LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE ONE

A FOREWORD

This message is a foreword to the life-study of the Gospel of John. We need to have an overview of the Bible as a whole. Many times in the past we have stressed that the Bible covers two main matters--Christ and the church. However, considered from another angle, the Bible is a book of life and building. Christ is life, and the church is a building. When we speak of Christ and the church, we must realize that Christ is life and that the church is a building. If you fail to realize that Christ is life and that the church is a building, then when you say these words they will simply be doctrinal terms. What is Christ? Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). What is the church? The church is God's building.

The Bible is very consistent. If you read it with insight and with the heavenly vision, you will discover that it begins with life and building. We see life and building in Genesis 2. Immediately after the creation of man, life was introduced. After the Lord God created man, He placed him in a garden in front of the tree of life (Gen. 2:7-9). Following this mention of the tree of life, we see the flowing river and three precious materials: gold, bdellium, which is pearl, and onyx, a precious stone. According to the further revelation of the Scriptures, especially Revelation 21, these precious materials are for God's building. In Genesis 2:22 we find specific mention of the building. "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, builded he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Heb.). God took a rib out of Adam's side and used it to build him a wife. Thus, the man was created, but the woman was builded. In Genesis 2 we see life, the materials that proceed out of the flow of life, and the building of a wife. Therefore, in Genesis 2 we have life and building.

The book of Revelation also speaks of life. Revelation 2:7 says, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the

tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." This certainly is a reference to the tree of life in Genesis 2. Revelation 2:17 says, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone." This verse speaks of a stone which, according to the Bible, has no purpose other than that of building. In the last two chapters of Revelation, which are the last two chapters of the Bible, we see the building of the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem the river of life flows and the tree of life grows in the waters of the river (Rev. 22:1-2). Thus, it is clear that the Bible ends as it begins, with life and building.

Between Genesis and Revelation, the two ends of the Bible, there is a wide gap, a broad span. What bridges this gap? The bridge is the Gospel of John. The book of John opens with the words, "In the beginning." However, if you read this gospel carefully, you will discover that the history recorded in it has no end. Hence, it starts from the beginning in eternity past and it continues indefinitely into the future. Thus, it bridges the span between Genesis and Revelation.

We have seen that the Bible begins and ends with life and building. The Gospel of John, the bridge between the two ends of the Bible, is also a book of life and building. A few words from the first chapter of this gospel will convince us of this fact. "In the beginning was the Word...In Him was life" (1:1, 4). The Gospel of John does not say, "In the beginning was doctrine, and in it was knowledge." No, it says that in the beginning was the Word, that the Word was God, and that in this One, the Word who was God, was life. Therefore, we find life in the first chapter of John. Furthermore, verse 42 of the same chapter speaks of a stone. When Simon was brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew, He gave him a new name, Cephas, which means a stone. In the same chapter we are told that in the Lord was life and that one of His disciples

became a stone. What is the meaning of this? It means that life not only quickens, enlivens, and regenerates, but also transforms. Life will transform the believer into a stone.

The purpose and function of the stone are revealed in 1:51. Speaking to Nathanael, the Lord said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." The ancient Jews knew the meaning of this word. It was the fulfillment of Jacob's dream recorded in Genesis 28:10-22. In that dream Jacob saw a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reached to heaven and on which the angels of God ascended and descended (Gen. 28:12). Jacob called the name of the place at which he had the dream Bethel (Gen. 28:19), which means "the house of God." During the night Jacob slept there, he used a stone as his pillow. Early the next morning he awoke and poured oil upon the stone, calling the name of that place Bethel. The Lord Jesus was referring to Jacob's dream as He spoke to Nathanael. Therefore, in the light of all these verses from John 1, we can see that this gospel is concerned with life and building.

We have seen that Genesis 2:22 speaks of the building of a wife, a bride for Adam. John also mentions the bride. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). Who is the bride? According to John 3, all the regenerated ones composed together become the bride.

Moreover, John 14:2 says, "In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." This verse tells us that the Lord was going to prepare a place of many abodes in the house of the Father. And if we love the Lord, He will come with the Father and make an abode with us (14:23). When we study John 14 we shall see that this denotes the building of God's eternal habitation, a building which has many abodes. Thus, the Gospel of John is altogether a gospel on life and building. If you want to know the meaning of the Bible, you cannot stay away from the Gospel of John. The key to the whole Bible is in this book.

We have seen that Christ is life and that the church is a building. But what is life? It is correct to say that life is

Christ and that Christ is life. However, we must realize that life is Christ as God dispensed into our being. Although many Christians talk about Christ being life, not all have the experience of Christ as life. The genuine experience of Christ as life is in the realization that Christ is God Himself dispensed into our being. This is life. If you lack this realization, the word life may remain a mere term as far as you are concerned. Life is the Triune God dispensed and wrought into our being.

Although I do not drink alcoholic beverages, we may use the illustration of drinking a glass of wine. If I were to drink a tall glass of wine, after a short period of time my complexion would become colorful because of the effect of the wine upon my system. I would be bold, happy, and blissful. That would be the result of wine becoming life to me. However, if I only learn the meaning of the word wine, discussing it night and day and acquiring a great deal of knowledge about it, I would experience nothing. The wine would be unrelated to me. On the contrary, if you forget about discussing the wine and drink a large glass of it each day, you will know what wine is, for it will be dispensed into you, making you happy and ecstatic. Although this example may be poor, it is nevertheless very illustrative.

Do not talk about life without the realization of life. What is the realization of life? It is the living Triune God being wrought into us. The Lord Jesus never told us to talk about life. He said that He is the bread of life and that we have to eat Him (John 6:57). He also told us that He gives the living water and that we must drink it (John 4:10, 14). When you eat the bread, it will be wrought into you, and when you drink the water, it will be dispensed into you. No longer will you only have bread and water, you will have life. You will have Christ as the Triune God dispensed and wrought into your being. Do not put some artificial coloring on your face, but simply drink the heavenly wine and you will have a colorful complexion. Do not pretend to be joyful when inwardly you are filled with sorrow. If you realize that the Triune God has been

dispensed into you, you will be happy and your joy will be full. This is life.

What is building? Many of you are familiar with the term building. Numerous times the young people have told me, "O brother, in the brothers' house we have very little building." Occasionally I ask them what they mean by this, and they say, "We are all so independent. We lack the building among us." Thus, I ask you, what does building mean? Perhaps no one reading this message can give an adequate definition. According to your understanding, what does the word building mean? Some may find it easy to give a doctrinal answer, perhaps quoting a phrase from Ephesians or another biblical book, but it is difficult to answer in a practical way.

Building is actually the enlargement of God. Building is the enlargement of God to express God in a corporate way. We have seen that life is God Himself wrought into our being. If the Triune God has truly been wrought into us, the issue will be an enlargement and an expansion of God. As I have mentioned earlier in this message, God did not create a couple; He only created a man. The wife came out of the husband, becoming the enlargement of her husband. That was building. Eve, as the wife of Adam, was God's building, and that building was the enlargement of Adam. Adam was a figure and type of God becoming a man, and Eve was a figure and type of God's building. Since this building was a part of Adam, it was undoubtedly his enlargement and expansion.

We need to read the Bible carefully. In Genesis 1 God was alone. At the end of the book of Revelation, God is in the center of the holy city, New Jerusalem, which is His enlargement. In the beginning we find God Himself without any expansion or enlargement. However, throughout the ages and generations God has been working Himself into His chosen people. Eventually we all shall become His building, a building which is the enlargement of God Himself. Hence, this building will become God's expansion, and this expansion will express

God in a corporate way. This is God's building. Building is not simply that I depend upon you, that you depend upon me, and that the brothers and sisters depend upon one another. That is not an adequate understanding of building. The proper building is the enlargement of God, the expansion of the Triune God, enabling God to express Himself in a corporate way. This is exactly the revelation of the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John reveals that the Triune God is dispensing Himself into His believers and that all His believers, as a result of the transfusion and infusion of the Triune God into them, become His enlargement. This enlargement of the Triune God is the expansion, the building, and the expression of God. This is the revelation of the Gospel of John. Thus, when we speak of the building of God, we mean that the Triune God as life is being wrought into us continually and that under His transfusion and infusion we are becoming His one expression. This expression is His enlargement and expansion. May this thought be written on our heart.

I. THE CENTRAL THOUGHT OF THE SCRIPTURE-- LIFE AND BUILDING

A. Life

God's creation was centered on life. This is unfolded in Genesis 1. If you read the life-study messages on Genesis 1, you will see that God's creation was focused on life.

After creating man God placed him in front of the tree of life, indicating that He wanted man to take Him in as life. This is unveiled in Genesis 2:8-9.

The Old Testament saints enjoyed God as their life. Even the psalmists enjoyed God in this way. Psalm 36:8-9 says, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light."

In the time of the New Testament, God came in the Person of the Son to be life to man. This is fully revealed

in the Gospel of John, especially, as we have seen, in 1:4, and also in 10:10, which says, "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly." Eventually, Christ is life to the New Testament believers (Col. 3:4). We all have Christ as our life.

In eternity the tree of life and the river of life will be in the New Jerusalem, indicating that the Triune God will be the life supply to all of His redeemed ones forever (Rev. 22:1-2, 14, 17).

B. Building

As we have already seen, the flow of the river from Eden brought forth gold, pearl, and onyx, which are materials for God's building (Gen. 2:10-12).

God used a rib from Adam to build a bride for him (Gen. 2:22), which was a type of the building of the church and ultimately of the New Jerusalem.

God's intention was for man to be His bride. This bride is symbolized as a city, for in the Bible a city is always visualized as a woman. Hence, a city is a symbol of a corporate wife.

The Building of Enoch's City

However, before God built His corporate wife on this earth, Satan constructed his first counterfeit, the city of Enoch, named after Cain's son (Gen. 4:16-24). The city of Enoch was a devilish counterfeit conceived by Satan to frustrate God's purpose.

The Building of Noah's Ark

The city of Enoch produced a culture that corrupted the whole of mankind, and that corruption brought in the judgment of the flood. Before the flood came, God commanded Noah to build an ark (Gen. 6:11-21). According to 1 Peter 3:20-21, the ark typified Christ. The building of the ark was versus Satan's counterfeit, the city of Enoch. All of the worldly people of the time were included in the city of Enoch, but Noah stood apart, building an ark for God's salvation.

The Building of Noah's Altar and Tent

After the flood, Noah built an altar and pitched a tent (Gen. 8:20; 9:21). The altar was for the purpose of worshipping God, and the tent was for his living. These two items were Noah's building. His tent and altar were miniatures of the tent and altar which the children of Israel later built for their worship of God.

The Building of the Tower and City of Babel

Noah's descendants built the tower and city of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). The tower was versus Noah's altar, and the city was versus his tent. This building was Satan's second counterfeit, a rival of God's building.

The Building of Abraham's Altar and Tent

Out of the rebellious descendants of Noah God called Abraham. Over against the tower and the city of Babel, Abraham built an altar and a tent (Gen. 12:7-8; 18:1, 6, 9). Noah's altar and tent were versus the city of Enoch; Abraham's were opposed to the tower and city of Babel. At Babel there was a tower, but with Abraham there was an altar; at Babel there was a city, but with Abraham there was a tent. Hence, God's building with Abraham was versus Satan's counterfeit building at Babel.

The Building of Sodom

While Abraham lived in the tent, his nephew fell into the city of Sodom which was another counterfeit building of Satan (Gen. 13:12-13; 18:20; 19:1). According to history, Babel was a city of idols, and Sodom was a city of sin.

The Building in Jacob's Dream--Bethel

With Babel and Sodom as the background, God, according to His selection, visited Jacob, "a supplanter." Jacob knew nothing of God's selection; he only knew how to be crafty. Nevertheless, God was sovereign, forcing him to leave his parents' home. While he was wandering, he slept one night in the open air. That night he had a dream

in which he saw a ladder set up from the earth to the heavens (Gen. 28:10-22). The angels of God were ascending and descending upon this ladder. When Jacob awoke from his sleep he said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." As we have already pointed out, Bethel means the house of God. Genesis 28:18 says that Jacob "took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel." Scripturally speaking, a stone symbolizes a transformed person. According to the Bible, the oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, reaching human beings. Whenever the Triune God reaches a human being through the Person of the Holy Spirit, that man will become a part of Bethel, the house of God. We all are stones which have been anointed with oil. Thus, we are the Bethel. Although I do not know where Jacob acquired the oil, he nevertheless anointed the stone with it and called it Bethel.

The Building of Pharaoh's Treasure Cities

However, Jacob's descendants did not stay in the promised land, but went down into Egypt where they were forced to build Pharaoh's treasure cities (Exo. 1:11-14), which were further counterfeits of Satan. Have you noticed the alternation between the positive and the negative, between God's building and Satan's counterfeit? This resembles the alternation of night and day. After each night we have a day, and after each day we have a night. After Jacob's positive dream, we have the building of Pharaoh's treasure cities, cities of worldly enjoyment.

The Building of the Tabernacle

After the "night" of Pharaoh's treasure cities, we have the "day" of the building of the tabernacle (Exo. 25:1-9). In the midst of all the cities on the negative side we have the building of God's tabernacle on the positive side. Jacob's descendants were rescued from Egypt and brought to Mt.

Sinai. After they were released from the bondage of Pharaoh, they became God's freed people, being made by God's mercy and grace a "kingdom of priests" (Exo. 19:6). Then God charged them to build a tabernacle as His dwelling place among them on earth, and He showed them the heavenly pattern that they might build it according to God's plan and design. And they did accordingly. From that time there was a real and practical building of God as His habitation on earth. That tabernacle with the altar was the enlargement of Noah's and Abraham's tents and altars. It was not only God's dwelling place, but also a place for God's priests to stay with God. It was not only a full type of Christ, but also a prefigure of the church as the enlargement of Christ. All the utensils within it were types of the different aspects of Christ as the content of the church. It fulfilled God's plan in the way of type, expressed the heart's desire of God, and satisfied Him. Thus, after it was builded and erected, God's glory filled it (Exo. 40:17, 34).

The Building of the Temple

After the tabernacle was built, it was carried through the wilderness and was brought into God's promised land, remaining there as God's habitation on earth until the temple was built (1 Kings 6:1-10). Its history lasted for about five hundred years, from approximately 1500 to approximately 1000 B.C., and is recorded from Exodus to 1 Kings. The temple was bigger and more solid than the tabernacle, but its purpose and function were the same. It was the type of both Christ and the church in a full way. With the building of the temple, Jacob's dream, at least to some extent, was fulfilled. There was, on earth, a house of God built with stones on a solid foundation. It was much more solid in form than was the tabernacle. Its history lasted for about four hundred years, from about 1000 B.C. until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in approximately 600 B.C., and is recorded from 1 Kings to Ezra.

The Building of Babylon

In opposition to the temple with its city, Jerusalem, Satan built the city of Babylon (Dan. 4:28-30), which was a bigger counterfeit. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, with his army destroyed the temple of God and brought its utensils to Babylon, putting them in his temple of idols (2 Chron. 36:7, 18-19). By this we can see how Satan has been constantly frustrating and damaging God's building as His habitation on earth.

The Rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem

Seventy years after the destruction of the temple some of the Jewish people returned from their captivity and rebuilt the temple (Ezra 1:2-5). The rebuilding of the temple was the recovery of God's building. Following the rebuilding of the temple came the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:17-18). This remained until the Lord Jesus came.

The Building of the Church

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord prophesied that He would build the church, which is the fulfillment of both the tabernacle and the temple as God's habitation on earth. After the Lord had accomplished redemption, had resurrected from the dead, and had ascended to the heavens to send down the Spirit, the building of the church began. This building has lasted over nineteen centuries and will last until the Lord's second coming.

The Building of the Local Churches

In order to accomplish the building of the church the Lord builded the local churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The building of the church is actually realized by the building of the local churches. The building of the local churches is practical. Although the church is universally one, the local churches, as the expressions of the one universal church, are many. The building of the universal church began in the building of the local churches. It has been proceeding and will continue to proceed in this way until its completion.

The Building of Religious and Political Babylon

In order to oppose and frustrate God's building of the church Satan builded, both in a religious and a political way, the great Babylon (Rev. 17:5; 18:2, 21), which is his ultimate counterfeit. Religious Babylon is exposed in Revelation 17, and political Babylon in Revelation 18. These two sides of Babylon are the greatest, the consummate, and the ultimate counterfeit of Satan in frustrating God's building. It is versus God's ultimate building, the New Jerusalem.

The Building of the New Jerusalem

God's building, mainly, the building of the church, will consummate in the New Jerusalem, which is His ultimate building (Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22; Rev. 21:2, 10--22:2). Satan's building will consummate in the great Babylon; God's building will consummate in the New Jerusalem, which will ultimately fulfill God's eternal purpose, express God, and fully satisfy Him for eternity.

Thus, we have before us a brief sketch of the whole Bible showing the two lines of life and building.

II. THE POSITION OF JOHN'S WRITINGS IN THE SCRIPTURE

A. John's Ministry, A Mending Ministry by Life

John's ministry was a mending ministry. When Peter was called by the Lord, he was fishing, but when John was called, he was mending the net (Matt. 4:21). Peter did a great deal of fishing, bringing in a multitude of people. However, John mended the spiritual net, for his ministry of mending was a mending ministry of life. Only life can mend, covering all the holes in the spiritual net. How much this is needed today! There are so many holes in the Christian net. What can mend them? Nothing but life. This is the reason that we have been burdened over and over again with this matter of life. Some people laugh at us saying, "Don't you know anything except the one word life?" Yes, in a sense, we only know life, nothing else. We

do not know anything else because we do not need anything else. Life is our only need. Brothers and sisters, you need life. Other things may enlarge the holes; life will close every gap. We need John's ministry. John's ministry, the last ministry in the Bible and the ministry with which the Bible concludes, was a mending ministry of life.

B. John's Writings, the Final Words of the Divine Revelation

All of John's writings are the final words of the divine revelation in the Scriptures. The final word is always the decisive word. Although many words may be spoken, the decision depends upon the final word. John's gospel is the last of the four gospels, his epistles are among the last ones of the epistles, and his revelation is the last book of both the New Testament and of the entire Bible. Thus, his writings are the final word of the divine revelation.

III. THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A. An Extract of the Whole Bible

We have seen that the Bible is a book of life and building and that the Gospel of John is also focused on life and building.

1. Life

The Gospel of John reveals that in Christ, the Word of God, is life (1:4); that He came that man may have life (10:10b); and that He Himself is life (11:25; 14:6). Furthermore, this Gospel shows us that Christ is the bread of life (6:35); that He has the water of life (4:14); that He gives life to man (5:21); and that He even lives in man as life (14:19).

2. Building

The Gospel of John unfolds the building. In 1:14 we see that Christ in the flesh was the tabernacle for God's

habitation among men on earth. "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." Also, Christ's body was the temple before His death and after His resurrection (2:19-22). Before His death His body in the flesh was the temple, and after His resurrection His resurrected body remained the temple of God. This is the building. Furthermore, this gospel reveals that the believers are to be built as the abode of the Triune God (14:2, 23). This is adequately and fully disclosed in John 14. According to that chapter, all the believers will be built together as God's eternal habitation with so many abodes. Thus, as the Lord's last prayer found in John 17 indicates, all His believers must be built up into one (vv. 11, 21-23).

B. Of Two Sections

1. The First Section: The Lord's Coming

The first section of the Gospel of John, composed of the first thirteen chapters, is on the coming of the Lord Jesus to bring God into man and to declare God to man. This section tells how the Lord was the Word of God, which was God Himself, coming through His incarnation to bring God into man and to declare God to man. Before the time of His incarnation, He was separate from man. God was God, and man was man. However, through His incarnation He brought God into man. God became one with a man named Jesus, a man who was both God and man. Although no one has ever seen God, through incarnation the only begotten Son of God has declared God to man in life, light, grace, and reality. We shall see more of this in the following messages. For the time being it is sufficient to remember that in the first section of John we see how God was brought into man and declared to man.

2. The Second Section: The Lord's Going in Death and Coming Back in Resurrection

The second section, composed of the last eight chapters, is on the Lord's going in death and coming back

in resurrection to bring man into God and to abide in and with man for God's building. In the first section He brought God into man; in the second section He passed through death and resurrection to bring man into God. Thus, He is able to enter into man and to abide in and with man for God's building.

Although the language of the Gospel of John is simple and brief, this book is deep and profound. The language is so elementary that even a first grader can read most of it. "In the beginning was the Word"; "I am the light"; "I am the life"--such statements are simple, but their meaning is profound. What does "the Word" mean? Try to define it. What does it mean to say that "in Him was life"? Who can say what life is? It is profound, far beyond our understanding. Hence, this gospel, in its brief and simple style, uses many allegories and figures. In John 1 we have the Word. We know that this Word was Christ. However, do not think that Christ was a word with four letters; the Word here is an allegory, a figure, depicting what Christ means for God. In 1:14 we have the tabernacle, which also was Christ. Furthermore, in 1:29 Christ is called the Lamb of God, although He was not actually a lamb with four feet. We have seen that Christ called Peter a stone (1:42), but this "stone" has a spiritual significance. Therefore, we should not try to understand the Gospel of John merely according to letters; we need to allegorize it in a proper way according to the revelation of the entire Bible.

Nearly every chapter of John's gospel contains some figures. In chapter one we have the Word, the light, the tabernacle, the lamb, the stone, and the heavenly ladder; in chapter two the six waterpots, the wine, the temple, and the Father's house; in chapter three the serpent on a pole; in chapter four Jacob's well and the living water; in chapter six the living bread; in chapter seven the rivers of living water; in chapter nine the spittle and the clay; in chapter ten the door, the fold, the flock, the pasture, and the shepherd; in chapter twelve the grain of wheat; in chapter thirteen the footwashing; in chapter fifteen the

vine and the branches; in chapter sixteen the woman and the child; in chapter nineteen the bone, the blood, and the water; in chapter twenty the breath; and in chapter twenty-one the sheep and the lambs. We cannot understand this gospel properly without allegorizing all of its figures.

Because the matters of life are abstract, deep, and profound, it is extremely difficult to describe and express them with ordinary human language. Hence, this gospel uses various figures to signify spiritual things, the exceedingly profound matters of life and building. Thus, we need to read the Gospel of John carefully, praying to receive a genuine understanding of the allegories. To help you in this, we suggest that you read the Recovery Version of John, paying close attention to all the notes. If you read the text and the notes, you will be helped.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWO

AN INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AND BUILDING

(1)

I. THE WORD, WHO WAS GOD, COMING AS LIFE AND LIGHT TO BRING FORTH THE CHILDREN OF GOD

A. In the Beginning the Word

The language of the Gospel of John is simple and brief, but this book is actually the most profound book in the Bible. Consider, as an example, the first clause of the whole book: "In the beginning was the Word." Although the language of this clause is very simple, the depths of its meaning cannot be fathomed. What is the beginning?" Do you understand what the beginning is? When was the beginning? How difficult it is to answer. Furthermore, what is the Word? If you say that the Word is Christ, I would ask you why Christ is designated as the Word in this verse. Why is He not designated otherwise? That such a term as "the Word" is used to designate Christ is very meaningful. Although this clause is exceedingly deep, let us try to understand it.

1. The Beginning--the Eternity Past

The Bible begins with the words, "In the beginning." However, what Genesis 1:1 says is different from John 1:1. It says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the

earth." Although two books, Genesis and John, start with the same phrase, the meaning of each is absolutely different. The phrase, "In the beginning," in Genesis denotes the beginning of time, for it refers to God's creation. Therefore Genesis 1:1 refers to the beginning of time in which God created all things. The meaning of this phrase in John 1:1 is different, for it refers to eternity in the past without a beginning. The beginning in Genesis 1 starts from the time of creation, but the beginning in John 1 is before the time of creation. In other words, the beginning in Genesis 1 is the beginning of time, and the beginning in John is the beginning before time existed; it refers to eternity past without a beginning.

As we pointed out in the last message John's ministry was a mending ministry. Mending means that something has been in existence for a length of time, that it has been damaged, broken, or hurt and that it now requires mending. Mending always restores a situation to the condition which was present at the beginning. For example, I have had a particular jacket for seven years. At times, a part of this jacket has been torn, and my wife has had to mend it for me. After she mended the broken places, the jacket was restored to its original condition. Likewise, the church has been in existence since the day of Pentecost. However, not too long after its beginning, the church was damaged and injured by many different thoughts, opinions, concepts, philosophies, ideas, teachings, and doctrines. If you carefully read the New Testament along with church history, you will learn that many injurious concepts crept into the church through Judaism. These ideas damaged the ancient church. Moreover, in the early days, even in the first century, Gnosticism, a blend of Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian philosophy, also crept into the church, causing considerable harm. Thus, the early church was damaged by both Jewish religious concepts and Greek philosophical ideas, all of which produced numerous doctrines and teachings and injured the church, making many holes in the spiritual net.

