is the embodiment and expression of the divine life; therefore, the kingdom is of the Son as a realm of life—1 John 5:11-12:
 - a. To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son, who is life to us—Col. 3:4.
 - b. The Son as resurrection is now the life-giving Spirit, and He rules us in His resurrection life with His love—1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:45b.
 - c. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father's love—John 6:57.
3. The fact that we have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love indicates that this realm of life is in love, not in fear—Col. 1:13:
 - a. The kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love—1 John 1:1-2, 5, 7; 4:8, 16.
 - b. The Son as the object of the divine love becomes to us the embodiment of the divine life in the divine love with the authority of resurrection; this is the kingdom of the Son of God's love—Col. 1:13.
 - c. The Father has transferred us into a realm where we are ruled in love with life:
 - 1) Here, under the heavenly ruling and restriction, we have genuine freedom in love, with life, and under light—Matt. 7:13-14.
 - 2) Here in this kingdom we enjoy Christ and have the church life—Col. 1:12; 4:15-16.

C. The kingdom of the Son of God's love is a crucial aspect of God's will—1:9; 4:12:

1. God is a God of purpose, having a will of His own pleasure, and He created all things for His will so that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose—Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9-11.
2. The Father's eternal will is to build up the church upon Christ the Son as the rock—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16.

3. The will of God is to obtain a Body for Christ to be His fullness, His expression—Rom. 12:2-5; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11, 22-23.
4. The kingdom is absolutely a matter of God's will and completely fulfills His will; in fact, the kingdom is God's will—Matt. 6:10.
5. As the kingdom people, those who are living in the kingdom of the Son of God's love, we are here on earth to do the Father's will—7:21; 12:50.
- D. In the kingdom of the Son of God's love, there is only one person—the all-inclusive Christ—and one way—the cross—Col. 2:9, 14-15:
 1. The one person, Christ, is the center, the focal point, of the universe—1:15-17.
 2. God's intention is not to give us many items; He intends to give us one person, the all-inclusive Christ—2:10.
 3. The cross is the center of God's government—vv. 14-15:
 - a. By the cross God has dealt with all the negative things in the universe.
 - b. God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross.
- E. In the kingdom of the Son of God's love, Christ has the first place, the preeminence, in all things—1:18:
 1. Both in the old creation and in the new creation, in the universe and in the church, Christ is the first and occupies the first place of preeminence.
 2. If we see the vision of the preeminence of Christ, our Christian life and our church life will be revolutionized, for we will realize that in all things Christ must be first:
 - a. To give the Lord the first place in all things is to love Him with the first love, the best love—Rev. 2:4.
 - b. In order to give Christ the preeminence, we must be willing to be adjusted, to be broken, and to be made nothing so that He can have a way in us, through us, and among us for the building up of His organic Body.
 3. In the kingdom of the Son of God's love, we experience and enjoy Christ in His all-inclusiveness—Col. 1:12, 27; 2:9, 16-17; 3:1, 4, 11:
 - a. Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily—2:9.
 - b. Christ is our allotted portion, our good land—the divine inheritance for our enjoyment—1:12.
 - c. Christ is the reality of every positive thing in the universe—2:16-17.
 - d. Christ is the One sitting at the right hand of God—3:1.
 - e. Christ dwells in us as our hope of glory—1:27.
 - f. Christ is our life—3:4.
 - g. Christ is the constituent of the one new man—vv. 10-11.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The Kingdom of the Son of God's Love

Paul tells us that the Father has "delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). *The authority of darkness* denotes the authority of Satan. God is light, and Satan is darkness. God has delivered us out of Satan's authority of darkness into God's marvelous light. Darkness is Satan as death, but light is God as life. To be delivered out of the authority of darkness is to be delivered from the devil, who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14; John 17:15). We have been delivered from the devil, Satan, by the death of Christ (Col. 2:14-15) and by the life of Christ in resurrection (John 5:24).

We have not only been delivered out of the authority of darkness but also transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. The kingdom of the Son is the authority of Christ (Eph. 1:16, 12:18).

According to the New Testament, the Son of God is the expression of the divine life and its embodiment. This means that the kingdom of the Son is a realm of life. The fact that the kingdom into which we have been transferred is the kingdom of the Son of God's love indicates that this realm of life is in love, not in fear. The kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love.

The Son of the Father is the expression of the Father as the source of life (John 1:10, 4; 1 John 1:2). The Father as the source of life is expressed in the Son. The Son of the Father's love is the object of the Father's love to be the embodiment of life to us in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. The Son, as the embodiment of the divine life, is the object of the Father's love. The divine life embodied in the Son is given to us in the divine love. Therefore, the object of the divine love becomes to us the embodiment of life in the divine love with the authority in resurrection. This is the kingdom of the Son of His love.

To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son who is life to us (1 John 5:12). The Son in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:4-5) is now the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). He rules us in His resurrection life with love. This is the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection, we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father's love.

We have been transferred into a realm where we are ruled in love with life. Here, under the heavenly ruling and restriction, we have genuine freedom, the proper freedom in love, with life, and under light. This is what it means to be delivered out of the authority of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. Here in this kingdom we enjoy Christ and have the church life.

Comprising the Church in the Present Age, the Millennium in the Coming Age, and the New Heaven and New Earth in Eternity

The kingdom of the Son of God's love comprises three ages: the present age, in which the church is; the coming age, in which the millennial kingdom will be; and the eternal age with the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth. These three aspects of the kingdom are considered by Paul in Colossians 1:13 as the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

The words the Son of God are a delight to the Father's ears. When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight" (Matt. 3:17). When the Lord was transfigured, the Father made the same declaration (Matt. 17:5). Because the Father delights in His Son, the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is a pleasant thing, a matter of delight. This is the reason it comprises only three sections—the section of the church life, the section of the heavenly part of the kingdom of the heavens in the millennium, and the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the church and the kingdom. In each of these three sections the kingdom of the Son of God's love is a matter of delight. The Father, by His mercy and grace, has transferred us out of the darkness of Satan into this pleasant part of the kingdom.

The Stress in Colossians 1:13 Is the Kingdom of the Son of God's Love in This Age, Which Is the Reality of the Church

The stress in Colossians 1:13 is the kingdom of the Son of God's love in this age, which is

the reality of the church. The church life today is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, which is as delightful to God the Father as the Son of God is. We, the believers, all have been transferred into this delightful kingdom of the Son of God's love. God the Father loves the delightful part of the kingdom, just as He loves His delightful Son as His own. So, the church, as the delightful part of the divine kingdom, is considered a great blessing to God's redeemed people by the apostle Paul in the book of Colossians, a book which is on Christ as the all-inclusive portion of God's people (Col. 1:12).

All the Believers Have Been Transferred into This Aspect of the Kingdom

John 3:5 indicates that it is through regeneration that all the believers have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Through regeneration we have been brought out of the darkness of Satan into this delightful aspect of the kingdom. God loved the Son, so He gave this part of the kingdom to Him. Through God's salvation and regeneration, all the believers of His Son have been transferred into this section of the kingdom. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 2581-2584)