The largest hole in the church net was caused by some so-called Christians who, in their philosophical concepts, did not recognize that Christ was God incarnated to be a man. They claimed to be Christians, but did not believe that Christ, the Son of God, had come in the flesh. These were called antichrists by John (1 John 2:18, 22). Thus, 1 John 4:1-3 says that we may test the genuineness of a spirit by asking it whether or not it recognizes that Christ has come in the flesh, for "every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God." Furthermore, in his second epistle John warned the believers about antichrist, a person who claims to be a Christian, but who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (v 7). Those who preach Christianity without believing that Christ was God incarnated to be a man caused a large hole in the net. Thus, by His sovereignty, God prepared a mending ministry to patch up all the holes. John's ministry fulfilled this task, testifying that Christ, the very God incarnated, came in the flesh (John 1:1, 14).

In principle, we face the same situation today as John faced in the first century. The spiritual net is broken and full of large holes because of many doctrines, teachings, concepts, and ideas. We must be brought back to the beginning. What was in the beginning? In the beginning was only one thing--life. "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God...In Him was life." The Gospel of John does not say, "In Him were many doctrines." The way to mend the holes in the spiritual net is by life. We should not discuss doctrine, we should enjoy life. If you come to me for the purpose of arguing doctrine, I would say, "O Lord Jesus! Christ is so lovable, sweet, and dear. Let us call on Him. Dear brother, let us enjoy the Lord. As long as we have the Lord Jesus as our enjoyment, everything is wonderful. Let us forget doctrine and enjoy Him." The mending ministry is accomplished by life, for life brings us back to the beginning. In the beginning there was nothing but life.

2. The Word--the Definition, Explanation, and Expression of God

Word is the definition, explanation, and expression of God; hence, it is God defined, explained, and expressed. God is mysterious. He needs the Word to express Him. If you want to appear mysterious, the best way to do it is to be silent, for the more silent you are, the more mysterious you become. However, the more you talk, the more you expose yourself. All that is deep within you is revealed by your words. This is the meaning of the Word. Although God is a mystery, Christ as the Word of God, defines, explains, and expresses Him. Thus, this Word is the definition and expression of God. Eventually, this Word is God Himself, not God hidden concealed and mysterious, but God defined, explained and expressed. The Word is not the invisible God, but the very God who is visible. In the beginning this Word was with God; it was not separate from God, but always had God in Him.

B. The Word with God

John 1:1 says that the Word was with God, and verse 2 says, "He was in the beginning with God." The Word was always with God and always had God in Him; He was never separate from God. When many of the young people are away from home, they receive loving letters from their parents. These letters are a word from their mother or father. Suppose you receive a letter from your father. That letter is your father's word coming to you. However, when that word comes to you, it cannot be a word with your father. Although the letter is the word of your father, it is not a word with your father, for you and your father are actually far away from each other. This means that the word of your father is separate from your father himself. It is different with Christ as the Word of God. Never think that this Word was separate from God. No, this Word was and always is with God. When the Word comes, God comes. When the Word is present, God is present. The

Word is with God. Thus, we have another clause in 1:1 telling us that the Word was with God.

C. The Word Being God

The last clause of 1:1 says, "the Word was God." Never try to understand the Bible merely according to the black and white letters. This verse says that, as the Word, Christ was both with God and was God. Are Christ and God one or two? If He and God are one, why does the Bible say that He was with God? How can these two statements be reconciled? We cannot reconcile them. In this verse we find the secret to understanding the whole Gospel of John. In subsequent messages we shall see many points similar to this one. For example, the Lord said to Nicodemus, And no one has ascended into heaven, but He Who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man Who is in heaven." Where is He--in heaven or on earth? We should simply say "Hallelujah," He is both here and there. He can be both here and there because He is omnipresent. Although we cannot figure it out, we nevertheless have a clear word. Just accept the word. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Although we cannot reconcile all the clauses in this verse, we should simply accept this verse as God's Word.

John's writings were brief, but he was very careful. He was aware that some might argue with him, saying, "He was with God and He was God, but He was probably not with God from the beginning. In the beginning He was the Word, but He was not with God. At a later time the Word came to be with God and eventually became God." If you read church history, you will discover that even in the first century there was a school of thought which claimed that originally Christ was not God and that only at a certain time did He become God. Thus, John added verse 2, not as a mere repetition of a part of verse 1, but as a confirmation. "He was in the beginning with God." Christ was with God, and was God from the beginning. In the beginning, that is, from eternity past, the Word was with

God. It is not, as supposed by some, that Christ was not with God and was not God from eternity past, and that at a certain time Christ became God and was with God. Christ's deity is eternal and absolute. From eternity past to eternity future, He is with God, and He is God. This is why in this gospel there is no genealogy regarding Him as in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. In this gospel He is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Heb. 7:3). We all must be very clear that our Christ was with God and was God from the beginning. He was the Word with God from the beginning.

D. The Creation Through the Word

The creation came into being through the Word. I like the way the Recovery Version of John renders verse 3. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being which has come into being. What does it mean that all things came into being through Him and that apart from Him nothing has come into being? It simply means that apart from Him nothing has existence. One day, through the Word, so many things came into being. We may say that, in a sense, God did not make anything, for there was no need for Him to do anything. He simply said, "Being," and everything had being. According to our human concept, creation requires a certain amount of labor. However, in God's creation there was no labor, only speaking. When God said, "Let there be light," light came into existence. When He said, "Let there be an expanse," the expanse came into being. When He said, "Let the dry land appear," the dry land appeared. An atheist would say that this is nonsense, because he does not believe in God. But we believe in Him. We not only believe in God, but also in the all-inclusive Christ. Through Him as the Word all things came into being.

The principle is the same in the new creation. Although we are men of the old creation, the Bible tells us that we must become men of the new creation. According to our human concept, this type of change requires a great

deal of work. However, it does not require very much work at all; it is accomplished through the Word, which is Christ. If a man will say, "Lord Jesus," he becomes a new man even before the words have escaped his lips. By simply saying the word "Lord" something not being comes into being. Abraham believed in the God who "calls the things not being as being" (Rom. 4:17). God did not do anything; He just called. Although once there was no such thing as light, when God said "Light," light sprang into existence. This is God's creation. If He did not create in this way, He might be the same as we are. But God is not as we are--God is God. Everything came into being through the Word. As long as you have the Word, you have everything.

This should strengthen and confirm our faith. Whenever you take the Word, something not being comes into being. This is wonderful. Do not say that you are weak, for the more you say that you are weak, the weaker you become, simply because you say that you are weak. However, if, by taking the Word, you say. "I am strong," strength comes into being. Do not say, "I have no power." The more you say you have no power, the more powerless you become. However, if you say, "Praise the Lord that I have power through the Word," you will have power, the power that things not being will come into being through the Word. If you are afflicted with a certain illness do not think very much about it, but say, "Through the Word I am a healthy person." If you say this, health, which had no being, comes into being. Sisters often come to me saying, "Brother, as sisters, we have no wisdom. We come to you because you have wisdom." Sisters, the more you say that you lack wisdom, the less wisdom you have. Nevertheless, it is a lie that you lack wisdom. Do you not have the Word? As long as you have the Word you must declare, "I have wisdom through the Word." If you claim this, you will have wisdom. We have nothing in ourselves, but we have everything through the Word.

What is creation? Creation is calling things not being

as being through the Word. The Word is both the means and the sphere. As long as you have the Word, you have the means and the sphere. Thus, you can say, Because I have the Word as the means and the sphere. things not being can come into being." Learn to say, "Not being as being through the Word." No longer am I apart from the Word. I am in the Word and with the Word. Hence, through the Word things not being come into being.

E. Life In the Word

Now we come to the most important point: life is in the Word. "In Him was life" (1:4). The "Him" in 1:4 denotes the Word who was God and through whom all things came into being. In Him is life. Why did He create all things before He came to be life? Because in order for Him to be received as life there was the need of a receptacle, a receiver. Suppose He had not created anything, yet came to be life. To whom would He be life? Although He might be life, there would have been no receiver for Him as life. Thus, before He came to be life He created the heavens, the earth, and man with a spirit to receive Him. Zechariah 12:1 says that the Lord "stretcheth forth the heavens and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him." Thus, the heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man was made with a spirit to receive God. Now the Word can come as life to be received by the man whom He created. Creation produced the receptacle for life.

We have seen that life is in the Word. Life can only be found in the expression of God. The Word, which is the expression and explanation of God, contains God as our life. When we receive the Word, we receive the life within it. Both the Word and the life are God Himself. The Word is the expression of God, and the life is the very content of God. When we hear the Word, we realize that God is expressed and explained; when we receive the Word, we receive God's very content as life and are thereby born of

God and become the children of God. The life in the Word is the very content of God.

Since verse 2 refers to the creation in Genesis 1, the mention of life in verse 4 should refer to the life indicated by the tree of life in Genesis 2. This is confirmed by John's mention of the tree of life in Revelation 22. Since life is in Him, so He is life (John 11:25; 14:6), and came that man might have life (10:10).

Man was made as a vessel to contain God as life. However, by creation he was merely an empty vessel; he did not have genuine life. The created life of man is not genuine; genuine life is the divine life which is in Christ. What kind of life did you have before you received Christ? It was, at best, a temporary life, it was not a permanent life, an everlasting life. Although it was an instant life, it was not a constant one. Before we received Christ we were uncertain just how long our instant life would endure. Thus, in a sense, before we were saved we did not have life. The life in Christ is eternal, constant, and permanent. All men need such a life, the divine and uncreated life that is in Christ. This life is for man, and man is the receiver of this life.

F. Life Being the Light of Man

John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." It is absolutely true that the life is the light of men. When we called on the name of the Lord Jesus, receiving Him into us, the divine life came into our being. Immediately we had the sense of something shining within, but perhaps, at that time, we did not have the language or the utterance to describe it. That shining was the shining of life. Because life shines, the life is the light of men. This shining is the strongest confirmation that we have been born of God.

When the Word is heard and the life is received, the life becomes the light shining within to enlighten us. When God, as the divine life, shines within us as the light

of life, we are under His enlightening. Being born of God by receiving His Word, we have God as our life, and this life becomes the light within us shining all the time. The Lord is the Word of God, the expression of God by which we may know God. When we receive Him as the expression of God, He becomes our life, and this life becomes the light that shines within us.

Verse 5 says, "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Darkness can never overcome or extinguish light, but light dispels darkness. When the light of life shines within us, darkness can never overcome it. Furthermore, this light is the true light which enlightens every man. The word "enlightens" in Greek is the same word used in the same way as in Ephesians 1:18; 3:9 and Hebrews 6:10; 10:32. It refers here to the inward enlightening which brings life to the ones who receive the Word. For the old creation, it was the physical light (Gen. 1:3-5, 14-18). For the new creation, it is the light of life.

Life also becomes the authority for the believing ones to be the children of God. But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13). The birth described in these verses is not the natural birth which we had through our parents; it is the second birth which occurred when we believed in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Believing in the Lord is equal to receiving Him. When I speak of receiving the Lord Jesus, you may say that you have never done that. However, I want to ask you a question: Have you not believed in the Lord Jesus? When you heard His name, did you not believe in it? If a person truly believes in that dear name, I am certain that, in some way or other, he will say, "Lord Jesus." As long as you say His name from the depths of your being, it means that you believe in Him. If you believe in Him by calling on His name, it is proof that you have received Him. And since you have received Him, you have received the

authority to become a child of God. What is this authority? It is Christ Himself as life to you. Christ as life is simply the Spirit of sonship, and this Spirit of sonship makes you God's child. You can know that you are a child of God by two things: by the fact that you believe in Him and call on His name, and by the fact that, at times, you spontaneously and sweetly cry, "Abba, Father." If you can call God "Abba, Father" in such a sweet way, it proves that you are His child.

As verse 13 declares, this birth is not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man. Blood (Gk., bloods) here signifies the physical life; the will of the flesh denotes the will of fallen man after man became flesh, the will of man refers to the will of man created by God. When we became a child of God, we were not born of our physical life, our fallen life, or our created life--we were born of God, the uncreated life. For human beings to become children of God is for man to have the divine life and the divine nature.

Why has God brought forth so many children? Not mainly because He loves us or because He has pity on us. Although He loves us, the purpose of His begetting so many children is for His multiplication. God loves to be multiplied. Every father has some multiplication. Before God brought us forth, He was merely God Himself. He could look at Himself and say, "Here I am by Myself. I am almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent. I am everything, but I am alone." Now, after generating so many children God can say, "Behold My multiplication!" Throughout all the centuries and generations God has been multiplying Himself.

In the beginning was the Word and in Him was life. Through creation He prepared many receivers. Today, these receivers have become God's multiplication, and this multiplication has become the increase and corporate expression of God. God is fully expressed through His children as His increase and corporate expression.

God originally had only one Son, His only begotten, as His expression. That expression may be called the

individual expression. Now God, through the multiplication of His life, has many sons as His expression. This expression may be called the corporate expression, which is composed of His Son, who has now become His firstborn, and His many brothers. This is one of the main aspects of the revelation of this book.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THREE

AN INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AND BUILDING

(2)

In the previous message we saw that Christ, as the Word, came as life and light for the purpose of bringing forth many children to be God's enlargement and corporate expression. This is revealed in John 1:1-13. May we keep this point deep within us.

In this message we come to the second section of John 1, which is composed of verses 14 through 18. This section shows us that the very Christ who was the Word and who came as life and light to produce many children for God's enlargement and expression was incarnated for our enjoyment. John 1:1-13 tells us that Christ came to produce the children of God; verses 14-18 indicate that all the children of God need the enjoyment of Christ.

How can we enjoy Christ? By His incarnation. To be incarnated means to be consolidated. As the Word before His incarnation, Christ was mysterious. However, when He was incarnated, He became so real to us. Before His incarnation, He was intangible, invisible, and untouchable. By becoming flesh, He became solid, real, visible, and touchable. Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." That was something solid. In becoming flesh to tabernacle among man, He became tangible. People could not only see Him, but could also touch Him. Hence, John says, "We beheld His glory as of an only begotten from a father." In his first epistle, John tells us that they touched Him (1 John 1:1). Thus, in His incarnation, Christ became tangible.

Although He became tangible through His incarnation, we needed something more before we could enjoy Him.

Therefore, 1:14 says that He was "full of grace and reality." It does not say that He was full of doctrines and gifts. When He became visible and touchable, He was full of grace and reality. When Christ was in the flesh with the disciples, they not only saw and touched Him, but they also enjoyed Him. If you could have asked Peter and Mary why they loved Him so much and why they liked being in His presence, they would have said, "We simply cannot put it into words. As long as we stay with Him, we have a certain enjoyment. No words can utter it. But we can all testify that it is so sweet to sit in His presence. There is such enjoyment and reality. We don't know how to explain it or define it, hut we know for sure that we enjoy it. What did they enjoy? It was the Word in the flesh, full of grace and reality.

II. THE WORD INCARNATED TO DECLARE GOD

A. Becoming Flesh

We have just stated that the Word became flesh for our enjoyment. Now we must see that He was incarnated that He might declare God (v. 18). God "was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). How did He declare God? He declared God in the flesh by presenting Himself to us for our enjoyment. He did not say to the early disciples, "My little children, I want you to know that I am the Son of God and that I have come in the flesh to declare God to you. You all must know God. Look at My face. You must realize who I am. When you know Me, you know God the Father." If He had declared God in this way, all His disciples would have withdrawn from Him. Peter would have said, "I will return to my fishing in Galilee," and Martha would have said, "Lord, I will go home and tend to my affairs." No, Christ did not come in the flesh to declare God in the way of teachings, but in a way that was full of grace and reality. He did not say, "Little children, you must seek God in Me. Learn the lesson that I am here to declare God." He declared God in the way of enjoyment, by

presenting Himself as grace and reality. Thus, Peter could have said, "I will never go back to fishing. I will stay with this man forever. Although I don't know who He is, whether He is the Son of God, the Father, the Word, or the Creator, I do know that staying with Him is so sweet." This is the way that Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, declared God. He did not declare God to His disciples by teaching them, but by affording them such a sweet enjoyment. By simply looking at people He could capture them. How enjoyable was His presence! His presence was so charming. So many of the early disciples were charmed by Him. It seemed that no one could withstand His charming presence. That was His way of declaring God.

God is not a God of teaching, doctrine, regulations, laws, or gifts. God is a God of enjoyment. God is grace and reality to us. God is our full enjoyment, and Jesus as the Son of God is the very embodiment of all the enjoyment of God. When He abides with you, you enjoy God. You taste God as One who is sweet, dear, and precious. Eventually, you gain His reality. We have no human words, to explain this. Although we lack the utterance to describe this, we may enjoy it today. When we stay with the Lord for a period of time, calling on Him, saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You," we sense sweetness, comfort, rest, refreshment, and strength. Not only so, we have His reality. People may ask you, "What kind of reality do you have?" Although I do not know how to describe it, I do have reality. Before spending time in the presence of the Lord I was empty, but now I am full. I have reality. I am satisfied and filled to the brim.

The Word was incarnated to declare God, becoming flesh for our enjoyment. The Son of God declares God to man in the way of enjoyment. This is wonderful.

When the Word became flesh, He was "in the likeness of the flesh of sin" (Rom. 8:3, Recovery Version). In the Bible, the word "flesh" is not a good term; it denotes something fallen and sinful. Romans 7:18 says that nothing good dwells in our flesh. When the Word says that Christ became flesh, does this mean that He became

something sinful? Absolutely not. He became flesh in the "likeness of the flesh of sin." The brass serpent lifted up on a pole by Moses (Num. 21:4-9) was a type of Christ being made in the likeness of the flesh of Sin. Although that brass serpent was in the form of the serpent, it did not have the poisonous nature of the serpent. It's nature was pure, clean, and good. It was made in the form of the serpent for the purpose of substitution. We shall see more of this when we come to John 3:14. For the time being it is sufficient if we realize that when Christ became flesh, He did not have the sinful nature of the flesh, but only the likeness of the flesh of sin. By His becoming flesh in this way, man was able to touch Him. participate in Him, and enjoy the fullness of God that was in Him. When He became flesh, He apparently became sin, for 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that God made Him to be sin. Actually, He did not have the sinful nature, but only the form, the likeness of the flesh of sin.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we are also told that He "did not know sin." We do not have the language to explain this. How can we say that the Lord Jesus did not know sin when He knew everything? Since He knew everything, He knew sin thoroughly. Nevertheless, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that He knew no sin. What does this mean? According to my understanding, it means that Jesus had no sin and that He had nothing to do with it. In His nature and His substance there was no such thing as sin. Although He was made sin, within Him there was no nature of sin. All we can say is that He was in the form, in the likeness, of the flesh of sin.

B. To Tabernacle Among Men

When He was in the flesh, He was the tabernacle of God among men. By being incarnated, the Word not only brought God into humanity, but also became a tabernacle to God to be God's habitation on earth among men. According to the history in the Old Testament; there was among the people on earth a tabernacle, and in that tabernacle God was present. Jesus in the flesh was the real tabernacle. The Old Testament tabernacle was a type,

a shadow, and a prefigure of the real tabernacle which was Christ Himself in the flesh. God was in the tabernacle, for it was the tabernacle that brought God to the children of Israel. In the time of the New Testament, it was Jesus in the flesh who brought God to man that man might enjoy God's presence. When He was in the flesh as the tabernacle of God among men, God was embodied in Him (Col. 2:9). All that God is and has was embodied in Jesus. For what purpose was God embodied in the flesh in Jesus? For the purpose that sinful man might partake of God in Christ. In other words, God was embodied in Christ for our enjoyment.

He w as in the flesh, Christ was God's dwelling on earth. One day, while He was on the mountain with three of His disciples, He was transfigured before them (Matt. 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:17-18). This means that the very God of glory, who indwelt Him came out of the tabernacle. The God of glory who was concealed in and by His flesh was manifested there on the mountain. That was the transfiguration of Jesus. The glory, which was God Himself, came out of the tabernacle. Even in the ancient times the children of Israel saw the shekinah glory that was concealed in the tabernacle (Exo. 40:34). The same thing happened on the mount of transfiguration. Suddenly, as He stood before three of His disciples, the shekinah glory that was within Jesus was manifested, shining over Peter, James, and John. They were shocked, unable, at that time, to enjoy the glory very much. They might have had some enjoyment at the time. However, as they recalled that event, they mutt have thought of how wonderful it was.

C. With Grace

John tells us that when Christ as the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, it was full of grace. There was something with Christ that the Bible calls grace. What is grace? It is difficult to define. We may say that grace is God in Christ with all that He is as the fullness

for our enjoyment. This includes rest, comfort, power, strength, light, life, righteousness, holiness, and all the other divine attributes. This is grace for our enjoyment. We may simply enjoy God in Christ as everything. Whenever we are in the presence of God, we enjoy the fullness of all that He is. Thus, verse 16 says, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace." The fullness of the Godhead, that is, all that God is, dwells in Christ bodily for our enjoyment.

We have seen that grace is nothing less than God in the Son as our enjoyment. When Galatians 2:20 is compared with 1 Corinthians 15:10, Christ is clearly seen as the grace--i.e., "yet not I, but Christ" and "yet not I but the grace of God." Grace is not the gift of material things, nor just the gifts of spiritual things, but the gift of God Himself in Christ as our enjoyment. The Apostle Paul said that all things other than Christ are dung (Phil. 3:8). Besides Christ, besides God, even the best things in the eyes of the Apostle were nothing but dung, which in the Greek means dog food, the refuse or garbage thrown out to the dogs in ancient times. If anyone is seeking anything other than God in Christ, he is seeking garbage. All things apart from God in Christ are such. But God in Christ is grace to us, and this grace came by God's incarnation. Grace is simply God whom we enjoy in Christ as our only and full enjoyment.

When we enjoy God and participate in Him, that is grace. I say again that grace is God in the Son for our enjoyment. Grace is God, not in doctrine, but in our experience. When you experience God as your strength, life, comfort, rest, power, righteousness, and holiness, that is grace. Christ declares the Father God in the way of enjoyment, day by day affording us a portion of the enjoyment of God.

The more we enjoy God, the more we know Him. The only way to know a certain food is by eating it. Although you may tell me that a particular food is delicious, I cannot know it for myself unless I taste it. When I partake of that food, it is declared to me by my enjoyment of it.

Now I know it, but still I cannot explain it to you. If you want to know it, you also must eat it. Thus, God is declared to us by our tasting of Him. We need to taste God. We need to enjoy God as our grace, for this is the way in which Christ declares God to us. This matter transcends our utterance. We do have the enjoyment, but it is difficult to tell people about it. Suppose you have tasted a cake and you say, "This cake is delicious." If I were to ask you to tell me how delicious it is, you would have to reply, "I can't tell you. You have to taste it for yourself." We need to taste God. Christ came with the fullness of God's grace. We need to enjoy His presence and remain with Him. Then we shall participate in what God is. In this way God is declared to us, and we come to realize Him.

D. With Reality

Whenever we enjoy God, we not only have grace, but also reality. When God is enjoyed by us, we have enjoyment, that is, grace, and when we have this enjoyment, we realize the reality of God. The last item related to God's incarnation is reality. Truth in the Gospel of John actually means reality. It means the realization of God and the reality of God. Paul in the New Testament said that all things are dung (Phil. 3:8), and Solomon declared that all things are vanity (Eccl. 1:2), without reality. Nothing is reality; everything is vanity. Everything in the eyes of the Apostle was dung, and everything in the eyes of King Solomon was vanity. Only God is reality. If we have God, we have reality. The more we experience God, the more we shall enjoy grace and apprehend reality.

Grace is God enjoyed by us in the Son; reality is God realized by us in the Son. Grace is the enjoyment, and reality is the realization. To say, "God is light," may be merely a doctrine without realization. However, when you participate in God, experiencing God as light to you, you have the realization of God as light. Likewise, to say, "God is life," may be a mere term. But, whenever you enjoy Christ as your portion, you have the realization that God

is life to you. Hence, grace is God enjoyed by you, and reality is God realized by you in that enjoyment.

Both grace and reality came with Jesus. Verse 17 says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." The law makes demands upon man according to what God is, but grace supplies man with what God is to meet what God demands. The law, at the most, was only a testimony of what God is (Exo. 25:21), but reality is the realization of what God is. No man can partake of God through the law, but grace is the enjoyment of God for man, and reality is the realization of God for man. Eventually, grace is God enjoyed by man, and reality is God realized by man. Since both grace and reality came with Jesus, when Jesus is with us, we have grace and reality. Although we lack the adequate language to describe this, we may nevertheless know it, at least to some extent, from our experience. Many times we have enjoyed God in Christ as our grace, and many times we have realized that God in Christ is truly life, light, comfort, rest, patience, humility, and so many other things. This is the realization of God.

When we enjoy God in Christ as grace and apprehend Him in Christ as reality, we find how unsearchable are the riches of Christ. Of His fullness we have received grace upon grace. In the incarnated Christ there is abundant fullness, for the fullness of God dwells in Him (Col. 2:9). Through the incarnation of God in Christ, we can receive the riches of grace and reality out of His divine fullness.

Grace and reality have no limit. There is always fullness. Anything that we enjoy other than God in Christ has a limit; however, when we enjoy God in Christ as grace and reality, we find that there is no limit, only fullness. This fullness is unlimited. The more you enjoy this fullness, the more you realize how unlimited it is. Grace can never be exhausted by your enjoyment, and the reality can never be depleted by your experience. The more you experience, the more there is; it increases according to your capacity to experience it. Our capacity

determines our measure of the fullness of the Godhead. How full is God to you? If your capacity is that of an eight ounce cup, God's fullness to you will be eight ounces. If your capacity is enlarged to eight hundred gallons, the fullness of God will fill up that measure to the brim. If your capacity is that of the Pacific Ocean, you will know God's fullness to that extent. However, even the capacity of the Pacific Ocean is not great enough. We need the capacity of an eternal ocean. Even if our capacity were increased to that degree, God would fill it to the brim. Thus, the enjoyment of God in Christ is unlimited. How much we enjoy His fullness depends upon our capacity.

E. In the Only Begotten Son of God

This declaration of God is in the only begotten Son of God who was in the bosom of the Father from eternity past and who is still in the bosom of the Father after incarnation. Thus, verse 18 says. "No one has ever seen God: the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The only begotten Son was with God the Father and was, is, and always will be in the bosom of the Father. The words of verse 18 are simple, but the meaning is profound. Can you say what is the bosom of the Father? I have not heard a definition that can satisfy me. This matter is too intimate, too deep, and too profound. I simply cannot tell you what it means because I lack the understanding and the utterance. Nevertheless, we know that this dear, only begotten of the Father is continually in the bosom of the Father to declare the Father. This is the way in which He declares the Father and brings us into the enjoyment of the Father.

God is expressed in Christ, and with Christ we have grace and reality. Thus, when we come to Christ, we enjoy grace and participate in reality. Verse 18 tells us that Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, is in the bosom of God the Father. Thus, when we enjoy Christ in such an intimate way, this intimate enjoyment of Him will bring

us to God the Father. In other words, this enjoyment of Christ brings us into the bosom of the Father. With the Father we have love and light. Christ is the expression of God in the same way that grace is the expression of love and reality is the expression of light. When we enjoy Christ as grace and reality, this enjoyment brings us into the bosom of the Father where we enjoy love and light. Love is the hidden source of grace, and light is the hidden source of reality. This is the reason that in the Gospel of John we have grace and reality, but in the First Epistle of John we have love and light (1 John 1:5; 4:7-8). The Gospel of John brings God to us, and we enjoy Him as grace and reality. The First Epistle of John brings us to God, and we enjoy Him as love and light. If we merely enjoy grace. that enjoyment is not deep enough. When grace brings us into love we reach the source out from which grace flows. When we trace grace back to its source, grace becomes love. Likewise, light is the source out from which reality flows. When you trace reality back to its source, you arrive at light, for light is a deeper experience of reality.

F. To Declare God

We have seen that the Word was incarnated to declare God, to express God (Heb. 1:3), to explain God, and to define God. The Father's only begotten Son declared God by the Word, life, light, grace, and reality. We have seen that these five things are related to God's incarnation. All of them are founded and fulfilled in God Himself. The Word is God expressed, life is God imparted, light is God shining, grace is God enjoyed, and reality is God realized, apprehended. God is fully declared in the Son through these five things. The essence of them all is God Himself. It is by these things that God is declared. Although no one has ever seen God, the Son of God has declared Him in the way of being the Word, life, light, grace, and reality. The more we receive the Word, have God as our life, and let the light of this life shine within us, and the more we enjoy God as grace and apprehend Him as reality, the

more God will be declared to us. To declare God means to express, explain, and define God. Christ declared, expressed, explained and defined God by being incarnated as the Word with life, light, grace, and reality.

The first eighteen verses of chapter one may be summarized with a few simple words: Word, God, life, light, grace, and reality. John 1:1-18 tells us how through the Word all things came into being and how the Word as God Himself became flesh to bring grace and reality to man. In Him was life, which was the light of man for man to receive. As many as received Him as such were born of Him, having Him as their life and light. Then they partook of Him as grace and reality. In this way God in the Son was declared to man. By being the Word, life, light, grace, and reality, Christ has expressed, explained, and defined God.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FOUR

AN INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AND BUILDING

(3)

III. JESUS AS THE LAMB OF GOD WITH THE SPIRIT AS THE DOVE TO PRODUCE STONES FOR GOD'S BUILDING

In this message we come to the last part of the first chapter of the Gospel of John (vv. 19-51). The main subject of this passage is Jesus as the Lamb of God, with the Holy Spirit as the dove, making the believers stones for the building of the house of God with the Son of Man. This subject is composed of five main points: the Lamb of God, the dove, the stones, the building of God's house, and the Son of Man. The Lamb is for redemption; the dove is for life-imparting, transforming, and building; the stone is for material; the house is the building; and the very substance of God's building is man. Firstly, man is redeemed by the Lamb, and then he is regenerated and transformed by the dove. Thus, man becomes a stone, and this stone is then builded by the dove. The dove is not only for regenerating, but also for transforming and uniting, which eventually result in the building of God's house. The essence, the substantial element, of the house of God is not divinity, but humanity. Divinity is the dweller and humanity is the dwelling. Since the house is the dwelling place and not the dweller, the dwelling is humanity and the dweller is divinity. This humanity, however, is not a natural or a created humanity; it is a regenerated, transformed, and uplifted humanity, a humanity that has been processed through creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The humanity which has passed through such a wonderful process becomes the very substance of God's building. Such a humanity is God's dwelling place. In no other books is this matter so clearly revealed as in

the writings of John, in his gospel, epistles, and revelation. Thus, we must spend a great deal of time in John's writings.

John 1:19-51 is a long section composed of thirty-three verses. Why is this section so long? For years I was troubled by the length of this portion of John's gospel. I said, "In the first eighteen verses, every word is economical. Not one word is wasted. Why does John use so many words in this part of the chapter?" I could not understand why John, a brief and simple writer, used so many verses. If I had written this portion of the Word, I would have used only seven or eight verses, telling how the Pharisees inquired of John whether or not he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet, how John baptized people in water, how he introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God with the dove descending and abiding on Him, how five disciples were attracted to the Lord and began to follow Him, and how the name of one of them was changed. However, John used many more verses than this. What was his purpose in doing so? Very few Christians have seen John's purpose in verses 19 through 51. Thus, we must take time to consider it.

A. The Religious People Expecting a Great Leader

As you read through the Gospel of John, you will discover that the greatest opposition against Christ came from religion. Nothing was more troublesome or frustrating to Him than the Jewish religion. Religion is Christ's enemy. It frustrates Christ as life. Eventually, religion sentenced Christ to death. It was not Roman politics that sentenced the Lord Jesus to death, for the Roman politics under Pilate was too weak to do that. Christ was sentenced to death by the Jewish religion which utilized the weak Roman politics. Thus, in his gospel, John shows us that the strongest opposition to Christ as life comes from religion. Therefore, he found it necessary to use many verses in chapter one to describe the pitiful religious situation. John's intention was to portray the pathetic condition of religion.

Verses 19 through 25 reveal the concept of religious people, which is entirely contrary to the divine thought. The religious people were looking for a great leader such as the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet (according to the Scriptures, Dan. 9:26; Mal. 4:5; Deut. 18:15, 18). The religious concept is that of always looking to a great one such as the Messiah or to a great prophet such as Elijah. Religious people always think in terms of a great leader who will do wonderful things and perform marvelous miracles to save and deliver them. The Jewish leaders, therefore, sent people to ask John the Baptist if he was the Messiah. John, of course, replied, "I am not." Then they asked if he was Elijah, and again he answered, "No." In the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses promised Israel that a great prophet would come. So, from that day, Israel continually looked for the coming of that prophet, and when John the Baptist came upon the scene, they asked him if he was the one. Nevertheless, John said that he was not that prophet. The same principle still exists in today's religious situation. People everywhere expect to have a great world-famous preacher. The religious people today, like the Pharisees and scribes and chief priests, are not for life; they are for a big movement, a great leader. Although they await a great religious leader who will stir them up, after such a leader comes and goes, they still remain in their deadness.

The contrast in this portion of the Gospel of John is very impressive. We have seen that the religionists were expecting a great leader and that they inquired of John the Baptist whether he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet. When John repeatedly answered, "No," they finally asked him, "Who are you? What do you say about yourself?" John answered, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness." What is a voice? A voice is nothing. You hear it, and it is gone. You cannot touch it. John seemed to be saying, "I am nothing. I am nobody. I am just a voice. I

am not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet." The religious people were disappointed with him. How could they answer those who sent them? Perhaps they said to John, "Shall we go back to those who sent us and tell them that you said you were just a voice? What is this? It's nonsense." Yes, as far as religion is concerned, life is nonsense.

B. Jesus Recommended as the Lamb with the Dove

1. The Lamb Taking Sin Away from Man

When John saw Jesus coming, what did he say? He did not say, "Behold, Dr. Jesus Christ." He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." If I had been John the Baptist, I would have said, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah." How do you prefer to recommend Jesus--as the Lamb or as a strong lion? If you were to introduce Christ to me as a lion, I would flee, for I am afraid of lions. Jesus, however, was recommended as a Lamb. While the religionists were expecting a great leader, Jesus was recommended by John the Baptist as the little Lamb of God. Jesus did not come to be the great leader of a religious movement; He came to be the little Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is not a matter of a movement; it is a matter of redemption, of solving the problem of the sin of mankind. For our sin to be taken away we do not need a doctor of theology or a religious leader--we need a little Lamb. We need Jesus as the Lamb of God to die for us and to shed His blood for our redemption. The situation today is the same as it was in the time of John the Baptist. Religion still awaits a great leader for a great movement. However, in God's economy, Jesus is not such a leader. He is simply the Lamb of God. As you read this message you need to say, "Lord Jesus, to me You are not a great leader. You are the Lamb of God who died on the cross for my sins. Thank You for Your death, Lord. Thank You for Your blood. Thank You for Your redemption. I don't care for a great leader. I only care for this little Lamb who has accomplished redemption for me." The religious concept is

that a great leader will come, but the divine economy is that a Lamb die to redeem man from sin. Since the problem of sin requires a solution, the need of redemption is imperative. We need the Lamb of God to take away our sins.

2. The Dove Bringing God to Man

John not only recommended Christ as the Lamb of God, but also as the Lamb with the dove (1:32-33). The Lamb takes sin away from man, and the dove brings God as life to man. The Lamb is for redemption, to redeem fallen man back to God, and the dove is for life-giving, for anointing, to anoint man with what God is, to bring God into man and man into God, and for uniting the believers in God. Both are needed for man to participate in God. The dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, whose work is to bring God and join God to man. The Lamb, on the negative side, solves the problem of man's sin; the dove, on the positive side, brings God to man. The Lamb separates man from sin, and the dove joins God to man.

John recommended Jesus as the Lamb with a dove, not with an eagle. It seems that some Christians have an eagle instead of a dove. A dove is not large and wild. A dove is small and gentle. The dove here signifies the Holy Spirit and is for life-giving, regenerating, anointing, transforming, uniting, and building. The dove is not for power but for life. A dove has no power; it is full of life and insight. The Bible appreciates the dove's eyes, for the most beautiful part of a dove is its eyes. In the Song of Songs, the Lord praises His seeker for her doves' eyes (1:15). The dove is not a symbol of power, but of life. A dove is lovely, small, and full of life.

When we come to John 12, we shall see that the Lord Jesus likens Himself to something even smaller than a dove--a grain of wheat (12:24). A grain of wheat is neither for outward appearance nor for power. A grain of wheat, which is full of life, is for the reproduction and propagation of life, for the multiplication in life. Thus, the Gospel of John is a book of life, not of power. The Lamb is not for power, but for redemption. If Jesus had come as a lion, no

one could have put Him on the cross. However, He came as a little Lamb who was led to the slaughter and killed for our redemption (Isa. 53:7). What a difference between life and religion! Religion is for power, for movements, and for great leaders. Life needs a Lamb for redemption to remove all sinful things and a dove full of life to impart life, regenerate, anoint, transform, unite, and build. Then God will have a house, a Bethel. We all must see this.

I hope that you have been impressed that we must absolutely abandon religion with all of its concepts. However, I am concerned that some readers of this message may still hold the concept that we need power to produce a great movement. God's economy is not to send a powerful leader to start a movement. God's economy is to send His Son to be the Lamb with His Spirit as the dove to accomplish redemption and to impart life to man. God's economy is for one grain to fall into the ground and die that it might produce many grains which will be blended into one loaf, the Body, the church, to express Christ. In God's economy it is not a question of a movement, power, or a great leader; it is a matter of the Lamb with the dove. Our need is redemption with life.

C. To Produce Stones for God's Building

1. The Followers of Jesus to Be Transformed into Stones

The Lamb with the dove attracted people to follow Him. When John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God," two of his disciples were drawn to Him, and John was very happy about it. What were the names of these two disciples? The first was Andrew, and the second should be John, the writer of this gospel, although he was humble, not mentioning himself by name. Once Andrew

had been attracted, he found his brother Simon and led him to Jesus (1:41-42). When the Lord looked upon Simon, He changed his name to Cephas, or Peter, which means a stone. The Lord referred to this word of His when He spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:18 about the building of the church. It must have been from this that Peter had obtained the concept of the living stones for the building of the spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), which is the church. The significance of a stone is that it denotes a work of transformation to bring forth material for God's building (1 Cor. 3:12).

In one chapter we have a Lamb, a dove, and the stone, all of which are figures. What is the meaning of these figures? The meaning is that the Lamb plus the dove produces stones. Redemption plus regeneration and transformation produces stones. Once again I say that we should not try to understand the Gospel of John merely according to the black and white letters. You must probe into the real significance of the allegories. What is a lamb? According to Exodus 12, the Passover lamb was slain for the people's sins and eaten for their satisfaction. What is a dove? From the Old Testament we have seen that a dove is a creature full of the beauty of life. Thus, it represents the third Person of the Godhead reaching humanity and imparting life to man. This dove which descends upon man matches redemption and is for the producing of stones. It does not produce preachers, ministers, or doctors of theology; it produces stones. As we shall see, these stones are for the building of Bethel, the house of God.

Although Andrew found the Lord before Peter did, Jesus did not change Andrew's name. What is the reason for this? If you and I had been the Lord Jesus, we probably would have changed Andrew's name to stone and John's to diamond. However, the Lord Jesus was unhurried and moved gradually, changing Simon's name, not Andrew's. If I had been Andrew, I would have said, "Lord, why didn't You change my name? It's not fair. I came to You first. Why do You give Simon a new name and not me? Lord,

You have to give me a new name too." But the Lord did not change Andrew's name. This indicates that everything depends on Him. The Lord will never act in a rush.

Philip was the next one to be attracted to the Lord Jesus. However, the Lord did not do anything with Philip. Then Philip found Nathanael and said, "We have found Him of Whom Moses in the law and prophets wrote, Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth" (v. 45). This information was inaccurate. Jesus was not born of Joseph, but of Mary (Matt. 1:16), and was not born in Nazareth, but in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7). When Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", Philip said, "Come and see." Philip was right not to argue with Nathanael. He realized that he was lacking in understanding, so he simply said to Nathanael, "Come and see." We all have a lesson to learn from these words. There are many young Philips among us, who, after seeing something of the Lord, have gone out and spoken to others in an improper way, giving them wrong information. Thus, we should not argue with people, but simply tell them to come and see. Nathanael came. Although the Lord did not do anything with Philip, He did something with Nathanael, speaking to him of Jacob's dream (1:51).

Why did the Lord do something with Simon and Nathanael, but not with Andrew and Philip? There is a principle here and the principle is this: the Lord does not deal with the first, but always with the second. The first is of the old creation. During the Passover in Egypt all the firstborn were killed. Do not be the first, for if you desire to be the first, you are finished with the Lord. Although it may be good to be the first in school, it is not good in the church. Never try to be the first with the Lord Jesus. Learn to be the second. If you attempt to be the first, you will miss the mark. Everyone likes to be first. However, if you are willing to be second, the Lord will do something to you. Simon was second, and the Lord revealed to him the matter of being a stone. Nathanael also was second, and the Lord unveiled to him the house of God.

2. For the Building of the House of God

"And He said to him, Truly, truly I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51). The ancient Jews knew that this was a reference to Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:10-22). When Jacob was fleeing from his brother, he slept one night in the open air, using a stone for a pillow. He dreamed that he saw heaven opened and a ladder set up on the earth which reached to heaven and on which angels were ascending and descending. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). He then poured oil upon the stone which he had used for a pillow and called the name of it Bethel. The Lord's word to Nathanael was the fulfillment of Jacob's dream. Christ, as the Son of Man with His humanity, is the ladder which is set up on the earth and leads to heaven, keeping heaven open to earth and joining earth to heaven for the house of God. Jacob poured oil (the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the last Person of the Triune God to reach man) upon the stone (symbol of the transformed man) that it might be the house of God. Here in John 1 are the Spirit (v. 32) and the stone (v. 42) for the house of God with Christ and His humanity. Where these are, there is an open heaven. Thus Christ, as a man, is the ladder that opens the heavens and joins earth to heaven and brings heaven to earth. Wherever Christ is in His humanity, there is the gate of heaven, there is Bethel, the building of God's house with all the stones, that is, with all the transformed persons.

As the introduction to the Gospel of John, John 1 introduces Christ as both the Son of God (vv. 34, 49) and the Son of Man. Nathanael recognized Him as the Son of God and addressed Him as such (v. 49), but Christ said to Nathanael that He was the Son of Man. The Son of God is God with the divine nature--divinity. The Son of Man is man with a human nature--humanity. For declaring God

(v. 18) and for bringing God to man and man to God, He is the only begotten Son of God. But for building God's habitation on the earth among man, He is the Son of Man. God's building needs His humanity. In eternity past Christ had only divinity, but in eternity future Christ will have both divinity and humanity forever.

There are three distinct sections in John 1. The first section, composed of the first thirteen verses, ends with the children of God. The second section, composed of verses 14 through 18, ends with the only begotten Son of God. The third section, composed of the last thirty-three verses, ends with the Son of Man. The children of God are the expansion and enlargement of God for His corporate expression. The only begotten Son of God is God's declaration, making Him known to all the people who enjoy God's fullness as grace and reality. The Son of Man is for the building of God's house. Thus, the children of God are many and are the expression of God, expressing Him in a corporate way. The only begotten Son of God is unique and is for the declaration of God, making Him known to all who enjoy Him as grace and reality. The Son of Man is for the building of the house of God. For God's corporate expression there is the need of the many children of God, for God's declaration there is the need of the unique, only begotten Son of God, and for the house of God there is the need of the Son of Man.

John 1 starts with the Word and ends with Bethel, the house of God. There is a long way between verse 1 and verse 51. Along the way we find many items: God, creation, life, light, the flesh, the tabernacle, grace, reality, the declaration of God, the Lamb, the dove, the stone, the ladder, the humanity of Jesus, and eventually the house of God. This is life and building. In this one chapter, we can see the beginning, the Word, God, creation, life, light, the many children of God brought forth in life, the flesh, the tabernacle, grace, reality, the full declaration of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and the dove which regenerates, anoints, transforms, unites, and builds; we can see a stone, a ladder, an open heaven, and

the house of God. We are a part of this house of God. Hallelujah!

The Gospel of John is marvelous and profound. In this gospel we do not have a great religious leader; we have a little Lamb with an even smaller dove. The Lamb and the dove make us stones for God's building. We are not doctors of theology, but stones for the building. We are not a religious organization, but Bethel, the house of God.

After Jesus was introduced as the Lamb with the dove, people began to follow Him. The Lamb with the dove is crucial in fulfilling God's purpose. There was a problem between God and man, the problem of sin. Man also had a shortage, a shortage of life. God's intention for man is that he have life. However, sin was present and life was absent. Thus, the Lamb came to take away sin. Although the Lamb has removed sin and has solved the problem of sin, what about life? The dove has come to impart life. Hallelujah, sin has been removed and life has been imparted! Sin is gone and life has come.

This is redemption plus anointing. Redemption removes our sin, and anointing brings in the life and the life supply. Since we have redemption and are under the Spirit's anointing, we have no problem with sin and no shortage of life. As a result of the removing of sin and the imparting of life, we are in the process of transformation. Transformation is the work of the anointing Spirit. After regenerating us, the Spirit works within us to transform us into stones. We are not stones by our natural birth, but we are clay. Having been reborn, we are under the process of transformation, for the regenerating Spirit is now the transforming Spirit.

The stones into which we are being transformed are for the building of the house of God. Few Christians have seen the building of the house of God that is revealed in John 1. Although many Christian teachers have pointed out the matter of life in this chapter, nearly all of them have missed the goal. The building is the goal. Life is not

the goal; it is the procedure by which God obtains the building. Thus, life is for the building and it maintains the building, but life is not the goal. The building of the house of God is God's goal.

The Lord had this goal in mind as men began to be attracted to Him and to follow Him. According to John 1, a large crowd did not follow the Lord. Only five disciples followed Him. Perhaps John the Baptist was disappointed at this. He had declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God," and, as a result of this declaration, only two disciples followed the Lord Jesus. If you think that the Lord's recovery has been moving too slowly, I would ask you to look at the following the Lord Jesus had. Acts 1 tells us that at the end of three and a half years of ministry the Lord had gained only one hundred twenty people. The Lord is not seeking a movement. In a movement there is mushrooming growth, for movements grow and increase overnight. However, the Lord's way is not that of mushrooming growth, but of a seed that is sown into the ground and that needs time to grow. Thus, John 1 does not give us the record of a great movement, but of the narrow way of life. Only two followed Him at the beginning. Then came Simon, Philip, and Nathanael. Although the number was small, there was a stone and there was also the house of God. Therefore, it is not a question of the number of people following Jesus; it is a matter of stones for the building. As long as there are stones, there is the possibility that the house of God can be built. God is not concerned about the number of people. He is interested in the stones and the building. This is God's need today. God wants people who will be transformed into stones for the building of His house.

The Lord spoke to Nathanael about Jacob's dream. Where is the house of God of which Jacob dreamed? When this dream was revealed to Jacob, he was homeless and a wanderer. When man is homeless, God also is homeless. At the time Jacob needed a house, God also needed a house. Therefore, God gave Jacob this revelation by means

of a dream. The house of God can only be realized when there is a stone upon which oil is poured. We have already pointed out that the stone represents the regenerated and transformed people of God and that the oil represents the coming of God as Spirit into man. When God is finally joined to a transformed people, then God has a house. This was accomplished by Christ's becoming the Lamb with the dove to redeem us from our sins and to join us to God. By this accomplishment, we can all become transformed stones for the house of God. The Son of Man as the heavenly ladder can then join earth to heaven and mingle God with man. At this point, we can realize that God's ultimate intention is to have a house built up with regenerated and transformed persons who are joined to God in the Son of Man by the Holy Spirit. This is a picture of the New Jerusalem, which is the building of living stones with the glory of God. The ultimate consummation of God's work in the eternal future will simply be the actual existence of this habitation of God.

We must abandon all religious concepts and take the divine concept which is Christ as the Lamb with the dove, the Redeemer with the Spirit. Christ is the Redeemer with the Spirit as the regenerating, transforming, and uniting power. The Spirit of Christ will regenerate, transform, and unite us to God and to one another. We must forget the religious concepts of trying to do good to please God and of attempting to do things for God. We must see that God's intention is to regenerate us and to transform us into stones--i.e., to change us from Simon to Cephas. All who have been attracted to the Lamb of God with the dove will be transformed into stones for the house of God. We must have the vision that all we need is to be transformed and built together as the very house that God desires. God is seeking this and will accomplish it by His Son, who became the Son of Man as the heavenly ladder joining earth to heaven. The ultimate issue will be that God is mingled with man so that God and man become a mutual habitation. Man will become His dwelling, and He will

become man's dwelling--this is the eternal dwelling of God according to His eternal plan.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FIVE

AN INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AND BUILDING

(4)

In this message we shall cover John 1 as a whole, reviewing some points that we have already covered and touching upon other points that we have not yet considered.

IV. TWO SECTIONS OF ETERNITY WITH THE BRIDGE OF TIME

John 1 reveals the two sections of eternity. John 1:1 refers to eternity in the past, for "the beginning" denotes eternity in the past. Verse 51 refers to eternity in the future, for when the Lord told Nathanael that he would see the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, He was not speaking about the present, but about eternity in the future. If we put together these two sections of eternity, we have the whole of eternity.

A. In the First Section of Eternity-- Eternity in the Past

In eternity past, Christ, as the Word, was with God and was God. In eternity past He was only God and only had divinity. Since the Word had not yet been incarnated, He was not a man and had no humanity.

B. In the Second Section of Eternity-- Eternity in the Future

In eternity future, Christ will not only be God, but also man. He will not only be the Son of God, but also the Son of Man. Since the Word has been incarnated in the flesh

(v. 14), He is also a man, the Son of Man with humanity forever. After the incarnation, He is still God, but God and man. He is still the Son of God, but the Son of God and the Son of Man. In addition to being the Son of God, for eternity in the future He will be the Son of Man. In eternity past He was God, solely and merely divine, having no humanity. However, in eternity future He will be God and man, the Son of God and the Son of Man, both divine and human, having divinity as well as humanity. He will have two natures, two essences, and two substances--divinity and humanity.

When Nathanael said to the Lord, "You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (v. 49), Jesus told him that he would see "the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Who is greater--the Son of God or the Son of Man? Logically speaking, everyone would say that the Son of God is much greater than the Son of Man. Let me ask you, do you prefer to be the sons of man or the sons of God? Surely you would answer that you prefer to be the sons of God. Everyone desires to be a son of God. It certainly was wonderful for Nathanael to realize that Jesus, a little man from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Nevertheless, Jesus immediately replied that He was the Son of Man. Although men attempt to make Him great, He likes to remain small.

Which is more important--for Jesus to be the Son of God or to be the Son of Man? If you are not careful in giving an answer, you may be involved in heresy. How difficult it is to answer such a question! The Lord is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. If He were not the Son of God, He could never be our life. If He were not the Son of Man, He could never be the essence of the building of God. The Son of God is for life, and the Son of Man is for building. The Bible never requires that we believe that Jesus is the Son of Man before we can have life. In order to have life, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We all must believe that Jesus, the little Nazarene, is the Son of God. If we believe this, we have eternal life. After

we have received eternal life, we must further realize that this Jesus who is the Son of God is also the Son of Man. His divinity is life to us, but His humanity is for the building of God. God's building needs His humanity. We need Jesus as the Son of God, but God needs Him as the Son of Man.

To us, Jesus is the Son of God, but to God and to the devil, Satan, Jesus is the Son of Man. The devil is not afraid of Jesus being the Son of God. He is afraid of Jesus being the Son of Man. A number of times when Jesus was casting demons out of people and the demons addressed Him as the Son of God, Jesus silenced them (Matt. 8:29; Mark 3:11-12), for, in front of them, He was acting as the Son of Man. When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness by saying, "If You are the Son of God, speak, that these stones may become loaves of bread" (Matt. 4:3), Jesus, resisting the temptation to forsake His position as the Son of Man, said, "Man shall not live on bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). Jesus maintained His standing as a man. Satan is not afraid of the Son of God; he is afraid of man. Why is Satan afraid of man? Because God, in His economy, has decided that Satan must be defeated by man.

God has no intention of dwelling in Himself. Divinity cannot be God's dwelling. God's intention in His economy is to dwell in humanity. God's intention is to defeat His enemy, Satan, by man and to make humanity His dwelling place. Thus, both for the defeat of Satan and for the dwelling place of God, there is the need of humanity. If the Lord Jesus were only the Son of God, He would only be qualified to impart life into man. He would have no substance by which to defeat the enemy or to become the dwelling place of God. Praise the Lord that He is the Son of God for us to have life, and He is the Son of Man for God to have a dwelling place.

Did God have a dwelling place of humanity in eternity past? Surely the answer is no. In Isaiah 66:1, God says, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool:... where is the place of my rest?" Heaven is considered as God's habitation (Deut. 26:15;1 Kings 8:49; Psa. 33:13-14; Isa. 63:15); yet God says, "Where is the place of my rest?"

God's resting place is man gained by Him (Isa. 57:15; 66:2). Today God dwells in the heavens, but the heavens will not be His habitation for eternity in the new heaven and the new earth. In the new heaven and the new earth, God's habitation for eternity will be the New Jerusalem, which is composed of all His redeemed saints and which will come down from heaven (Rev. 21:1-3). What will be God's eternal habitation? The regenerated, transformed, uplifted, and built up humanity which will eventually become God's dwelling place. God will not dwell with a natural humanity, but with a regenerated, transformed, uplifted, and built up humanity. This humanity is regenerated, transformed, united, and built together by the divine life. The divine life will uplift our humanity to such a standard that we will become God's dwelling place.

John 1 reveals Christ as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is the Son of God to impart God into us as our life, and He is the Son of Man to be the very essence of the building of God's house. In eternity past there was no humanity, and there was no dwelling place for God. In eternity future there will be humanity, and God will have a dwelling place.

C. On the Bridge of Time

John 1 reveals the two sections of eternity. How can God, who had no humanity in eternity past, have humanity in eternity future as His dwelling place? This will not happen overnight. Between these two sections of eternity is the bridge of time. In eternity past God planned and purposed, but He did not do anything. In eternity future God will not do anything, because, at that time, everything will have been accomplished. In eternity future He will simply enjoy His finished work. In eternity past He planned, and in eternity future He will enjoy. Everything that God needs to accomplish He accomplishes on the bridge of time. God is driving the car of His economy from the first section of eternity, through the

bridge of time, into the last section of eternity. By driving His car across the bridge of time, all the necessary work is completed. Once God has traveled from eternity past, through the bridge of time, and into eternity future, He will declare, "Finished!" In eternity future God will enjoy His finished work.

How long is this bridge of time? It may be more or less than six thousand years long. On this bridge of time God accomplishes five things, and we need to consider each of them in turn. We begin with creation.

1. Creation

Verse three says, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being which has come into being." Creation brings things into being. The meaning of creation is to call things not being as being (Rom. 4:17). The purpose of creation is to produce a receptacle to receive God as life. Consider the items in creation: the heavens, the earth, the billions of physical things, and man. What is the most important item in creation? Nothing is more important than man. Man is a V.I.P., a very important person. According to the Bible, the heavens are for the earth, and the earth is for man (Zech. 12:1). Everything is for man. The minerals, the vegetable life, and the animal life are all for man. The air, sunshine, and rain supply the vegetable life; the vegetable life is for the animal life, and both the vegetable life and the animal life are for man. All the living things on the earth are for man. Man, for whom all these things are, is for God, receiving God and fulfilling His purpose. There is a spirit within man which is the very receiver of God. By His creation, God produced the heavens for the earth, the earth for man, and man with a spirit as a receiver to receive God as his life.

Man is the center of the universe. Man, the center of the universe, has a mouth for eating and for calling. Eating is our most important daily activity. Regardless of

how busy a person may be, he will take time to eat every day. Most people eat several times a day. Do not feel ashamed to say that your most important daily activity is eating. I am a good eater. I eat both material food and spiritual food, which is Christ. I eat the Lord by calling, "O Lord Jesus." Eating the Lord is an important matter. All the silent Christians are being starved to death. I was such a dumb, silent Christian for years, and I nearly died. But today I am an eating Christian. I eat by calling on the name of the Lord. God created us with a spirit and with a mouth that we might receive Him as our life.

Have you ever thanked God for His creation? You need to say, "O God, my Creator, I thank You that You have created the heavens, the earth, and everything in it. I thank You for creating me. I thank You, Lord, that you created me with a spirit and a mouth." Many Christians have never thanked the Lord for creating them with a spirit and a mouth.

Romans 8:16 shows the importance of our spirit, and Romans 10:9-10 shows the importance of our mouth. Justification is related to our heart, and salvation is related to our mouth. Although many Christians say that it is sufficient to have a believing heart, Romans 10 makes it clear that we also need a mouth. We need to believe with our heart and call on the Lord with our mouth. The more you say, "O Lord Jesus," the more you will be saved. Why are you so weak? Because you do not call on the name of the Lord Jesus. If you call on Him, you will be empowered. Many Christians only know how to talk about their weaknesses. They do not realize that the reason they are so weak is that they do not use their lips and their tongue to confess the name of the Lord. "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:11). If every Christian would say, "Lord Jesus," continually, Satan would immediately be cast into the lake of fire. Hallelujah for our spirit and our mouth! We have a spirit within and a mouth without. Our spirit, our mouth, and our whole being come from God's creation. Oh, how we need to worship God for His creation. We owe Him a debt

of thanks for creating us. Even at the Lord's table we need to thank the Lord for His creation. Creation was the first item on the bridge of time.

2. Incarnation

a. To Bring God into His Creation--Man

The second item was incarnation. Without creation there would have been no way for God to be incarnated. Creation prepared the way and afforded Him the means to be incarnated. Creation brought things into being, and incarnation brought God into His creation. God waited approximately four thousand years after the creation of Adam before becoming incarnated. One day, He was incarnated, and there was on earth the little man Jesus with God in Him. God was wrought into that man. That was the greatest miracle of all. By incarnation, God was brought into mankind and became one with man. Divinity and humanity became one unit.

Between eternity in the past and eternity in the future is a gap, with time as a bridge to span it. On this bridge called time, Christ as the Word of God, through whom all things were created, was incarnated as a man. Creation was the first event on the bridge of time, and incarnation was the second. Creation means that things not being are brought into being through the Word. Before creation, nothing existed, but by Christ's creation all things came into existence. Incarnation is God coming into His creation. Although everything created by God was perfect and good, yet nothing of creation had been joined to God. Creation was but a preparatory step for incarnation. God firstly brought all created things into existence so that He could later become one with His creation. This is the reason that God created the heavens, the earth, and man as the center of the universe. It was His design to prepare creation so that He could join Himself to it. "The Word became flesh" means that God joined Himself to His creation by His incarnation. In incarnation, the flesh

which God put on became His tabernacle (1:14). This tabernacle was the building of God on a small scale; it was a miniature of the New Jerusalem, God's tabernacle in eternity (Rev. 21:2-3). By creation, God brought all things of the universe into existence; by incarnation, He mingled Himself with man, who is the center of His creation. The purpose of God in creation and incarnation is to fulfill His desire of mingling Himself with humanity and to make humanity a living habitation for Himself. He is not satisfied with heaven as His abode. He desires to build a living dwelling place with living people. Thus, He created man as the center of His creation and mingled Himself with man by incarnation so that He might make man His living habitation in the universe.

b. To Declare God

Incarnation is not only to bring God into His creation, but also to declare God to man in the Word, in life, in light, in grace, and in truth. In the incarnation, the Word, which is Christ as God, became flesh. The Word is God expressed, explained, and defined so that man may understand God. Life is God imparted that man may receive Him. Light is God shining that man may be enlightened to apprehend Him. Grace is God enjoyed by man that man may share His riches. Truth is God realized by man that man may have Him as reality. In total, it is through these five things that God is fully declared to man in order that man may partake of and enjoy Him as everything.

3. Redemption

The third item on the bridge of time is redemption. After living on the earth for thirty-three and a half years, the Lord went to the cross as the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God is for redemption. Through redemption, the Lord recovered fallen man and separated him from sin. By means of redemption, God not only removed sin, but also terminated the entire old creation. The very Jesus who

was crucified on the cross took the old creation with Him into the tomb. When He was raised from the dead, He left the old creation in the tomb and came out in resurrection as the head of the new creation.

4. Anointing

Anointing follows redemption. The anointing comes by way of the dove, the Spirit, which is the continuation of the Lamb. The Lamb has removed sin and terminated the old creation, and the dove, the Spirit, has come to regenerate, impart life, transform, unite, and build. The dove, the Spirit, regenerates the created man, transforms the natural man, and unites the transformed man. We may be in any one of three situations. We may be a created man who needs to be regenerated. We may be a regenerated man who is still quite natural and who needs to be transformed. We may be a transformed man who is still separate and individualistic and who needs to be united with others. If we are properly transformed, we would be willing to be united with others. So, firstly, we need to be regenerated; secondly, we need to be transformed; and thirdly, we need to be united for the building. The dove, the Spirit, regenerates, transforms, and unites. We are all under the anointing of the dove, the Spirit. Although we may not realize it or may be ignorant of it, the Lord is working to transform us.

I have the full assurance that all of the Lord's people eventually will be transformed. Sooner or later, we shall all be transformed. Transformation does not depend on us; it depends on Him. He has chosen us and ordained us, and we cannot escape Him. If we try to escape, we will simply waste our time and give Him a little trouble. Do not even say that you can delay Him, for with Him a thousand years are as one day. It is easy for Him to be patient with you. Eventually, every brother and sister will be transformed. When we enter into the New Jerusalem, we shall see that everyone is jasper, precious stone (Rev. 21:11).

The Lord is truly doing a transforming work within us. He is not a great eagle, but a little dove--the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This little dove is the continuation of the little Lamb. Since the Lamb has died on the cross, the dove now in resurrection has His turn to work. Day by day, the little dove as the life-imparting Spirit speaks within you, rebuking you and touching your heart or conscience. Often, as you are in a department store, the dove bothers you from within. Do not expect a big experience or a sudden change. Expect the little dove to move and work within you all the time. We have become involved in a process from which there is no escape. This involvement is continuous and permanent. In a sense, we have inward rest; in another sense, the little dove troubles us constantly. The inward working of this little dove is the anointing.

We all are under the process of transformation. I have observed that certain brothers and sisters have experienced a significant change due to the dove's transforming work. If you say that you do not like the church life and decide to leave it, you will find that you cannot escape the transforming work of the indwelling dove. If you want to be truly at rest, you should simply behave yourself as a "good boy" in the church life. If you do not behave yourself, but instead become a "naughty boy," you will suffer. But this suffering will help you to be transformed. Who can escape the way of the Lord? Once we are caught, there is no escape. We may say, "I don't like it," but He says, "I like you so much. You don't like Me, but I like you. The more you dislike Me, the more I like you." What shall we do? What shall we say? We should do nothing and should just say, "O Lord Jesus." Once you have been captured by the Lord for the church life, you are "hooked" for transformation, and there is nothing that you can do to escape it. You may not like it, but what can you do? Where will you go? There is no place to go. This is our destiny. God has destined us to be transformed for His building.

5. Building

After creation, incarnation, redemption and anointing, we have building. This building is for the house of God. God is building a dwelling place for Himself, and He is using transformed people as the stones (1:42). Praise the Lord that we are not only undergoing the work of transformation, but are also in the process of building. What God needs is not a great number of stones, but a house. For eternity God needs a builded house, a Bethel, as His habitation.

In order for the Lord to come back, He needs the nation of Israel to be prepared and the church to be built. Look at Israel: she is nearly ready. But Israel needs the church to match her. Although Israel is nearly ready, the church is not yet prepared. The Lord does not care for the number of people. Even if only a small number are completely processed, saturated, transformed, and built by and with Him, it will be sufficient. I do not speak this lightly.

The coming of the Lord will not be according to our natural concept. The religionists did not understand His first coming and neither will they understand His second. Do not follow the religious way of understanding the Lord's coming. You must take the way of life. If you are in the way of life, then you know the way in which He will come. It will be a "sneaky" way. The Bible tells us that the Lord will return as a thief (Rev. 3:3; 16:15). He will not come as a visitor who knocks at your door. He will come in a stealthy way as a thief. You may miss Him. If you keep yourself in the way of life, you will see that the Lord will come in such a hidden way. He will come in a mysterious way, in the way of life. Praise Him that we are in the secret way of life.

The Lord's coming back needs a solid building of His seekers. This building will be a stepping stone, a beach-head, for Him to take the earth, and it will be a mutual abode for both God and man. It will be the mingling of divinity with humanity and of humanity with divinity forever. Christ once was only divine. In order for Him to be the Son of Man, He must have the human life and the

human nature. We are human, but we can be born of God to become the children of God (1:12-13). In order for us to be the children of God, we must have the divine life and the divine nature. Eventually, He, the divine One, will have the human life and the human nature, and we, the human ones, will have the divine life and the divine nature. Thus, He and we, we and He, will be exactly the same. This is the mingling of divinity with humanity, and this is the mutual abode of God's building. This building will be the ultimate fulfillment not only of Jacob's dream, but of God's eternal plan. It will terminate the bridge of time and usher in the blessed eternity in the future. We must be for that building and we must be that building!

After all of these five items have transpired, we shall enter into eternity future with the Lord. At that time, He will be both the Son of God and the Son of Man. As the Son of God, He will be life to us, and as the Son of Man, He will be the dwelling place for God. We shall be joined to and even mingled with Him, and we shall enjoy eternity with Him forever. Nathanael, and all of us with him, will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This is the revelation found in John chapter one.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE SIX

LIFE'S PRINCIPLE

The Gospel of John is not as simple as many people think. When John wrote his gospel, he was one hundred percent under the anointing of the dove, the Spirit. Thus, the composition of this gospel is marvelous. We have seen that chapter one gives an introduction to the whole book. Although some expositors of the Gospel of John say that the introduction includes only the first eighteen verses of chapter one, the Lord has shown us that the entire first chapter is an introduction. The introduction begins with eternity past and ends with eternity future. Between eternity past and eternity future is the bridge of time on which five main events transpire for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. We have seen this clearly in the last message. John chapter one is also an extract of the whole Gospel of John. In fact, it is an extract of the whole Bible.

After giving us such an all-inclusive introduction, John presents several cases to illustrate the matter of life. Although Jesus did a great many signs before His disciples (20:30-31), John selected not more than twelve of them to illustrate the matter of life. Beginning with the case of Nicodemus in chapter three and ending with the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter eleven, nine cases are presented. If we add the incidents of the changing of water into wine, of the cleansing of the temple, and of the washing of feet, we have a total of twelve events. If you compare the record of the Gospel of John with that of the other gospels, you will find that they include many things which John does not, and that John records many things which they do not. For example, Matthew, Mark, and Luke say nothing about Jesus' changing water into wine. Neither do they mention the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus regarding regeneration. Do not think that these differences are accidental. No, each gospel was

carefully planned by the Divine Writer. Matthew wrote his gospel with a specific purpose--to prove that Jesus is the King and the Christ. In order to prove this, Matthew selected some incidents and cases in the life of Christ which demonstrate that Jesus is the King of Israel and God's Christ. Since Luke's purpose was to show that Jesus is the Savior of mankind, he selected the cases which prove that Jesus is the Savior. For instance, the story of the prodigal son is recorded in Luke, but not in Matthew, Mark, or John. Why is this story recorded in Luke? Because this story proves that Jesus is the Savior. Another incident recorded only in Luke is that of the thief on the cross who asked the Lord to remember him when He came into His kingdom (Luke 23:39-43). Luke also tells us of the Lord's answer to that dying thief: "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Neither Matthew, Mark, nor John gives us such an account. In the same principle, all the cases recorded by John prove that Christ is life to meet our need. Based upon this principle, we must realize that the incident of changing water into wine (2:1-11) is not merely the account of a story; it has a spiritual meaning with a special significance. Now we need to find out the spiritual significance of this event.

I. LIFE'S PRINCIPLE--TO CHANGE DEATH INTO LIFE

When I first heard the story of Jesus' changing water into wine, I did not know the meaning behind this event. Later I came to understand that this was not simply a story, but an event accomplished by the Lord Jesus to establish the principle of life. What is the principle of life? The principle of life is to change death into life. In each of the nine cases recorded from chapters three through eleven, the principle is to change death into life. This is especially clear with the case of Lazarus. Lazarus was dead and had been buried for four days. He even smelled. He was full of death from top to bottom and from the inside to the outside. In every layer and corner of his being there was nothing but death. As the record of chapter eleven tells us, when the Lord Jesus learned that Lazarus

was sick, He did not go to see him. He waited until he was full of death, until he was dead and buried. Then He came to raise Lazarus from the dead. If we apply the principle of life to that case, we see that Jesus changed death into life.

This principle not only applies to the last case, that of Lazarus, but to the first case, that of Nicodemus. Do you think that Nicodemus was not a person full of death? Because he was full of death, the Lord told him that he needed to be born again that he might have the eternal life which is God Himself (3:3, 5-6). In a sense, Nicodemus was living, but in the eyes of God he was a living dead person. In God's eyes, Nicodemus was dead. He also needed his death to be changed into life. Nicodemus did not even realize that he was sinful, much less that he was dead. Nevertheless, in the eyes of God, he was sinful, serpentine, and dead. As such a person, he needed the changing of death into life.

The same is true with the Samaritan woman in chapter four. The Samaritan woman was thirsty, and thirst is a sign of death. When you are thirsty, it means that you are going to die. The fact that you are thirsty indicates that you have death's element within you. Only the Lord Jesus can quench that thirst. To quench thirst means to change death into life. And so it is with every case recorded by John. Each incident illustrates the principle established in the event of changing water into wine--the principle of changing death into life.

A. Jesus Coming in Resurrection to Weak and Fragile People in the Enjoyment of Their Human Life

Now we need to see that Jesus came in resurrection to weak and fragile people. Some may ask, "How could Jesus come in resurrection when He had not been crucified yet? To say this is to allegorize." Yes, the whole story of changing water into wine is an allegory, and we need to allegorize every part of it.

1. "The Third Day," Signifying in Resurrection

The day upon which this sign was accomplished was "the third day" (2:1). "The third day" signifies the day of resurrection. In John 1 the words "the next day" are used three times, in verses 29, 35, and 43. Why does it say "the next day" three times in chapter one and then speak of "the third day" in 2:1? "The third day" in chapter two should not actually be called the third day, but the fifth. Perhaps you should go to John and argue with him, saying, "Brother John, you did something wrong. You have three 'next days' and so the day mentioned in 2:1 should be the fifth day." John would reply, "Dear brother, that was why I did not speak of the second day, third day, and fourth day in chapter one, but called each of them 'the next day' until I called the day in chapter two 'the third day.'" None of the events which transpired on the "next days" in chapter one were in resurrection.

Let us look at the three "next days" in chapter one. "The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). Was that in resurrection? Certainly not. How can you say that that was in resurrection? "Again the next day John and two of his disciples were standing, and looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, Behold, the Lamb of God!" (vv. 35-36). Although this happened on the second "next day," it did not occur on "the third day." The third "next day" is found in verse 43. "The next day He would go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip; and Jesus said to him, Follow Me." This did not happen on "the third day," because "the third day" is the day of resurrection. None of the events mentioned in chapter one transpired on "the third day," that is, in resurrection. Only as we come to the changing of water into wine in chapter two do we find mention of "the third day."

2. "Cana," a Land of Reeds, Signifying the Place of Weak and Fragile People

How do we know that in John 2 Jesus came to weak and fragile people? We know it by the fact that He went to

Cana and that Cana in Hebrew means "a land of reeds." A reed in Scripture signifies fragile people. Both Isaiah and Matthew say that we, the weak people, are the "bruised reed" which the Lord will not break (Isa. 42:3; Matt. 12:20). In Matthew 11:7, the Lord, when referring to John the Baptist, asked the Jews if they went out into the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind. Of course, John the Baptist was not such a weak, fragile person that could be shaken by the wind. Therefore, Cana as a land of reeds symbolizes the earth. The whole world is a Cana, full of weak and fragile people to whom the Lord came. The Lord's coming to Cana signifies His coming into a world full of weak and fragile people. Although the people of this earth, like reeds, are weak and fragile, yet the Lord came to them in resurrection.

3. "Galilee," a Despised Place

The wedding which Jesus attended in John 2 was in Cana of Galilee. Galilee was a place despised by people (7:52). As a despised place, Galilee signifies the low and mean condition of the world.

4. Marriage, Signifying the Continuation of Human Life, and a Wedding Feast, Signifying the Enjoyment of Human Life

We must allegorize the wedding and the wedding feast. Marriage is very significant and essential to human life, for without it human life is hindered. If you eliminate marriage, you terminate human life. Marriage signifies the continuation of human life. What does the wedding feast signify? It signifies the enjoyment and pleasure of human life. Nothing on earth is a more joyful occasion than a wedding. Have you ever seen people weep mournfully at a wedding? If you were to weep in such a way at a wedding, it would mean that you are impolite or uncultured. When attending a funeral, on the contrary, you are not permitted to be joyful. When attending a wedding, however, you must be happy. According to human culture, a wedding is a joyful occasion.

5. Wine, as the Human Life, Signifying the Basic Factor of this Enjoyment

The marriage feast, whether in ancient times or in the present, whether in the East or in the West, depends primarily on wine, which typifies that all human pleasure depends on life. Since wine, unlike water, derives its source from grapes, it comes from something living. Wine signifies life, for the wine of the grapes is the life of the grapes. Thus, the enjoyment of man depends upon the life of man. When life is brought to an end, all enjoyment is gone.

B. Their Human Life Running Out and Their Being Filled with Death

Although a wedding is a very joyful occasion, its joy is temporary. No wedding lasts very long. Recently I attended a wedding which lasted a little longer than half an hour. We were happy there for only half an hour. This is the human wedding, the human enjoyment.

1. "The Wine Ran Out"

The wine, which was the center of the enjoyment of the wedding feast, ran out (2:3). This signifies that the enjoyment of human life will be terminated when human life runs out. When the wine runs out, the pleasure of the marriage feast is gone. This signifies not only that the enjoyment of life is over, but that human life is finished. Regardless of how much pleasure you are enjoying, when your human life is ended, all your human enjoyment is also gone. Regardless of how good your wife, your husband, your parents, your children, or your job may be, if your life has come to an end, your pleasure is gone. When the wine has been exhausted, the feast is over, for the feast is dependent upon the wine. All your enjoyment depends upon your life. If your life has been terminated, your enjoyment is brought to an end. Regardless of the kind of wedding you are in, when your human life runs out, your wedding is terminated and the enjoyment is over. That is what happened that day in Cana of Galilee.

Do you not believe that before the Lord Jesus went to

Cana He realized that the wine would run out? Surely He knew it ahead of time, for that was the reason that He went to Cana. The wine did not run out by accident. The Lord Jesus foreknew that the wine would be exhausted, and He went to Cana to establish the principle of life, changing death into life. By coming to the marriage feast, He came to deal with and to heal the situation. The Lord healed death in the human situation by turning it into life like the way Elisha healed the salt water by making it fresh (2 Kings 2:19-22).

When the Lord came into the world, He came into a situation where human enjoyment existed, but was not lasting. He came into a situation where the death of human life terminates all human enjoyment. The changing of water into wine is a sign which must be understood figuratively. For example, if we are over sixty years of age, we are approaching a time when the wine is almost gone. When our wine is about to run out, we know that our marriage feast will soon be over. But, praise the Lord, it is at such a time that the Lord comes into our situation. In our marriage feast we have the Lord! We need not be afraid, for He can change the water into wine.

2. "Six Stone Waterpots"

Before doing the miracle, the Lord told the people to fill the waterpots with water (2:6-7). These water containers, made of stone, were six in number. The number six represents created man, because it was on the sixth day that man was created (Gen. 1:27, 31). Therefore, the six stone waterpots signify the natural man who was created on the sixth day. Naturally speaking, we are nothing but "waterpots," vessels to contain something. We, the "waterpots," were located in Cana, the land of reeds, full of weak and fragile people. We were the waterpots in Cana, weak and fragile.

3. "The Jewish Rites of Purification" with Water

The waterpots were used in the Jewish rites of purification (2:6), a practice of the Jewish religion. The Jewish rites of purification with water signify religion's

attempt to make people clean by certain dead practices. The ancient Jews took care of washing themselves and of keeping themselves clean and pure in God's worship. The Lord, on the contrary, changes death into life. The ritual purification with water is outward, without life, but the Lord's changing death into life is from within and is full of life.

4. "Fill the Waterpots with Water"

The Lord told the servants to fill the waterpots with water, and they filled them up to the brim (2:7). What does this mean? As we shall see, it signifies that human beings are filled with death. The waterpots, that is, mankind created on the sixth day, are filled with the waters of death.

C. Jesus Changing Their Death into Life Eternal

1. Water, Signifying Death

When the Lord commanded the people to fill the six vessels with water, it indicated that the natural man is full of death. Water in the Scriptures has two symbolic meanings. In some cases it stands for life (John 4:14; 7:38); in others, death (Gen. 1:2, 6; Exo. 14:21; Matt. 3:16). The waters in Genesis 1 and the water of baptism signify death. In this instance, water also signifies death. All the stone vessels were full of water, meaning that all humanity is naturally full of death. Just as the waterpots were filled to the brim with water, so we were filled with death.

2. Wine as the Life-Juice of the Grape, Signifying Life

The Lord Jesus marvelously changed this death water into wine (2:8-9). This miracle not only shows that the Lord Jesus can call things not being as being (Rom. 4:17), but also that He can change death into life.

The Lord's miraculously changing water into wine signifies that He changes our death into life. The water signifies death, and the wine signifies life. When the Lord changes our water into wine, that wine in our marriage feast will never end. Since we have been regenerated, life with its spiritual enjoyment will last forever. We shall have an eternal marriage feast which will never end. This

feast is not in our original life, but in the new life which we received through regeneration. Even as the ruler of the feast discovered that the new wine is better than the former wine (2:9-10), so we too shall find that the life we receive through regeneration is much better than our natural life. Our former life, symbolized by the poor wine, was greatly inferior. The Lord did not give us the best first, but the best last. The first life, the human, created one, is an inferior life; the best life is the second life, the divine and everlasting one. This life is the best because it is the life of God Himself in Christ. So, our pleasure will last forever and ever. We have everlasting enjoyment, for Christ has translated us from death into life. He, as our everlasting, eternal life, can maintain our pleasures and enjoyment forever and ever. A new marriage feast began when we were saved, and it will never end. There is always joy within and there is always a marriage feast within because we have the divine wine, which is the divine life--the Lord Himself.

We all have had this kind of experience. Before we were saved we were waterpots filled with death water. One day we said, "Lord Jesus," and He came and changed our death water into life. Regardless of the kind of death situation we might be in, if we turn our case over to the Lord Jesus, He will change that death into life. For example, even Christian husbands and wives may reach a point in their married life that the life runs out of their marriage. It seems that they are unable to go on in their married life. However, if they open to the Lord Jesus, He will change that death into life. In many marriages the Lord has changed death water into life wine.

D. The Beginning of Signs

1. All Miracles in this Gospel Called Signs

In this book, all the miracles done by the Lord are called signs (2:23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30). They are miracles, but they are used as signs to signify the matter of life. The word translated "miracles" in the King James Version is the word

"signs" in Greek. A sign is that which signifies something. For instance, a red light is a sign that tells us to stop. All the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John were not only miracles but signs.

2. The Principle of the First Mention

The first mentioning of anything in the Scriptures sets forth the principle of that particular matter. Therefore, the first sign here sets forth the principle of all the following signs, that is, to change death into life. The Lord's changing water into wine establishes the principle of life--changing death into life. Since this is the first sign, so the principle of life which is set forth in it can be applied to all of the other cases. For example, it can be applied to Nicodemus, a person full of death, who needed to be born again that he might have the eternal life which is God Himself.

We may also apply this principle to the case of the Samaritan woman in chapter four. Do you think that the Samaritan woman had a life full of pleasure and enjoyment? No, but the Lord came into her life and He changed her. That woman had simply been a vessel wherein the wine of human enjoyment had run out. She had tried five husbands, but eventually her human enjoyment ended with no wine. She had been trying her best to enjoy the wine of human pleasures, but finally she felt only emptiness and death. Then the Lord turned that death into life and filled her with the divine wine of His eternal life.

Chapter five shows a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. His sickness indicated that the wine was gone, but the Lord came to change his death into life. In the eyes of the Lord, he was not only sick, but also dead, because later in verse 25 the Lord said that the dead shall hear His voice and live. He was not only a sick man healed by the Lord, but also a dead man raised by the Lord. He was even weak and dead in religion. Although religion may be quite good, it requires energy. How could a dead man have energy? Consequently, he could do nothing with religion, for his wine had run out. But the Lord came to apply the principle of changing the death into life, as seen in the first sign.

We may also apply this principle to the other cases. The hunger of the multitude in chapter six reveals that their human enjoyment had come to an end, but the Lord came to them as the bread of life. The sinful woman in chapter eight was also one whose wine of enjoyment had run out. The blind man in chapter nine also had no enjoyment of the human life. This is especially true with the case of Lazarus in chapter eleven. The main points of the case of Lazarus, in principle, are the same as those of the first case, the marriage feast at Cana. In the first case there was the enjoyment of the marriage feast. In the case of Lazarus there was the pleasure of the family love between Lazarus and his two sisters. In the wedding feast the wine ran out; in the case of Lazarus the human life ran out. Lazarus died, indicating that the wine of human life had run out. In both cases the principle of life was exactly the same: the Lord came into both situations and changed death into life. Therefore, the principle of life set forth in the incident of changing water into wine can be applied to every case throughout the Gospel of John.

In the Scriptures, figuratively speaking, the tree of life is the source of life, and the tree of knowledge is the source of death, as revealed in Genesis 2:9, 17. In all the cases recorded in the Gospel of John, the significance always corresponds, in principle, with the tree of life resulting in life and the tree of knowledge resulting in death.

3. Manifesting His Glory

Verse eleven says that in this beginning of signs which Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him. The Lord's divinity was manifested in His changing death into life.

E. The Mother of Jesus Signifying the Natural Man

Mary, the mother of Jesus, here signifies the natural man, which has nothing to do with life and which must be subdued by the divine life (vv. 3-5). When the wine was exhausted, the natural man came out and even prayed to the Lord. When Mary told the Lord, "They have no wine," He said to her, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come" (vv. 3-4). Often we are exactly like the mother of Jesus. We are today's Mary, praying as a

natural man according to our natural life. Frequently the Lord will allow the wine in certain situations to run out in order that He might have an opportunity to change death into life. Even in a local church, the Lord may allow the situation to go into death. In such a case, the natural man will pray, "O Lord, do something to rescue the situation." If you pray in this way, the Lord will turn to you and say, "What have I to do with you? You have nothing to do with Me in this matter." Nearly all of us would act the same way Mary did. What then should we do? We should not do anything. Let the death come to the surface and be exposed. Then the Lord Jesus will come in.

We all must admit that many of our prayers have gone unanswered. For instance, many of the married brothers have prayed for their wives, telling the Lord, "O Lord, You know my wife. Lord, You must change her." What kind of prayer is this? It is the prayer of Mary, the prayer of the natural man. Do not pray in that way. Let the death in your wife come to the surface. Let Lazarus be dead and buried. Then the Lord Jesus will come and raise him from the dead. Let your wife, like Lazarus, die, be buried, and begin to putrefy. If you do this, the Lord Jesus will come and change death into life.

Quite often I have received letters from individuals or from churches who are crying for help, saying, "Brother, we are so weak. Please come to help us." Whenever I have received such a letter, I said, "You are weak, but you are not yet dead. Even if you are dead, you have not yet begun to smell." We need to wait until the death situation comes to the surface; then the Lord Jesus will come in to change death into life. Everything that the Lord does is according to this principle of changing death into life.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE SEVEN

LIFE'S PURPOSE

II. LIFE'S PURPOSE--TO BUILD THE HOUSE OF GOD

It is quite interesting to see that in John chapter two we firstly have the case of changing water into wine (2:1-11) and then, following that, the case of dealing with the temple (2:12-22). We must believe that both of these cases were recorded for the purpose of signifying something beyond the mere account of historical events. Why does the dealing with the temple follow the changing of death into life? It shows that life is for God's temple. In other words, life is for God's building. In the incident of the Lord's changing water into wine, we saw the principle of life, that is, to change death into life. Now, in the case of the dealing with the temple, we see the goal, the purpose of life, that is, to build the house of God.

A. Jesus Cleansing the Temple

John 2:12-22 shows two aspects of the Lord's dealing with the temple--the cleansing aspect and the building aspect. Satan, the enemy of God, is always trying to damage or to frustrate the temple of God. He attempts to defile it with many sinful things. This is the reason that the house of God needs cleansing.

1. "The Passover Was Near"

Jesus cleansed the temple at a time when "the Passover of the Jews was near" (2:13). The Passover at that time was a remembrance of God's salvation (Exo. 12:2-11; Deut. 16:1-3) through which remembrance the Jews worshipped God in their temple. But, when the Lord

Jesus went up to Jerusalem, their temple was filled with oxen, sheep, doves, and money-changers. So, the temple needed a cleansing, and the Lord Jesus did it.

The Passover was a prefigure of our remembrance of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24-25). And we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). It is very possible that when we come to the Lord's Table to remember Him, we are filled with earthly things. So, we also need a cleansing that we may be the proper temple of God.

2. The Cleansing of the Temple

a. With a Whip of Cords Made of Rushes

Let us read John 2:14-16. "And He found in the temple those selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers sitting there. And having made a whip of cords, He drove them all, both the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple, and He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned the tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, Take these things away; do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise." The Lord dealt with the house of God by cleansing it with a scourge or a whip made of cords. The King James Version says that the Lord made "a scourge of small cords," but some versions say that the Lord made a scourge or whip out of rushes, which are inexpensive and ordinary. The Lord made a scourge or whip of ordinary things, of rushes, and used it to cleanse the temple. He drove out the oxen, sheep, doves, and coins. That signified the casting out of all earthly occupations. We are the temple of God, yet we are not filled with God. We are filled with so many things other than God. Although we, as the house of God, should be filled with God, yet the fact is that we are filled with merchandise, money, and tables of the money-changers. Therefore, the Lord must make a whip of cords to drive these things out of us.

Often, the Lord uses the ordinary and common things, such as the rushes, to cleanse us. Sometimes He uses someone common to purge you--such as your wife or husband, your parents or children, your employer or

employees. We all have experienced the whip of cords which the Lord has made of common persons or ordinary things to purge us. Sometimes the Lord comes to interfere with our lives by turning things upside down. He comes to cast out the sheep, oxen, and doves, and to overthrow the tables in order to bring confusion into the whole situation. For example, last year you gained a lot of money in business, but this year you lose everything--this is a scourge that the Lord uses to purge you. With every seeking Christian there is always someone or something purging him.

Generally speaking, a wife who is a seeking child of God always longs for her husband to be spiritual and to love the Lord, but it sometimes turns out to be just the opposite. A husband who loves the Lord always looks to the Lord that his wife might be spiritual and love the Lord, but it is sometimes contrary to his desire. Also parents who sincerely seek after the Lord and pray daily for their children sometimes suffer to see their children going astray. The scourge you experience is made by the Lord. If your husband or wife is quite spiritual, the Lord would have no scourge to purge you. If your sons are like Peter and John and your daughter is like Mary, there would be no rushes available for the Lord to make a scourge. If your parents are like Abraham and Sarah, nothing would purge you. On the one hand, you may daily enjoy the Lord as a feast, but, on the other hand, the Lord will send a scourge a number of times to purge you. Many times the Lord will even use the brothers and sisters in the church as a whip of cords to purge away the merchandise and the money-changers that exist within you.

b. The Heart's Desire of the Lord for the House of God

Verse 17 says, "His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of Your house shall devour Me." Within the Lord Jesus there was a zeal for the house of God. This zeal devoured Him, ate Him up, consumed Him. He was

absolutely for the Father's house. The Father's house was His heart's desire. When He saw the corrupted situation within the temple, He could not tolerate it, but cleansed it, even with a whip. He was driven by zeal for His Father's house to drive all the defilement out of it. His heart was pure for the Father. He could not suffer to see that the temple, His Father's house, was defiled, contaminated by the things of man's greed. So, He cleansed it.

Satan tries his best to defile and to contaminate the church life with so many sinful and worldly things. Wherever there is a local church this will always happen. But praise the Lord that Satan's contamination brings in the Lord's cleansing. The enemy, Satan, is always busy. He never sleeps. Wherever a local church has been established, Satan will try to defile it. If we lack experience, we shall be very concerned about this. We shall be troubled that the church has been contaminated by the enemy. Let me speak a word to comfort you. If your local church has been contaminated, you should not be discouraged. You should say, 'Lord, now is Your time. Lord, come in. Satan's contamination only brings in Your cleansing."

B. The Body of Jesus Being the Temple Destroyed and Raised Up Again in Resurrection

Satan's goal was not only to contaminate the temple, but to destroy it. His ultimate aim was to destroy the house of God. But what the enemy destroyed, the Lord raised up in three days (2:19). This means that in His resurrection life the Lord built up what was destroyed by the enemy. It is needless for us to worry about the Lord's recovery of the church, because the more the enemy damages, the more the Lord will build up in resurrection. The Lord's word is, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). In other words, the enemy may damage and destroy the church, which is the house of God, but the Lord will build it up in resurrection and by resurrection. After the enemy has caused damage, the Lord, in resurrection, will rear up a building on a much

larger scale. We should not worry about the confusion that may exist in the church, for the Lord's Body, the church, is in the process of resurrection. The damage done by the enemy is necessary, because everything natural must be destroyed. Only that which is natural can be destroyed by the enemy. Afterward, the Lord will raise up His church in resurrection. Every time, after trouble damages the church, the church will be recovered and raised up in the newness of resurrection life. During the past, I have seen much damage that really hurt the church, but the more the enemy damaged, the more the Lord built up His church in and by His resurrection.

Seventeen years ago, in 1958, the churches in Taiwan were quite strong. Then some things happened which opened the way for the enemy to come in. A great storm assailed the churches. I was there then and I saw the situation clearly, but I was not afraid. That attack began in 1958. In 1959 I was conducting a life-study of John. When I came to the very point in John 2 that I am covering in this message, I told the people, "Some of you are being used by the enemy to tear down the church. I would like to let you know that if the church here has been built by the Lord, the more you try to tear it down, the more it will be built up." Later, I left Taiwan for the United States. I was not afraid that the churches there would be destroyed and so I left for the United States in peace. Afterward, the leading ones from the churches in Taiwan wrote me again and again, saying, "The enemy has done much. Brother, please come back." I did not return for four years. During that four-year period, I received many letters from the leading brothers speaking of the damage that the enemy had done, but each time I wrote back, saying, "Brothers, be at peace. If the churches on the island of Taiwan were set up by the Lord, no one can tear them down. The more they attempt to destroy the churches, the more the churches will be built up." Now, in the year 1975, all the churches in Taiwan are strongly established.

Do not be disappointed at today's Christian situation.

Do not say that the situation is pitiful. That is only one aspect of the picture. Praise the Lord that during the past twenty centuries there has always been another aspect. Do you believe that Satan can defeat the Lord Jesus? This is impossible. Do you believe that Satan is stronger than the Lord Jesus? The answer, of course, is no. Based upon this fact, I have always been restful. Regardless of how much trouble there has been in the church, my wife can testify that I always sleep well. I have the full assurance that Satan call never defeat the Lord Jesus and that the Lord will always prevail over Satan.

The Lord Jesus told his opponents that if they destroyed this temple He would raise it again in three days (2:19). They did not understand what He was talking about. The Lord was saying, "You may put Me to death and you may kill My body on the cross, but I will raise it up again in three days." Do not try to understand the Bible merely! according to the black and white letters, for if you do, you will find yourself in difficulty. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus told the people that after they killed Him He would resurrect Himself (Matt. 10:18). On the other hand, we are told elsewhere in the New Testament that God raised Him up (Acts 2:24). In the New Testament, there are two ways of recording the Lord's resurrection--that God raised Him up and that He raised Himself up. How shall we understand or interpret this? Did God raise Him up or did He raise Himself up? In the Gospel of Luke, which shows the Lord Jesus as the Savior who was sacrificed for our sins, we see that the Lord needed God to raise Him up (Luke 9:22). In the Gospel of John the situation is different. In John, the Lord was not slain as a sacrifice for sins. Rather, He Himself laid down His life. Jesus said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again" (10:17-18). In the Gospel of John, there was no need for God to raise Him up. As the sacrifice for sins, He needed God to raise Him up; as the One who is the giver of life, He could lay down His life and

take it up again. He could walk into death and walk out again. The Lord seemed to be saying, "In a sense, it is you that kill Me. But, in My sense, it is I who walk into death, take a tour of it, and walk out again." Each year many tourists come to Washington, D.C. and look at the White House. Likewise, the Lord Jesus took a tour of the region of death and visited the Black House. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Black House, I have come to have a look at you and to see what you can do. Can you do anything with Me? Since you can do nothing with Me, after My tour I will bid you farewell and return to life again." This is the resurrection in the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus laid Himself down and raised Himself up again.

1. The Physical Body of Jesus Being Destroyed by the Jews on the Cross

The physical body of Jesus was destroyed on the cross by the Jews. When Christ became flesh, He took on a physical body. In John 1:14 we are told clearly that His physical body was a tabernacle. According to chapter two of John, His physical body was also the temple. I wish to point out that throughout the New Testament, the temple of God does not denote a place; it denotes a Person. When Jesus was in the flesh, His body was the tabernacle and temple of God. Both the tabernacle and the temple are God's dwelling place. Satan knew this. Since Satan realized that the physical body of Jesus was God's dwelling place on earth, he did his best to destroy that body. And he did destroy it on the cross through the Jews. In a sense, Satan destroyed the Lord's physical body; in another sense, the Lord Jesus gave up His body to death. The Lord seemed to be saying to Satan, "Satan, do your best. Let Me see what you can do. Whatever you do will just give Me an opportunity to do something further."

2. Jesus Raising Up His Physical Body in Resurrection to Be the House of God

After Satan destroyed the Lord's physical body on the

cross, His body was put into a tomb and rested there. The Lord Jesus then went into death, took a tour of the Black House, and came out in resurrection. When Jesus arose, He Himself raised up His dead and buried body. The body of Jesus that was destroyed on the cross was small and weak; the Body of Christ in resurrection is vast and powerful. Which do you prefer to have--the body of Jesus or the Body of Christ? After the Lord's resurrection, His Body, that is, the temple, was reared up on a much larger scale. The body the enemy destroyed by crucifixion was merely the body of Jesus; what was raised by the Lord in resurrection was not only His own body, but everyone who is joined to Him by faith (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:6). After the Lord's resurrection, Satan would have had to say, "I lost my case. I was stupid. I shouldn't have destroyed Him." Nevertheless, it was too late for Satan to repent.

Once a local church has been damaged and destroyed, you can be assured that, in resurrection, it will become even larger than it was originally. The Lord Jesus is always more prevailing than the enemy. Do not be frightened by Satan's work. Many times there is no need for us to pray so desperately. We should simply say, "Satan, do your best. Whatever you do will simply afford the opportunity for our Lord Jesus to overcome you." Whenever a problem comes to the church, many brothers feel that they should immediately call a meeting and pray. However, you do not need to be that hasty. Be at peace. Do not be terrified by Satan's activity. When the Lord Jesus knew that the Jews were attempting to destroy Him, He did not pray, "O Father, kill all these Jews. Father, save Me and protect Me." Instead of praying that way, the Lord seemed to tell them, "Do your best to kill Me. Be assured that after you put Me to death I will have the opportunity to increase." No one can frustrate the purpose of the Lord. The more the enemy tries to do, the more he affords the opportunity for the Lord to do something more. Whatever the Lord does is always in resurrection. The Lord builds the temple "in three days," signifying that He builds it in resurrection.

3. The Resurrection of Jesus Being the Unique Sign

The Jews asked the Lord Jesus to show them a sign. The Lord answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). The resurrection of the Lord is the unique sign. In the building up of the church, oftentimes people, like the Jews, will challenge us to see what miracles we can do. We should not be tempted to try to perform miracles. We have to follow the Lord Jesus and let ourselves be put to death. Then Christ will be manifested in resurrection. This is the miracle, the sign, that is needed in the building up of the church. The unique sign for the building up of the church is life in resurrection.

4. The House of God Still Increasing in Resurrection with the Body of Christ

Since the day of His physical resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been enlarging His Body in resurrection life. What an immense Body Christ has today in His resurrection! Can you measure the size of the Body of Christ? Although it once was possible to measure the size of the physical body of Jesus, it is impossible to measure the immensity of the Body of Christ. The Lord continues to build His Body in resurrection, and Satan keeps on helping this. The house of God is still increasing in resurrection with the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:21-22). Today, we are still within "the three days," because the Lord is still working for the building of His Body under the process of resurrection. A great part of the Lord's Body has already been raised, but there are still some members of His Body who are not yet raised. Therefore, the Lord's Body is still in the process of resurrection. Even with yourself, only a part has been transformed, which means that only a part has been resurrected. The Lord continues to work on you through the process of transformation. You are still in the process of resurrection. The church today is still in the three days' process of resurrection.

All the damage that the enemy does to the church simply offers the Lord the opportunity to enlarge His Body in resurrection. If, since 1958, there had not been that storm caused by the enemy to destroy the church life in Taiwan, I might not be in this country today. Let the enemy do whatever he can, for his work simply gives the Lord the opportunity to do His increasing work in resurrection. Praise the Lord! Since the Lord started His recovery in the United States, many negative things have occurred. But we all must worship Him for His prevailing way. I have not seen one case in which the enemy has prevailed. He has helped the Lord's recovery. The enemy can never defeat the Lord Jesus. The gates of hades can never prevail against the builded church (Matt. 16:18). The church is still going on and is still growing. Hallelujah! Although the enemy may try his best to tear it down, we shall see the victory. We shall see that not only the Lord Jesus Himself is prevailing, but that the church also is prevailing. The more negative talk there is about the Lord's recovery, the more prevailing His recovery becomes.

C. The Changing of Death into Life Being for the Building of God's House

In the changing of water into wine, the principle of life was set forth. Now, in the dealing with the temple, the purpose of life is shown. The principle of life is to change death into life. The purpose of life is to build the house of God. The principle of life is for the purpose of life. The changing of death into life is for life's building, the building of God's house. These two points govern the whole Gospel of John. This is why after the introduction in the first chapter, the second chapter follows to show us these two points by two events. Then from chapter three through chapter eleven is the record of the nine cases proving how the Lord came into all kinds of human situations and changed death into life. After all of the cases have been related and after the last message has

been given in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen, in chapter seventeen the Lord offered a prayer to the Father about oneness. This prayer for oneness was simply a prayer for the building. If we are not built together, we can never be one. For example, a heap of materials is not one, because the materials are not built together. A house is composed of many materials, and these materials are one because they are built together. Only when the materials are built up together as one building is there oneness. Oneness means to be built up together. Therefore, the purpose of life is to build up God's house, God's temple, for God's habitation. The purpose of the Lord being life to us is to build the church as God's dwelling place. Life is for the building. Life is for the church. It is for the building of the church, His Body and God's house, that the Lord has come to be our life.

In John 2 the writer selected two events of the many things done by the Lord to show us the principle and the purpose of life. We must apply the principle of life for the purpose of life. Then we shall see that in the following chapters of the Gospel of John there are both the principle of life as signified in the first event and the purpose of life as shown in the second event.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE NEED OF THE MORAL PEOPLE-- LIFE'S REGENERATING

(1)

After the principle of life and the purpose of life have been set forth in John chapter two, from chapter three through chapter eleven the writer then relates nine cases to prove the principle of life set forth in the first sign in chapter two. He uses these cases to signify some spiritual and meaningful points. These cases first expose the condition and need of man, and then they reveal how the Lord can deal with all the conditions and meet all the needs of man. Life meets the need of man's every case. We must realize that life here means the Lord Himself, the Word which was God and which became flesh. Although the Lord might have dealt with thousands of human cases, John selected only nine of them to illustrate how the Lord as life could and still can meet the need of every human case.

MAN'S CONDITION AND NEED

Let us see, first of all, the condition of man in each case. The first case in chapter three is about a high-class, moral person who came to the Lord. He is a superior gentleman, highly cultured, very religious, God-seeking, and God-fearing. The second case in chapter four shows forth exactly the opposite condition. The first case is about a moral man; the second case is about an immoral woman. The former is about a mild, high-class person, while the latter is about a wild, low-class person. This wicked

woman had five husbands and was living with a sixth who was not her husband. The third case in chapter four was about a young man who was sick and about to die. The fourth case in chapter five is about a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He was utterly weak and unable to move even one step. The fifth case in chapter six is about the hungry multitude who were seeking something to feed on. The sixth case in chapter seven is about the thirsty people whose thirst could not be quenched by the best religion or by anything of this life. The seventh case in chapter eight sets forth a sinful woman who committed a terrible sin and who was under the condemnation and bondage of her sin. The eighth case in chapters nine and ten concerns a blind man who was born blind. Finally, the ninth case in chapter eleven is about Lazarus who died and was buried for four days.

The conditions of the people mentioned in these nine cases represent the conditions of all men. Some men are good like Nicodemus, while others are wicked like the Samaritan woman. Others, like the young man in Capernaum, are dying. Most are weak like the man who was sick for thirty-eight years. They desire to do good, but they do not have the strength to fulfill that desire. They know religion, but, because they are weak, they do not have the power to live out its standards or fulfill its regulations. Other people are hungry, craving for something to enjoy, while some are thirsting for something more than their human life can offer them. There are some people whose thirst is so great that nothing in this life can satisfy them. Some people continually commit sins and are under the condemnation and bondage of their sins. Some, like the blind man, are blind, not physically, but psychologically and spiritually. Finally, the last condition of all men is death, for they are in death and, at the same time, are on the road to death. They are dead already and yet they all will die later. All men are dead men who are going to die. Therefore, these nine cases portray the true conditions of all men. These conditions speak for man's need, which only the Lord as life can fully meet.

EACH INDIVIDUAL'S CONDITION AND NEED

All the conditions of these nine cases can also be found in each individual person. One person can possess all the conditions of all men. For example, you may be a good man, or, at least you have the intention of being a good man. You may also be quite religious, fearing God and seeking Him. At the same time, however, you may also have done something mean, something which is not honorable. You may be a religious gentleman with high morals and yet have done something low. On the one hand, you are a high-class person; on the other hand, you are a low-class person.

You are also sick and about to die morally and spiritually. You may be very living physically, but you are dying morally and spiritually. Even physically you are also dying day by day. Apparently you are living; actually you are dying.

Another condition of yours is that you are a weak person. You know that you should do good and you know what is right, but you lack the strength or the power to do it. Perhaps you are not yet twenty-five years old, but you have been sick for "thirty-eight years." You know that you should love others, but you are weak; you want to keep all the laws of God and you desire to please God, but you are unable to do so. In other words, you have the desire to do good, but you do not have the ability to perform what you desire. You need the proper power of life.

Hunger and thirst are also two items of your condition. Many times you feel that you are a hungry person; many times you are thirsty for a Ph.D. degree, for money, or for pleasure. You need the Lord as the bread of life to satisfy your hunger and you need the Lord's living water to quench your thirst.

Another condition that can also be found in you as an individual is your sinfulness. You are sinful. You are a sinner and you commit sin. You need the forgiveness of the Lord as well as deliverance from the bondage of sin.

In another respect, you are in a state of blindness.

Even though you may have perfect vision with your physical eyes, you cannot perceive the meaning of human life, and especially you cannot see spiritual things. You are blind and you need the Lord to open your eyes and to give you sight.

Your last condition is that of a dead man who eventually will die. Have you ever realized that you are a dead person? No one is alive in spirit--everyone is dead. You need the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus.

Every person has, in his fallen condition, every aspect of these nine cases. Every person, to a certain degree at least, is in each of these conditions. Every condition is an indication of everyone's real need.

THE LORD'S SUFFICIENCY IN MEETING MAN'S NEED

We have seen the condition and need of man in these nine cases. Now we must see how the Lord is able to come into man's fallen condition and meet his every need. In every case, the Lord presents Himself as the One who could fulfill the deficiencies of man. These nine cases fully prove the Lord's sufficiency to meet man's every need.

The first case shows that the Lord can afford us regeneration, which even a superior person such as Nicodemus needed that he might have the life of God for the entrance into the kingdom of God. The case of the Samaritan woman, a sinful and unsatisfied woman, reveals how much the Lord can satisfy such a person with His living water. For the case of the dying man, the Lord is the healing power of life. The case of the weak man who had been sick for thirty-eight years demonstrates the enlivening power of the Lord's life. In the case of the hungry multitude which needed something to feed on, the Lord presents Himself as the bread of life. In the case of the thirsty people, the Lord assures them that He can quench their thirst by the flowing river of living water. In the case of the woman living in sin, we see that the Lord is able to deliver such a one from her sinful situation and release her from the bondage of sin. In the case of the blind man, the Lord opens his eyes and gives him sight.

Finally, in the case of Lazarus, who had died, had been buried, and was even decaying in the grave, the power of the Lord's resurrection life is fully exhibited.

In all of these cases the Lord's sufficiency in meeting man's need is adequately proved. There is not one of man's conditions that He cannot solve. There is not a need that He cannot meet. He is able! He is sufficient! He can deal with all our problems and supply all our needs! Praise His name!

REGENERATION PREREQUISITE TO FULL SALVATION

All aspects of the Lord's work as shown and signified in these nine cases are the different aspects of the Lord's full salvation, which are 1) regeneration, 2) the satisfaction with the living water, 3) the healing power of life, 4) the enlivening with the power of life, 5) the feeding with the bread of life, 6) the quenching of thirst with the rivers of living water, 7) the deliverance from sin, 8) the opening of the blind eyes, and 9) resurrection. All of these items are included in the Lord's salvation, the first of which is regeneration. Regeneration is the start of the spiritual life. All spiritual experiences begin with regeneration. If we have regeneration, we are then qualified to participate in all the other items of the Lord's salvation. Regeneration is a prerequisite to the experience of all the other items of the Lord's salvation. This is the reason that the case of regeneration is recorded as the first one. All the experiences of the other items depend upon the experience of regeneration. Before we can be satisfied with the living water, we must first be regenerated. The living water issues from the initial experience of regeneration. Without regeneration, the Lord's living water can never be in you. The principle is the same with all the other experiences. A dying person needs to be regenerated that he may be healed and live eternally. A weak person must first be regenerated; then he can be enlivened with the power of life. A person must first be regenerated before he can feed

upon the Lord as the bread of life. To enjoy the nourishment of life depends very much upon regeneration. To have the flow of living water is also dependent upon regeneration. If you are not regenerated, you could never have your thirst quenched by the Lord's living water. To be delivered from sin and to have our blind eyes opened both require that we first be regenerated. Without regeneration, it is impossible for anyone to partake of the deliverance from sin or to receive spiritual sight. Furthermore, no one can participate in resurrection life before experiencing regeneration. The Lord's salvation begins with regeneration and ends with resurrection life. Thus, we need to examine very carefully the first case, the case of Nicodemus, which reveals man's need for regeneration.

I. THE LORD'S COMMITMENT

Before we consider the case of Nicodemus, we need to realize that the Lord's commitment to man is not in miracles, but in life (2:23-3:1).

The word "But" in 3:1 indicates that the case of Nicodemus differs from the cases in the foregoing verses, 2:23-25. All the cases there are cases of people believing in the Lord because of seeing the miracles He did. The Lord could not commit Himself to such people. But the case of Nicodemus, a case of life in regeneration, reveals that the Gospel of John is not for miraculous things, but only for life. This is why even the miracles done by the Lord are called signs in this book, signifying that the Lord came for life, not for miracles.

II. REGENERATION

The first case, that of Nicodemus, is the case of regeneration. Nicodemus was a person of the highest class, and we need to consider his virtues and attributes. Firstly, he was a teacher with the highest attainment in education. As a teacher of the Jews, he taught the Old Testament, the Sacred Word. Secondly, Nicodemus was "a ruler of the Jews." He had a position with a certain

amount of honor and authority. Thirdly, he was an old man. As an old man, he had a good deal of experience. He was a man full of experiences. Fourthly, he was undoubtedly a moral man, a good man. If you look at the way he talked, you will realize that he was a moral man. Fifthly, Nicodemus was a man who was truly seeking after God. Although he was somewhat fearful of the Pharisees, he still came to the Lord Jesus by night. This indicated that he was seeking God. Sixthly, he was very humble. Nicodemus was an old man of perhaps sixty or seventy years of age, yet he came to see the Lord Jesus, who was only a little over thirty years of age. That such an experienced. educated, and elderly man would come to see someone much younger than he indicates his humility. Furthermore, although Nicodemus was a teacher, he addressed the Lord Jesus as Rabbi. Among the Jews, to call a person Rabbi means that you are humbling yourself. Seventhly, Nicodemus was an honest man. His speech reveals his honesty. Can you find a better person than Nicodemus? He was a man of a superior standard, high attainment, and morality.

When Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus, the Lord took the opportunity to reveal the true need of mankind. In His conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord revealed that regardless of how good we are, we still need regeneration. Regeneration is the first need of man. Moral people, as well as immoral people, need regeneration. Many Christians hold the mistaken concept that people need regeneration simply because they are fallen. However, if man had never fallen, he still would have needed regeneration. Even if Adam had not fallen, he still would have needed regeneration. That was why God put him in front of the tree of life. If Adam had partaken of the tree of life, he would have been regenerated.

Since we are human beings, we all have a human life. The problem is not a matter of whether or not our human life is good or bad. Regardless of the kind of human life we have, as long as we do not have the divine life, we need to be regenerated. To be regenerated simply means to have

the divine life besides our human life. God's eternal purpose is that man be a vessel to contain the divine life. Our being with our human life is a vessel to contain God as life. The divine life is God's goal. The divine life is God Himself. God's goal is that we, as people with a human life, receive the divine life into our being as our real life. This is the true meaning of regeneration. Many Christians are not clear about this fact, thinking that regeneration is necessary simply because we are fallen and sinful. According to this concept, we need to be regenerated because our life is bad and cannot be improved. This concept is wrong. I say once again that even if Adam in the garden of Eden had never fallen, he still would have needed to be regenerated, to be born again, that he might have another life, the life of God. Therefore, to be regenerated is to receive the divine life, God Himself.

What is the meaning of regeneration? Regeneration is not any kind of outward improvement or cultivation neither is it only a mere change or conversion without life. Regeneration is a rebirth which brings in a new life. It is absolutely a matter of life, not a matter of doing. Regeneration is simply to have life other than the life we already have. We have already received the human life from our parents; now we need to receive the divine life from God. Hence, regeneration means to have the divine life of God in addition to the human life which we already possess. Therefore, regeneration requires another birth in order to possess another life. To be regenerated, to be born again, does not mean to adjust or correct ourselves. It means to have the life of God, just as to be born of our parents means to have the life of our parents. To be regenerated is to be born of God (John 1:13), and to be born of God is to have the life of God, that is, the eternal life (3:15-16). If we have the life of God, we are the sons of God. The life of God gives us the right to become the sons of God (John 1:12), because by this life we have the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4) and have the life-relationship with God, that is, the sonship (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6; "adoption" in Greek is "sonship").

A. Man's and Religion's False Concept-- the Need of Better Teaching to Improve Man

Due to human culture and Jewish religion, Nicodemus thought that man needed to behave. Since man must have good conduct and worship God in a proper way, man needs much teaching. Nicodemus considered Christ to be a teacher come from God. This indicates that he might have thought that he needed better teachings to improve himself. But the Lord's answer in the following verse unveiled to him that his need was to be born anew. To be born anew is to be regenerated with the divine life, a life other than the human life received by natural birth. Hence, his real need was not better teachings, but the divine life. Nicodemus was seeking for teachings which belong to the tree of knowledge, but the Lord's answer turned him to the need of life, which belongs to the tree of life (cf. Gen. 2:9-17). The Lord told Nicodemus very emphatically that what he needed was to be born again. Thus, man's real need is to be regenerated with another life. All of us must realize that what we need is not religion or teaching to regulate and correct us, but another life, the life of God, to regenerate us. Man needs regeneration because he needs the divine life. Regardless of how good you are, you still do not have the life of God. You need another birth in order to receive the life of God with His divine nature. Although you may feel that you are good, yet you must admit that you do not have the life of God with His divine nature. Another birth, regeneration, is necessary that you may receive another life, the divine life of God.

The Lord's answer to Nicodemus cut across his human, traditional, religious concept. The Lord seemed to be telling Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, what you need is not teaching, but another life. Regardless of how good you are, you only have the human life. You need the divine life. Nicodemus, don't you realize that by seeking knowledge you are on the line on the tree of knowledge? You are not on the line of the tree of life." Nicodemus was not on the line that would lead him to the New Jerusalem, but on the

line that would take him to the lake of fire. Nicodemus, however, did not know that he was partaking of the wrong tree.

B. Man's Real Need--To Be Born Anew

1. Not to Enter the Mother's Womb and Be Born Again

When Nicodemus heard that he had to be born anew, he thought that this meant that he had to go back to his mother's womb and come out again. His answer proves that he did not know how to exercise his spirit. He misunderstood the Lord's word. Then the Lord Jesus said that that which is born of the flesh is flesh. He seemed to be saying to Nicodemus, "Regardless of the number of times you go back into your mother's womb and come out again, you still will be flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Nicodemus, there is no need for you to say that you can't go back to your mother's womb and be born a second time, for even if you could do it, you would still be the same. Even if you could be born anew in that way and be young again, after another sixty or seventy years you would be the same as you are now. You do not need that kind of rebirth." Nicodemus did not need another birth in time, but another birth in nature.

2. But to Be Born of Water and the Spirit

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Since Christians throughout the centuries have exercised their mentality instead of their spirit, they have formulated many different interpretations of this verse. Fifty years ago I was taught that water in this verse denotes the Word and that to be born of water and the Spirit means to be born of the Word and the Spirit. First Peter 1:23 and James 1:18 were given as references. Another interpretation, a most terrible way of expounding this passage of Scripture, is that the water refers to the mother's own birth water. According to this interpretation, to be born twice is firstly to be born of the water in the mother's womb, and secondly to be born of the

Holy Spirit. This interpretation is utterly illogical, and we should forget it.

We need to have a logical and solid standing as we approach this verse. We must admit that Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus were speaking with plain words. If the Lord Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus with words that were not plain, He would have given him some sort of interpretation. Perhaps Nicodemus would have asked the Lord what He meant by water. However, the Lord Jesus did not interpret His words and Nicodemus did not request an interpretation of them, proving that the words were plain to them both. Thus, the words, "of water and the Spirit," should have been plain to Nicodemus, without any kind of explanation. Since the same words were spoken by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 to the Pharisees, they should have been fully understood among the Pharisees. John told them that he baptized in water, but that Another was coming who would baptize with the Spirit. After hearing this word of John's, the Pharisees probably discussed it among themselves, for, at that time, it was a new saying. Since the Pharisees were quite serious, after hearing such a word spoken by John the Baptist, they must have had a long talk about it. As Nicodemus was a Pharisee, he should have been familiar with these terms. Now Nicodemus, as one of the Pharisees, is talking with the Lord, and the Lord speaks these familiar words to him, saying that to be born anew is to be born of water and of the Spirit.

Water is the central sign of the ministry of John the Baptist, that is, to bury and terminate people of the old creation. In his ministry, John the Baptist came to baptize with water. He told people that they had to repent, and realize that they were fallen and good for nothing except burial. Everyone who heard John's preaching and repented was baptized in water. This means that, as fallen men of the old creation, they were being terminated. That was John's ministry. Furthermore, John told people that his ministry was for the ministry of the Lord Jesus. As water is the central sign in the ministry of John the Baptist, Spirit is the central significance of the ministry of Jesus,

that is, to germinate people in the new creation. These two main concepts, water and Spirit, when put together, are the whole concept of the matter of regeneration. Regeneration, to be born anew, is the termination of the people of the old creation with all their deeds and their germination in the new creation with the divine life. What does it mean to be born again? It means to be terminated by John's ministry through water and to be germinated by Jesus' ministry through the Spirit.

How can we have the ministry of John the Baptist today? We have it by repentance. Whenever a person repents, confessing that he is a fallen being who is good for nothing, that is the acceptance of John's ministry. There is no need, of course, for John literally to be present, for his ministry is in the New Testament already. When we preach the gospel, we firstly preach the ministry of John. That is why we preach very much about sin and repentance. We are today's John the Baptist. I was a John the Baptist forty years ago, and many people repented as a result of that ministry. That was not my ministry; it was John's. Whoever accepts this ministry, in one sense, is terminated, and, in another sense, is born of water. Following repentance, everyone must believe in the Lord Jesus and accept His ministry of life in order to be germinated. In order to accept salvation, we need both repentance and faith. To repent is to receive John's ministry, and to believe is to accept the ministry of the Lord Jesus. This is regeneration. We all have passed through this process of regeneration. Now we understand what it means to be born of water and of the Spirit.

The Lord made Nicodemus' situation very clear to him. Everyone, whether he is good or bad, needs to be terminated through water and then germinated with the divine life. This is the second birth, a birth not of the mother's womb, but of water and of the Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE NINE

THE NEED OF THE MORAL PEOPLE-- LIFE'S REGENERATING

(2)

3. The Flesh Begetting Flesh

Nicodemus thought that to be born anew was to go back to his mother's womb and come out of it again. He did not realize that even if that could be done he would still be flesh. Regardless how many times a person could be born out of his mother's womb, he would be still flesh because flesh begets flesh. So, the Lord told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (3:6). Flesh here denotes the natural man with the natural life. Regardless of how many times we could be born of our parents, we still would be a natural man with a natural life. It can never change our nature. To be born anew is not to be born again of our parents, but to be born of God the Spirit that we may have His divine life with His divine nature, a life with a nature absolutely different from our natural life with its nature.

4. The Spirit Begetting spirit

To be born anew is to be born of the Spirit in our spirit. The divine Spirit regenerates our human spirit with God's divine life. Regeneration, that is, receiving the divine life, is absolutely a matter that transpires in our spirit. Our spirit was made by God for this very purpose. We have such a special organ, our human spirit, deep within us. In His creation, God made us with a spirit for the purpose that one day we might exercise it to contact Him and to receive Him into our being. The function of the human spirit is to contact God. Regeneration is not a matter of our mind, emotion, or will; it is altogether a matter in our spirit. Verses 12 and 13 of John 1 say, "But as many as

received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In what part of our being are we born of God? In our spirit. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. God is a Spirit, and only a spirit can touch a Spirit. Only a spirit can be born of a Spirit. So, regeneration is absolutely a matter in our spirit. It does not matter whether you have a sober mind, a proper emotion, or a strong will. Such things are in another realm. Regeneration transpires in the realm of our spirit. Our spirit is the sphere in which regeneration transpires. In order to be regenerated, you do not exercise your mind, will, or emotion. Simply open yourself up, forgetting what you are, and from deep within your spirit, call on the name of the Lord Jesus, believing in Him. If you do this, immediately God the Spirit will touch your spirit. This will happen quickly, perhaps taking less than a second. If you open yourself from deep within your spirit, calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, in that one second, God the Spirit will enter into your spirit and you will be regenerated. The delivery of a reborn child happens very fast. There is no need of a midwife, nurse, or doctor. When you say, "Lord Jesus, I believe in You," you are reborn in your spirit.

In verse 6, the Lord said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Regeneration is not a birth of the flesh that brings forth flesh. Regeneration is a birth of the Spirit, God's Spirit, that brings forth spirit, our regenerated spirit. Flesh is our natural man, our old man, our outward man, born of our parents who are flesh. But spirit, our regenerated spirit, is our spiritual man, our new man, our inward, or inner man (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16), born of God who is the Spirit. When we were born of our parents, we were born flesh; when we were born again of God the Spirit, we were born spirit. The nature of the spirit is different from the nature of the flesh. The nature of the flesh is born human, but the nature of the spirit is born divine. Before we were regenerated, we lived by our flesh and had our being in our flesh; our spirit was dead. By regeneration, our dead spirit

was not only quickened, made alive, but also imparted with the divine life of God by the Spirit. Now our spirit is a regenerated spirit and becomes our new being. Formerly our flesh was our being by which we lived; now our spirit is our being by which we should live. The first Spirit in verse 6 is the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, and the second spirit is the human spirit, the regenerated spirit of man. Regeneration transpires in the human spirit, by the Holy Spirit of God with God's uncreated, eternal life. To be regenerated is to have the divine eternal life as the new source and the new element of our new being.

Once our spirit has been born of the Spirit of God with the life of God, it has the Spirit of God with the life of God in it and mingled with it. So it becomes a mingled spirit--our human spirit mingled with God's divine Spirit, as Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit... with our spirit." It is in this mingled spirit that we are "one spirit" with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Because it is such a mingled spirit, in many places in the New Testament, such as Romans 8:4-6, 10; Galatians 5:16, 25; Ephesians 4:23, and 6:18, it is rather difficult to say whether the word "spirit" refers to God's divine Spirit or to our human spirit. Now, the two spirits are mingled as one within us. This mingling comes from regeneration. Regeneration brings forth in us a newborn spirit (Ezek. 36:26), indwelt by and mingled with God's divine Spirit. Now this spirit with God's divine life in it is our new being by which we should live and walk. We should no longer walk according to the flesh (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:4). It is in this spirit that we are regenerated persons.

It is also correct to say that we have been born again by the Word of God. However, we must realize that the Word in black and white letters cannot regenerate us. Only the Word that is the Spirit can do this (John 6:63). God, the Word, and the Spirit--all must be the Spirit that regenerates us. God Himself is the Spirit in regeneration, and the Word also must be the Spirit. Whatever we preach when we preach the gospel must be in the Spirit, for it is the Spirit that gives life to people in their spirit.

It is difficult to understand thoroughly what regeneration is because it is a matter accomplished by, with, and in the Holy Spirit. And it is difficult to define what is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is here. Can you define Him? He is present, constant, instant, prevailing, and available. Nevertheless, if you are to be born of the Spirit, some conditions must be fulfilled. The first condition is that you must repent and confess that you are a sinner. Then you need to believe in the Lord Jesus and call on His name. You should not just call with your lips, tongue, or throat, but open up from the depths of your being and say from deep within your spirit, "O Lord Jesus, I believe in You." When you do this, the divine Spirit will enter into you immediately. When He comes into you, it is Christ coming into you. It is also the Triune God coming into you. The Holy Spirit is nothing less than Christ Himself. In fact, the Holy Spirit is nothing less than the Triune God. The Father is in the Son, and the Son today is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). When the Spirit comes into you, both the Son and the Father also come into you. Thus, from the time that you are born again, the Father, the Son, and Spirit are in you. This Triune God is the divine life. The divine life is not separate from the Triune God. From the very moment you are regenerated, you have the Triune God within your spirit as your divine life. Now you have two lives: the human life in your flesh and the divine life in your spirit.

5. The One Born of the Spirit Being Like the Wind

John 3:8 says, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." The Greek word for wind, pneuma, is the same word as for spirit. Whether it means wind or spirit depends upon the context. The context here says that it blows and that the sound of it can be heard. This indicates that it is the wind. A regenerated person is like the wind, which can be realized, but which is beyond understanding. Regeneration is not a physical thing, but a spiritual thing, like the *pneuma.* It is like the wind. The wind is

intangible. Although the wind is intangible, it can be realized. The Lord told Nicodemus that the regenerated spirit, like the wind, is not physical and tangible, but invisible and spiritual.

6. Regeneration, a Matter which Transpires on Earth

Regeneration transpires on earth. The Lord told Nicodemus, "If I told you of things on earth and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you of things in heaven?" (3:12). The "things on earth" in this verse does not mean things of an earthly nature, but things which transpire on earth, including redemption, regeneration, etc. The "things in heaven" in this verse also does not mean things of a heavenly nature, but things which transpire in heaven. In the following verse, the Lord said that He is the One who descended out of heaven and who is still in heaven. This indicates that He knows the things which transpire in heaven, because He is the One who is in heaven all the time. At the same time He is on earth telling people the things on earth, of which regeneration is one item.

7. For the Entry into the Kingdom of God

In verse 3 the Lord said, "Truly, truly, 1 say to you, unless a man is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and in verse 5 He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The Lord's words here are a clear revelation that regeneration is the unique entrance into the kingdom of God. In order to enter into the kingdom of God, we need to be born again. There is no other way by which we can enter into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the reign of God. It is a divine realm to be entered into, a realm which requires the divine life. Only the divine life can realize the divine things. Hence, to see or to enter into the kingdom of God requires regeneration with the divine life.

A kingdom is always related to life. The vegetable kingdom is related to the vegetable life, and the animal kingdom is related to the animal life. If you want to share

in a certain kind of kingdom, you first need the life of that kingdom. Only birds can partake of the bird kingdom because only they have the life of a bird. Likewise, only men can participate in the human kingdom because only they have a human life. So, without the life of God, how could we ever share the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is not only the reign of God, but also the divine realm or sphere. In order to participate in the reign of God and to be in the divine realm, we need the divine life of God. Only those who have the divine life can be in the divine realm and share the divine kingdom. Thus, we need to be regenerated that we may have the divine life which enables us to enter into the divine realm and participate in the divine kingdom. Even if we were not fallen or sinful, we would still need to be born again, because regardless of how good, pure, and clean our human life might be, it is not able to realize the things of the divine realm and it is not qualified to enter into the divine kingdom. Only the divine life is qualified to be in the divine realm. Only the life of God meets the requirements of the kingdom of God. How can our human life know the divine things of the kingdom of God? How can it match the divine kingdom? It is impossible. We need the divine life. We need to be born again. Regeneration is the only way, the unique entrance, into the kingdom of God.

The divine life brings us into the kingdom of God. We were all born into the human kingdom. No one has ever been naturalized into the kingdom of man. For example, when a dog is born, he immediately finds himself in the dog kingdom. He knows everything about being a dog. There is no need for anyone to teach him to be a dog, saying, "Little dog, you must know that you are a dog, that you are in the dog kingdom, and that from now on you must bark every day." A dog is in the dog kingdom and knows all about being a dog by birth. This is why the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born into the kingdom of God. We cannot enter into the kingdom of God by learning or by being naturalized. Although you may be naturalized to be a citizen of a particular nation, you can

never be naturalized into a kingdom. A dog cannot be naturalized into the cat kingdom. Suppose someone would say to a dog, "Little dog, I like you. I want to change your nationality. You were born into the dog kingdom, but I want to naturalize you into the cat kingdom." If you try to do this, you will cause the cat kingdom a great deal of trouble. The correct way to bring a dog into the cat kingdom is to regenerate the dog with the life of a cat. If a dog could be reborn with the life of a cat, that little dog would spontaneously be translated from the dog kingdom into the cat kingdom.

When we were regenerated, we were translated into the kingdom of God. Colossians 1:13 says that God "delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." We were translated by being regenerated and now we are in the kingdom of God. When we called on the name of the Lord, the divine Spirit came into us, regenerating us and causing us to be born into the kingdom of God. Although you may know very little about the kingdom of God, your spirit within you knows about the kingdom. The divine life in your spirit knows the kingdom of God.

Many Christians depend too much upon teachings. Many young people have come to me, asking about such things as smoking, attending the movies, eating, dressing, and marrying. Young people have a great many questions about these matters. Whenever a young person comes to me with such a question, I always turn the question to him and say, "Why do you ask me whether or not you should smoke? You know better than I do. You shouldn't come to ask me, for you already know the answer. The reason you come to ask me is that you want confirmation, but I will never give you that kind of confirmation. Tell me the truth, don't you already know whether or not you should smoke?" Once he admits that he already knows, I go a little further and ask him, "How do you know? Where do you know?" They always tell me that they have something within them that knows. We know because we have been born into the kingdom of God.

It is unnecessary for a preacher or minister to tell people what to do. Do you need to teach a dog to bark? If you were to try to teach a dog to bark, and if that dog could speak, he would say, "I don't need your teachings. I just bark. I was born to bark and I live in the barking kingdom. Since my kingdom is the kingdom of barking, and since I have a barking life, I don't need to be taught. I cannot help but bark." Likewise, we all have been born into the kingdom of God. As a result, we simply "know" certain things. If you ask me how I know, I would reply, "I just know." I know that I am a man. I do not need anyone to teach me that I am a man. I simply am a man. Just as I am a man in the kingdom of man, so, because I have the divine life, I am also a son of God in the kingdom of God. I have the life of God, and this life places me into the kingdom of God. In fact, I am not only in the kingdom of God, but also in God Himself.

Because we are in the kingdom of God, there are certain things that we cannot do, even if we try to do them. If you purposely try to lose your temper, you will find that you cannot do it. If you determine to beat your wife, you will discover that you cannot do that either. What is the reason for this? The reason is that you are in the kingdom of God and that the life of God keeps you from doing such things. This is the kingdom of God. Hallelujah, we are in it!

C. Man's Real Condition

1. Poisoned by the "Serpent," with a Serpentine Nature

Nicodemus was still puzzled and asked, "How can these things be?" The Lord Jesus said in return, "You are the teacher of Israel, and you don't know these things?" Then the Lord spoke to him regarding a prefigure or type of redemption found in the Old Testament.

a. Poisoned to Die Like the Israelites in the Wilderness

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." When Jesus said this, Nicodemus was clear. When the children of

Israel spoke against the Lord and against Moses, "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). The people then came to Moses and asked him to pray that the Lord would take the serpents away. Moses prayed for them, and God showed Moses the way of salvation, telling him to make a serpent of brass and to put it upon a pole (Num. 21:8-9). When the people who had been poisoned by the fiery serpents looked upon the serpent of brass, they lived (Num. 21:9).

In John 3:14, the Lord Jesus applied that picture to Himself, saying that He, the Son of Man, would be lifted up as the brass serpent was lifted up by Moses. Please notice that the Lord here refers to Himself as the Son of Man, not as the Son of God. The Lord was telling Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, you appear to be a gentleman, but you must realize that you are actually a serpent. Regardless of how gentle you are. you have a serpentine nature within you. You have been poisoned. You were poisoned in Adam. When Adam was poisoned by the serpent, you were there. You were born of that poisoned nature, and so your nature is also serpentine." Nicodemus never realized this before. Likewise, very few people today realize that they are serpents. Do you like to have this said of you? If you were to tell an unbeliever that he is not only a sinner, but also a serpent, he would be highly offended. No, Nicodemus had never thought that he had a serpentine nature. However, the Lord Jesus, the best preacher, indicated a great deal by one brief sentence, telling Nicodemus that he was a serpent.

In John 1:29, John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God." In 3:14, the Lord Jesus likens Himself, not as the Lamb of God, but as a brass serpent. The Lamb of God deals with sin, but the brass serpent destroys the old serpent. Our trouble as fallen people is not only with sin, but also with the serpent. Although Christians have heard many messages on the Lamb of God, they have not heard very many on the brass serpent as the type of Christ.

b. Christ Lifted Up on the Cross in the Form of a Serpent

When the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He was in the form of a serpent. This is a hard saying and it needs some explanation. Romans 8:3 says, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Recovery Version). This verse tells us that Christ was made in the likeness of the flesh of sin. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that Christ was made sin for us. What a strong word this is! What does it mean? When Satan in the serpent tempted Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and to take his concept, Satan, as the old serpent, injected his nature into man. That serpentine nature was injected into man's body. Although the human body was created by God as something good, when Satan's serpentine nature was injected into it, it was transmuted into the flesh. The body is something good created by God, but the flesh is something bad, being the body transmuted by the poison of the serpent. The term "body" is good, but the term "flesh" is bad. But what about John 1:14 which says that, "The Word became flesh"? Is the flesh there good or bad? When Christ became flesh, did He become something good or bad? Be careful of your answer. John 3:14 indicates and guarantees that when Christ became flesh, He did not actually become something bad, and Romans 8:3 says that He was in "the likeness of the flesh of sin," which likeness is equal to the form of the brass serpent. It had the form of the serpent without the poison of the serpent. Christ was made in "the likeness of the flesh of sin," but He had no participation in the sin of the flesh (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). Christ became the flesh of sin in form, not in actuality. Look at the serpent made of brass. In form, appearance, and likeness, it looks like a real serpent; however, it has no poison in it. It has the serpentine appearance, but it does not have the serpentine nature. Likewise, Christ became the flesh of sin in appearance, in likeness. In appearance, He was exactly the same as a sinful man, but within Him there was no sinful nature. Although He was made sin, He knew no sin. He was only in the form, in the likeness, of the flesh of sin.

c. The "Old Serpent," the Devil, Satan, Being Judged Through This

When Christ was lifted up on the cross, Satan, the devil, the old serpent, was dealt with (John 12:31-33; Heb. 2:14). This means that the serpentine nature within fallen man has been dealt with by the death of Christ. We may use the illustration of a mouse trap. Mice are a nuisance and they are difficult to catch. However, you may catch them if you use a trap and some bait. When a mouse comes out of hiding seeking for something to eat, he will see the bait, walk into the trap in an attempt to seize the bait, and immediately be caught. In this way the mouse is caught and destroyed. In the universe there is a little "mouse," Satan. Humanity became a trap in which he was caught. Adam became both the trap and the bait. Satan seized the bait, thinking that he had gained the victory by injecting himself into man's body, but he did not realize that in doing so he became trapped. He was trapped, located in man's flesh. One day the Lord Jesus put on the likeness of this flesh of sin. Then He brought this flesh to the cross and crucified it. By crucifying the flesh, He destroyed the devil who had injected himself into man. Now we can understand Hebrews 2:14 which says, "He took part of flesh...that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil." Christ destroyed Satan in the flesh by His death. If we do not understand all of these verses, it will be difficult to have the proper meaning of Hebrews 2:14. How did Christ destroy Satan on the cross? By taking on the likeness of the flesh of sin and by bringing this flesh to the cross. There, through His crucifixion, Satan was destroyed.

In the eyes of God, we all have become serpents. Like the ancient Israelites who became serpents and needed a brass serpent to be lifted up as their substitute, we also needed Christ to die on the cross as our substitute. On the cross Christ was not only the Lamb of God to take away

the sin of the world (1:29), but He was also in the form of the serpent that He might deal with our serpentine nature and destroy the old serpent. When Christ was lifted up on the cross, the serpentine nature within fallen man was dealt with. When man receives the crucified and resurrected Christ that he may be regenerated with the divine life in Christ, his satanic nature must also be dealt with. This is why in John 3:14, when the Lord Jesus revealed the matter of regeneration to Nicodemus, He specifically mentioned this point.

Nicodemus might have considered himself as a good and moral man. But the Lord's word in 3:14 implies that regardless of how good Nicodemus might have been outwardly, he had the serpentine nature of Satan inwardly. As a descendant of Adam, he was poisoned by the old serpent, and the serpent's nature was within him. He not only needed the Lord to be the Lamb of God to take away his sin; he also needed the Lord to be in the form of the serpent that his serpentine nature might be dealt with on the cross and that he might have eternal life. In the principle set forth in chapter two, this is changing death into life. The serpent's death is swallowed up by the divine life. By telling this to Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, "Nicodemus, you are a serpent. I am going to die for you as your substitute in the form of a serpent, not only to take away your sin, but also to deal with your serpentine nature and to destroy Satan."

d. Man Believing in This Christ and Having Life Eternal

Verse 15 shows the purpose of verse 14. "That every one who believes in Him may have eternal life." The word "that" in verse 15 indicates that this verse is an issue, an outcome, of verse 14. Christ died on the cross in the form of a serpent as our substitute. In doing so, He dealt with our serpentine nature and destroyed the serpent in our flesh. The issue of this is that we may have eternal life by believing in Him. Just as the poisoned Israelites lived by looking unto the brass serpent on the pole, we may

experience the same thing today if we repent, lift up our heart, and gaze upon the very Jesus crucified on the cross. When we do this, our sin is removed, our serpentine nature is dealt with, Satan is destroyed in us, and we have life eternal. This is what it means to be regenerated. When we are regenerated, we receive the divine life other than our human life which was corrupted by the serpent and dealt with by Christ on the cross.

2. Condemned in Adam Through His Sin

All men are condemned in Adam through his sin. In verse 18, the Lord revealed more to Nicodemus about his condition. He not only had the poisonous nature of the serpent, but was also under the judgment of God. This verse says, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." According to this verse, Nicodemus, a good gentleman, had been judged already. When were you judged? You were judged on the same day that Adam was judged. In other words, you were condemned before you were born. You were condemned six thousand years ago. Since you are a part of Adam, you were condemned when he was. Regardless of whether you are bad or good, you are already under the wrath of God (3:36). Although Nicodemus was a high-class gentleman, he was still condemned. He was a good man, a religious man, and a moral man, yet he was already condemned. Therefore, he needed the Lord's redemption--the Lord had to die for him.

The actual condition of such a good man is not really good. His true condition is twofold: his nature has the poison of Satan within it and his position is under the condemnation of God. We are not gentlemen; we are serpents. As far as our nature is concerned, we have the poisonous element of Satan, the devil, and element which makes us "the children of the Devil" (1 John 3:10). As far as our position is concerned, we are already under God's condemnation. Thus, the condition of the best person is the same as that of the worst.

a. The Son of God Coming to Save Man from This Condemnation

The Son of God has come to save man from this condemnation. Verse 17 says, "For God did not send the Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." Christ, the Son of God, was sent to save us from God's condemnation, which was caused by the sin of Adam. We all were condemned in Adam. Now we all can be saved from this condemnation through Christ. In the natural birth we were condemned in Adam. In regeneration we are saved in Christ.

b. Man Being Saved from This Condemnation by Believing in the Son of God

What is the way for us to be regenerated? How can we receive regeneration? In verses 15, 16, 18, and 36, the Lord said, "That everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life"; "that everyone who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"; "he who believes in Him is not judged"; "he who believes in the Son has eternal life." These emphatic words spoken repeatedly by the Lord tell us clearly and definitely that the way for us to be saved and regenerated is simply to believe in the Lord. To believe is the only way for us to receive salvation and regeneration. It is absolutely a matter of faith. Regardless of how much we can work or how good our work may be, we cannot be saved and regenerated by our work. Our work does not count in this matter. Only faith counts. Salvation and regeneration must be by faith. It is by faith in the Lord, by believing in the Lord, that we receive the forgiveness, the release from God's condemnation negatively. It is also by faith, by believing in the Lord, that we receive eternal life, the divine life of God, positively for our regeneration. The Lord has accomplished the redemptive work for us. By His redemptive death on the cross, He has met all of God's righteous demands on us and has fulfilled all the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory for us. By His death on the cross in the form of the serpent, the Lord has even destroyed Satan, the devil that usurps us and enslaves us, that we might be delivered from the evil one's slavery and

power of death (Heb. 2:14). All negative things have been solved by His all-inclusive death on the cross. We do not need to do anything except believe in what the Lord has accomplished. He has dealt with and solved all of our problems. He has left no room for our doing or work. So, there is no need of our work, only of faith in His finished, completed, and all-inclusive redemptive work.

After passing through death, by and in resurrection, the Lord has released His life and has become a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Now, in resurrection, He is the Spirit of life (2 Cor. 3:17), with all the virtue of His redemptive work, waiting for us to believe in Him. Once we believe in Him, we not only receive the forgiveness of sins and the deliverance from Satan's evil power of darkness, but we also receive the Spirit of life, that is, the Lord Himself, with the eternal life of God. In this way we are saved and regenerated. It is by the way of believing in the Lord with His all-inclusive redemptive work that we receive God's life and are born of Him to be His sons.

To believe in the Lord means to receive Him (John 1:12). The Lord is receivable. He is now the life-giving Spirit, with His complete redemption, waiting for and expecting us to receive Him. Our spirit is the receiving organ. We can receive the Lord's Spirit into our spirit by believing in Him. Once we believe in Him, He, as the Spirit, enters into our spirit. Then we are regenerated by Him, the life-giving Spirit, and become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The phrase "believes in" in verses 16, 18, and 36 literally translated should be "believes into Him." When we believe in the Lord, we believe into Him. By believing in Him, we get into Him to be one with Him, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us. By believing into Him, we are identified with Him in all that He is and in all that He has passed through, accomplished, attained, and obtained. As we become one with Him by believing into Him, we are

saved and regenerated by Him as life. It is by believing into Him that we partake of Him as life and are regenerated in Him.

c. The Son of God Coming as Light

The Son of God came as light that man might be enlightened for salvation (3:19-21). In order to save us Christ, the Son of God, came firstly to be the light to enlighten man that man might be saved. But, sorry to say, most men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But anyone who comes to the light will be enlightened and, through this enlightenment, he shall be saved. Light comes first, then salvation follows.

In chapter three of John we can see that even a high-class moral gentleman was also on the line of death. Though he was seeking after God, he was seeking according to the line of the tree of knowledge. Nicodemus was seeking for teaching, for knowledge, which belongs to the tree of knowledge. He did not know life and had no concept of the tree of life. But the Lord turned him from knowledge to life, from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life, that he might be regenerated and have the divine life denoted by the tree of life in Genesis 2. In the Lord's conversation with him, it is implied that his seeking of knowledge was related to his serpentine nature. The serpentine nature of our natural being causes us not only to do evil things, but also to seek knowledge, even knowledge concerning God, in a way that is not in the way of life. This kind of knowledge-seeking is on the line of death and brings in death. We all have to be turned from this line of knowledge to the line of life that we may receive the divine life for our enjoyment.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TEN

THE INCREASE OF CHRIST AND THE IMMEASURABLE CHRIST

When I was young, many things in the Bible bothered me, one of which is in John chapter three. Although this chapter is so elevated, speaking about the rebirth, it seemed to me that suddenly, beginning at verse 22, it became rather low. Verse 22 says, "After these things, Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea; and there He stayed with them and baptized." When I read this verse as a young man, I thought that there was no need for it. It seemed to me that such a record was unnecessary. I felt the same about verse 23, which says that John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim because there was much water there. I was also bothered by verse 24, which says that John had not yet been thrown into prison. I asked, "What is all this about? After the mention of heavenly and spiritual things, why are things such as imprisonment mentioned?" The reason for this appears in verse 26. "And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, He Who was with you across the Jordan, of Whom you testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." Why did John include all of these verses? Simply for the purpose of exposing the tail of the fox. What is this tail? It is the matter of who will have the crowd and the following. Today people's attitude is, "This is one who follows me. All of these are my following. Why should some of them go to you?" What we find today was also present in the time of John the Baptist.

John's reply begins in verse 27. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves testify of me that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him" (vv. 27-28). If I had been there, I would have said to John,

"Brother, if this is the case, you should go home and not baptize any more. Since the One of whom you testified is now baptizing, you should stop your baptizing. If you continue to baptize, you will surely be cast into prison." John was good, but he was not clear. The problem was that after Jesus came upon the scene, John was still there. John should have withdrawn and allowed the Lord Jesus to occupy the whole scene. There should have been only one main figure, not two. When I was young, I did not understand why John was cast into prison. Later I came to realize that he was put into prison because he did not withdraw from the scene.

I. THE INCREASE OF CHRIST

Nevertheless John said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This joy of mine therefore is made full. He must increase, but I must decrease" (vv. 29-30). Most Christians, especially most of the Christian teachers, misinterpret verse 30. What does it mean for Christ to increase and for you to decrease? It means that you must withdraw from the scene and from having the following and allow Christ to be the only figure on the scene and to have all the following. All the following should go to Christ; none of it should go to John the Baptist or to anyone else. Since John did not make this matter clear to his disciples, they were jealous on his behalf. When John's disciples saw that all the people went to Jesus, they were unhappy. They seemed to say, "Why do these people not follow our teacher, but they go to Jesus?" Do you see the point? If John had withdrawn from the scene, there would have been no problem. If he had told all of his disciples to go to the Lord Jesus, no longer accepting a following for himself, there would have been no difficulty.

A. Christ Coming as the Bridegroom for the Bride

However, in answering his disciples John made the matter clear to them that he was not the Christ, or the

bridegroom who came for the bride; he was only the friend of the bridegroom. He told them clearly that Christ was the bridegroom who came for the bride. People should not follow him; they should follow Christ so that He might have His bride.

B. All the Regenerated Ones Becoming One as the Bride of Christ Given Him by God

John wrote his gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. By his words we can see that all the regenerated followers of Christ are His increase. The increase in verse 30 is the bride in verse 29, and the bride there is a living composition of all the regenerated people. This means that in this chapter on regeneration, regeneration is not only to bring the divine life into the believers and annul the satanic nature in their flesh, but also to make them the corporate bride for Christ's increase. The last two points, to annul the serpentine nature in the believers and to make them the bride of Christ, are both fully developed in John's writing of Revelation. The book of Revelation mainly reveals how Satan as the old serpent will be fully eliminated (Rev. 20:2, 10), and how the bride of Christ as the New Jerusalem will be fully produced (Rev. 21:2, 10-27).

Although most Christians are familiar with regeneration in John 3, very few see that each regenerated person should be a part of the increase of Christ, which is His bride. Regeneration is for the increase of Christ. It is for the producing of the bride. Regeneration is for you to be a part of the bride of Christ. John 3 is a chapter of regeneration for the increase of Christ. Many Christians only see regeneration itself. They do not see the purpose of regeneration. Is regeneration just for you to have eternal life? No! It is for something more. Regeneration is for us to be built into the bride, which is the increase of Christ.

Originally we all were little serpents with a serpentine nature. By regeneration, the serpentine nature has been terminated. We saw this clearly in the last message. Furthermore, in regeneration we all have been

germinated with the divine life. Since our serpentine nature has been terminated and since we have been germinated with the divine life, we are all a part of the bride. Are you a serpentine person or are you a part of the bride of Christ? We are parts of the bride! We are parts of the increase of Christ.

The Gospel of John is a book about the increase of Christ. Christ as the bridegroom needs a bride. He came for this purpose. He came for His increase. How will He obtain His increase? By entering into us and making us a part of Himself. We all are parts of Christ. As parts of Christ composed together, we are the bride of Christ, His increase. Both salvation and regeneration are for this purpose, for the bride as the increase of Christ.

C. The Bride of Christ Being His Increase

The bride of Christ is the increase of Christ. All of the reborn people are the increase of Christ, and this increase is the bride which becomes the counterpart of Christ. The bride is the church, the composition of all the regenerated people. All those who are regenerated are composed together as the corporate bride to match Christ. Without regeneration, Christ cannot have a bride as His increase.

The bride as the increase of Christ is like Eve who was the increase of Adam. When Adam was first created, he was single--a so-called bachelor. In Adam's single state, there was no increase. After God took a rib out of Adam and built a woman with it, this woman was married to Adam (Gen. 2:21-24). Once she was joined to Adam, she became the increase of Adam. Adam then had an increase and was no longer single.

Christ also was single, and so He made a bride to be the increase of Himself. But who are the increase, the bride, of Christ? Only those who are regenerated with Him as life. Through regeneration we possess the divine life of God which is Christ Himself, thus becoming members of the corporate bride of Christ. Later, the same writer, in the book of Revelation, says that the bride of Christ, the bride of the Lamb, is the New Jerusalem (21:2, 9-10) What is the New Jerusalem? Again, it is the composition of all

those who have been born again through the regeneration of the Spirit. If you have been regenerated, you are part of the increase of Christ, a member of the corporate bride of Christ, which is the church today and which will consummate in the New Jerusalem in the future.

How can we become the increase of Christ? We repeat once again that the increase of Christ is produced through regeneration. For example, when we were born of our parents, we were the increase of Adam. Do you realize that Adam is increasing every day? Have you ever thought of how large Adam is today? About six thousand years ago, when Adam was alone in the garden of Eden, he was single, a bachelor. However, down through the generations, Adam has acquired many descendants. All his descendants are his increase. Today, counting only the living ones, Adam has increased to about three billion people. Adam has increased to be such a big Adam. Praise the Lord that Christ is increasing also. But He is not increased by our first birth. Our first birth is for the increase of Adam; our second birth is for the increase of Christ. When you have a child, that is another person for the increase of Adam. However, you must thank the Lord for another possibility: this once-born one may also be born again for the increase of Christ. Potentially, all of your children can be born again into the increase of Christ as well as into the increase of Adam.

Are you the increase of Adam, or are you the increase of Christ? Formerly, we had to say that we were just the increase of Adam. Now, thank the Lord, we are the increase of Christ through regeneration. However, we must also make sure that we live, walk, and do things, not by the life of Adam, but by the life of Christ. As long as we live by our human life, we are merely the increase of Adam. It is only as we live and walk by God's divine life that we are the increase of Christ. Then we shall be the bride as the counterpart of Christ.

As a wife is one flesh with her husband, so we are one spirit with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). As the wife is the increase of the husband, so we, as His bride, are the increase of Christ. Due to the fact that we have Christ as life through

the second birth, we are the increase of Christ. Therefore the ultimate result of regeneration is that Christ has a bride as His increase. Christ is increased through regeneration because by regeneration He is reproduced in us. We, the regenerated people, are His reproduction.

Eve could be the increase of Adam because she was constituted with the rib of Adam and became one flesh with Adam, a part of Adam. In the same principle, we can be the increase of Christ because we are spiritually constituted with the life of Christ and have become one spirit with Him, a part of Him. As Eve came out of Adam and returned to be one with Adam, thus becoming Adam's increase, so we also have come out of Christ and will return to be one with Him, thus becoming His increase. This increase is just His reproduction in us through regeneration. All the people who participate in this reproduction are given to Christ by God.

D. The Worker for Christ Decreasing

We must let Christ increase. We all must decrease. The entire following must go to Him. If all of today's Christian preachers and leaders would say, "Lord, let my following be Yours that You may increase and that I may decrease," there would be no problem. Some people seem to say, "He must increase, and I must decrease, but I must hold my following." As long as you hold your following, you will never decrease and He cannot increase. The increase or the decrease all depends upon the following. To whom does the following belong? This is the problem today: every preacher has his own following. Many think that we are the same as they are because, according to their concept, every worker must maintain his following. When we say that we do not keep a following, they do not believe us. May the Lord have mercy upon us. We need His mercy not to keep a following under our hand. If we do, sooner or later, we shall be cast into prison. Let the following go to Him. He must increase, and we all must decrease.

II. THE IMMEASURABLE CHRIST

John 3:31-36 bothers many translators of the Bible. They do not know where to place these verses. One version even puts them in another place. Some translators have argued whether these words were spoken by John the Baptist, by the Lord Jesus, or by John, the writer of the gospel. Several suppositions have been made. But, by the Lord's mercy, we have come to see that these verses should be where they are, because they continue what has transpired up to verse 30.

Verse 30 says that Christ must increase and that we all must decrease. Why? Because Christ is unlimited and all-inclusive. These verses reveal an unlimited Christ. He was the little Jesus who was born in a manger and raised in Nazareth in the house of a poor carpenter. He had no outward beauty or attractiveness and He was very limited. Nevertheless, He is all-inclusive, immeasurable. He is higher than the heavens and broader than the universe. He is everything, and everything is for Him. Let us read these verses and see what they unfold of the immeasurable Christ. "He Who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is of the earth and speaks of the earth. He Who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of this He testifies, and no one receives His testimony. He who receives His testimony has sealed that God is true. For He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for He gives the Spirit not by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." These verses reveal that the Christ in whom we believe is unlimited and immeasurable.

A. Coming from Above

Christ by then was a person on earth physically. But He was One coming from above. He was on earth, but His source was above. So, He is above all.

B. Coming From Heaven

As Christ is a person from above, so He is also from heaven. Heaven is above earth. He was on earth, yet His source was heaven.

C. Being above All

Christ is above all. In this portion of the Word, the word "all" does not mainly mean all things or matters, but all people. Christ is above all people, especially John the Baptist. At that time, John was in a position of rivalry with the Lord Jesus. Both Jesus and John accepted disciples. In the eyes of John's disciples, John was on the same level as the Lord Jesus. But that was not right. Therefore, verse 31 tells us that Christ is the One who is above all. He is above you, me, and everyone else.

D. Being from Heaven yet Still in Heaven

Christ was from heaven; yet while He was on earth He was still in heaven (3:13). He is universal, He is immeasurable.

E. Ministering the Words of God and Dispensing the Spirit without Measure

Verse 34 says, "For He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for He gives the Spirit not by measure." In this verse we see two things: the Lord Jesus ministers the words of God to His people, and He gives the Spirit to God's people without measure. Some versions render this verse incorrectly, saying that God the Father gives the Spirit to the Son without measure. However, if you study the best manuscripts, you will see that it means that the Son gives the Spirit without measure to God's people. The Lord Jesus ministers the living Word and the immeasurable Spirit.

In the local churches we need just two things--the living Word and the immeasurable Spirit. Today, as the Head of the church, Christ is still ministering these two things I believe that He has especially burdened us with

the ministry of the living Word. Although we speak the Word, it is not we who minister the Word. We speak, but He ministers. He ministers His rich Word in our speaking. He is the divine speaker and the divine dispenser. He ministers the rich Word and dispenses the living Spirit without measure. He is the One who ministers the living Word to nourish all of His members. He is the One who dispenses the Spirit into all His members in order that they might function in a full way. No one else can do this. He is the all-inclusive Spirit and the all-inclusive Christ. He is unlimited.

In these last days the Lord is going to vindicate His way by means of the rich Word and the living Spirit. Where is the Lord? He is wherever there is the rich Word and the living Spirit. Nothing else can be considered as signs of the Lord's presence. If we meet without the riches of the Word and without the livingness of the Spirit and yet claim to meet in the name of the Lord, our claim is meaningless. It is vanity. There is no confirmation, no reality, to back up what we say. There is no need for us to claim that we are the church. As long as we have the rich Word and the living Spirit, that is the vindication that we are the church. Where the Lord Jesus is, there you will find the rich Word and the living Spirit.

People often talk and argue about the church. Eventually, most of the people who talk and argue about the church are afraid to say anything about it. They just shut their mouths and become unwilling to even use the term church. They say, "Don't talk about the church. The church is a troublesome thing." It is difficult for people to say what is right or wrong as far as the church is concerned. What is the church? The church is Christ increasing and all the leaders decreasing. Whenever you see that the leaders are increasing and that Christ is imprisoned, that is not the church. The church is something in which Christ is continually increasing and the leadership decreasing.

The church is the Body of Christ. We know that the ointment of the high priest was poured upon his body and flowed down to his skirt (Psa. 133:2), indicating that the

rich, living Spirit is not a matter of gift or miracles, but a matter of the anointing in life (Psa. 133:3). In the church, Christ as the all-inclusive Head, gives the Spirit of life without measure. I like to hear the saints praying freely. But what would happen if the Head withheld the anointing and we still tried to pray? If He recalled the anointing, although we might try our best to pray, we would be unable to pray in a living way. We could only pray in a very dry and formal way. In these days I have been watered by listening to the prayers of the saints because those prayers have been filled with the anointing. This anointing comes from the all-inclusive Head. As long as we have the anointing, we are the Body. The ointment was poured out upon Aaron's garments, meaning that it was poured upon the Body of Christ. If we have to arrange ahead of time for people to pray in a certain meeting, that is an organization, not the Body. An organization does not need the anointing, the immeasurable Spirit. A meeting which is filled with prayer from beginning to end would be a proof of the presence of the Head, proving that the whole Body is under the anointing of His immeasurable Spirit. There would be no need for someone to ask us to pray for two and a half hours, for that would be our doing, not the doing of the Head. Where is the church? Who are the church? What is the church? Where the Spirit is, there is the church.

Another sign of the church is the Word. If you read the book of Acts, you will see that in the early days of the church there were the Spirit and the Word. But it was not the Word in black and white letters. In Acts the church had the living Word, the Word full of life, light, anointing, and watering. The church has the living and instant Word, the Word that the Lord speaks today. Where there is the living Word, there is the church.

Praise the Lord that since the day that He raised us up, His Holy Word has been open to us in a living way. As the days go by, I believe that the Word will open to us more and more. We do not need the outward things, because the presence of the Lord is in the church. His living Spirit and His living Word are in the church. This

proves where the church is and it also testifies that the Head of the church is the unlimited Christ.

It is blasphemy to keep a following under our control. All the following must go to Him. The more we let go of our following, the more the Bible will be open to us, and the more the anointing will be on the Body. Brothers and sisters, now is the time that the Lord is going to vindicate His way on the earth, not only in this country, but throughout the world. His Divine Word will be open to His Body more than ever before. And the anointing of the Spirit will be intensified sevenfold (Rev. 1:4). The all-inclusive Christ, the living Word, and the intensified Spirit will vindicate the way of the church. Otherwise, it is difficult for people to know who, where, and what is the church.

Hallelujah, we are regenerated people! We have been regenerated for His increase. His increase is for the all-inclusive Christ. John chapter three has three main points: regeneration, the increase, which is the bride of Christ, and the all-inclusive Christ.

F. Loved of the Father

The Father loves the Son (3:35). The Son is the object of the Father's love. In love, the Father has made the Son to be above all and to be all in all. The Son's all-inclusiveness is a matter of the Father's love.

G. With All Given by the Father

Verse 35 also says that the Father has given all into His hand. Again the "all" here does not mainly mean all things or all matters, but all people. The Father has given all people to the Son. The Father never gave anyone to John the Baptist. He has given all His chosen people to His Son. None of the chosen people of God belong to John the Baptist or to any Christian worker. John and all the Christian workers should not accept any of the people of God. God the Father has given all His elect to the Son. Everyone must go to Him. He is above all, and over all. All have been given to Him. All must be under His hand.

H. Believing in This Christ to Have Eternal Life

Verse 36 says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." In John 3 we see both the Person and work of Christ. All that He is and all that He does is for us to be saved and regenerated that we might be His bride as His increase. Oh, He is such a wonderful One and He has accomplished such a marvelous work! Therefore, we must believe in Him. By believing in Him we receive the forgiveness of God and have the divine life, which is the eternal life. By believing in such a One, we receive God's forgiveness, the release from God's condemnation through His redemption, and eternal life, the uncreated life of God, through the Spirit's regeneration. Thus, we are born of God and are delivered from the evil power of Satan and translated into the kingdom of God. Otherwise, we shall remain poisoned by Satan and continue under the condemnation of God which will eventually bring His wrath to us. Formerly, we were serpents poisoned by Satan, the enemy of God, and condemned already under the judgment of God. But now, thank the Lord, by His death and resurrection, we have been saved and regenerated to be parts of His bride. Therefore, we are His increase. His reproduction, which is His bride, His counterpart.

I. Disobeying This Christ to be under the Wrath of God

If anyone disobeys this Christ, he will remain under the wrath of God unto perdition. But we are not the disobeying ones, but the believing ones. We shall never perish. We have been saved from God's condemnation and from Satan's serpentine nature and we have been regenerated with God's eternal life to be the bride of the all-inclusive Christ as His universal increase.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE NEED OF THE IMMORAL-- LIFE'S SATISFYING

(1)

In this message we come to the case of the Samaritan woman in John 4. This case is the second of the nine cases. There is a great contrast between this case and that of Nicodemus in chapter three. Nicodemus was a moral, high-class man; the Samaritan woman was an immoral, low-class woman. The first case sets forth a man with superior attainments while the second sets forth a woman with dishonorable behavior. The man was a Jew whereas the woman was a Samaritan. The Jewish religion was very sound, proper, real, and genuine, but the Samaritan's religion was false and very decadent. It is also interesting to note that the Lord talked with the man at night, but that He talked with the woman at midday. In the nighttime the man came to the Lord; in the daytime the Lord came to the woman. The place where the Lord talked with the man was in a house or a building, but He talked with the woman in the open air.

In the case of Nicodemus the first need of mankind is covered. According to spiritual experience, mankind's first need is regeneration. In God's economy man's first need is regeneration. God's economy is that man have His divine life and be one with Him in life and nature for the fulfillment and accomplishment of His eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose is to have a group of people who have been regenerated by His divine life and who are the same as He is in both life and nature, that they might become His corporate expression for eternity. This is God's eternal purpose and this is God's economy. In order to

fulfill this purpose, we must be regenerated that we may have His divine life.

The kingdom of God is entered only by birth, never by works. For example, a bird is in the bird kingdom only by birth; a fish can never enter the bird kingdom by any kind of work. The only possible way for you to enter any kind of kingdom is by having a particular kind of birth. Therefore, the first aspect of the Lord becoming our life is that He gives us divine life by means of a divine birth, which is the only way to share the things of the kingdom of God.

What is man's second need? What is his need following regeneration? The second need is satisfaction. In chapter three the problem is that man is void of the divine life. Regardless of how good or superior you may be, it means nothing as far as God's eternal purpose is concerned. As long as you have not been regenerated, you are void of the divine life. You only have human life. The human life is simply a vessel to contain the divine life. If you do not have the divine life, you are void. You are just an empty vessel. Although your human life may be wonderful, you do not have the divine life. The divine life is God Himself. You need this divine life to fill you up as your content. Your human life is a container to contain this divine life. When this divine life is within you, it becomes your content. As your content, it will also be your satisfaction. Before we were saved, we all had the experience of being empty. Regardless of our success or attainments, there was a continual emptiness within, the sensation of having no satisfaction. Whether we were good or bad, we were empty. Although we had the container, the vessel, we did not have the content. We were empty. Young and old, rich and poor, high and low--all are empty. One day we received the Lord Jesus. We not only obtained God's salvation, but we also received the divine life, which immediately became our content. Now we have satisfaction. Therefore, following the case showing the need of regeneration, we have a case showing genuine satisfaction. Nothing can satisfy man except Christ Himself. As long as Christ is not the satisfaction of our

human life, nothing can satisfy us. There is no satisfaction apart from Christ. As human beings, we always feel thirsty; only Christ can quench our thirst.

I. A THIRSTY SAVIOR AND A THIRSTY SINNER

The case of the Samaritan woman reveals that Christ is real satisfaction. While Nicodemus was a pure-blooded Jew, the Samaritan woman was of mixed blood. Everything related to her was a ruin; nothing was pure or good. The Samaritans claimed to be the descendants of Jacob. At most, they were his descendants by mixed blood. While the name of Nicodemus is given, no one knows the name of the Samaritan woman. Because she was mean and low, the Bible does not divulge her name. She was altogether a mixture. She was an extraordinary case among all of the cases. If you read the Bible carefully, you will find that everything about her was extraordinary. Even her coming out to the well to draw water was extraordinary. According to the custom in the Middle East, the women come to draw water in the late afternoon, not at noontime. When the sun is going down, the women come to draw water in companies. However, this Samaritan woman came to draw water at noontime by herself. Why did she do this? Because she had a bad name, and no one would keep company with her. She was afraid of being talked about, of being criticized, and she did not dare come in the late afternoon when so many other people would be there. She came at noon when the sun was blazing and when no one else would come out of the house. This woman was poor and immoral. She had five husbands and was living with one that was not her husband. No one cared for her. She knew this and came to draw water at such a lonely time, expecting that no one would see her.

In the case of the Samaritan woman there are many signs. The case itself is a sign, but within this sign, there are many signs. The case itself signifies that Christ is our satisfaction, but one of the signs within the case is the woman.

According to the types and figures in the Scriptures, what does a woman signify? Firstly, a woman signifies that humanity needs to rely upon God. Man can never stand alone; he must rely upon God, who is both his Maker and Husband (Isa. 54:5). Brothers, allow me to ask you this question: Is your standing before God that of a male or a female? If you were to ask me, I would tell you that although I am a man of over sixty years of age, I do realize that my standing before God is that of a female. My position before God is not that of a man, but of a woman, because I can never stand alone. I need God to rely upon. A woman signifies a person who cannot stand alone. This is both your position and mine. In figure, we are either males or females, but in reality we are all females. None of us can stand by himself. Man can never be independent. Nowadays people proclaim independence, but I must tell you that you can never be independent. You were created to be dependent upon God. Whenever anyone tries to be independent, he will be dissatisfied, because God created man inherently dependent.

A woman also signifies weakness (1 Pet. 3:7). We human beings must realize that we are weak. We are all weak because we are all human. Do not think that your wife is a weak vessel and that you are a strong one. Although this may be true figuratively, in fact both men and women are weak. In some cases, as far as spiritual things are concerned, the brothers are weaker than the sisters. When the Lord Jesus was about to be betrayed and put to death, the sisters in the New Testament were stronger than the brothers. The sisters were much stronger at the time of the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension. Even in loving the Lord, Mary was the strongest. So, brothers, do not proudly think that you are the strongest. We are all human and we were all made weak and dependent so that we would have to rely upon the Lord.

The significance of a woman also includes an inner longing and thirst, which were created by God. Of course, a man has the need for a wife as a helpmate, but a woman

needs a husband much more. A woman always has the longing and desire to have satisfaction. In the human nature of both man and woman, there is always the inner thirst for satisfaction. The Lord created that thirst so that we might seek Him. You always feel thirsty and you always feel an inner lack. These are the signs that you are a woman. Your need to rely on others and your sense of dependence, weakness, and thirst for satisfaction all indicate that you are a woman.

A. The Savior "Had to Pass Through" the Sinner's Place

We need to pay close attention to 4:4. "And He had to pass through Samaria." The key word in this verse is "had." Undoubtedly, this Samaritan woman had been foreknown and predestinated by God the Father in eternity past (Rom. 8:29). Certainly she had been given by the Father to the Lord Jesus (6:39). Such a low, mean, and immoral Samaritan woman was given to the Lord by the Father. Therefore, the Lord was burdened and went to Samaria to do the will of the Father. Later, He told His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to finish His work" (4:34). The Lord went to Samaria to do the will of God, which was to find that immoral Samaritan woman. He was seeking her that she might become a worshipper of the Father. That one soul was worth the Lord's going there purposely. According to history, no Jew would ever pass through Samaria. Samaria was the leading region of the northern kingdom of Israel and the place where its capital was (1 Kings 16:24, 29). Before 700 B.C., the Assyrians captured Samaria and brought people from Babylon and other heathen countries to the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 17:6, 24). From that time, the Samaritans became a people of mixed blood, heathen mixed with Jew. History tells us that they had the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) and worshipped God according to that part of the Old

Testament, but they were never recognized by the Jews as being a part of the Jewish people.

Although the Jews would never pass through Samaria, the Lord Jesus felt burdened to do so. He had to go there, not because it was necessary geographically, but because of the will of the Father. Because of the Father's will, He had to go through that region. The Lord knew that at noontime an immoral woman would be at the well.

B. The Savior Came to the Sinner's Traditional Religious Inheritance--Jacob's Well

Let us read verses 5 and 6. "So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being wearied from the journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour." Tell me, who was the first to come to Jacob's well, the sinner or the Savior? How marvelous it is that the Savior came there first! When I read this chapter in the early years, I became very excited with many of the points. Later, in my gospel preaching, I gave a long message about the Samaritan woman, including all the details. At that time I saw that the Lord Jesus had to go to the well ahead of that fallen, immoral Samaritan woman. He went to the well and waited for her.

The Lord was sovereign and wise. Before the woman came, He found a good excuse to send all of His disciples away. If any of the disciples had been there, it would not have been so good. It would not have been as convenient for the Lord to talk to that immoral woman about her husbands. So the Lord, in His sovereignty and wisdom, sent His disciples away to the city to buy food. Perhaps the Lord was thinking, "Please leave Me alone. I'm waiting for that immoral woman. Because she is so immoral, she doesn't want to see anyone or talk to anyone. But I am going to touch her conscience with the history of all her husbands. You disciples must leave." Without the excuse of buying food, how could the Lord have sent the

disciples away? While the disciples went away to purchase the food, the woman came. When I saw the picture as a young man, I worshipped the Lord. Suppose the Lord was in a house at midnight and this woman came to speak to Him during the night, and the disciples saw it. They probably would have said, "What are you doing here? Jesus, you are a man a little over thirty years of age and she is such a woman. What is going on here?" In His sovereignty and wisdom, the Lord waited for the woman to come under the bright sunshine and in the open air. Even under the open air, there was no one present to listen to the conversation. When the Lord and the Samaritan woman had finished their talk, the disciples returned and saw them, but they had nothing to say. That conversation did not transpire in a private room; it was in the open air. How wise was the Lord Jesus!

The point here is this: the Savior knows where the sinner is. He knows the sinner's true situation. The Lord Jesus went to the well, sent all of His disciples away, and sat by the well, waiting until the woman came. If you look back into your salvation, you will realize that, to some extent at least, the same principle was operating. You did not go to heaven--the Lord came to you. He came down to the very place where you were. I was born in China, but the Lord Jesus went there. One day He was waiting for me at a certain place, and I was caught by Him. What about you? You did not go to meet the Savior, did you? The Savior came to you. Some have been saved as a result of an automobile accident. Nevertheless, they must realize that before the accident occurred, the Lord Jesus was already waiting to meet them. We all were saved in this way. This is marvelous.

While the Lord Jesus was waiting for the sinner to come, He was thirsty. Thus, in this second of the cases, we see a thirsty Savior and a thirsty sinner. You may think that you are thirsty, but your thirst is a sign that the Savior is thirsty. The Savior is thirsty for us, for, to Him, we are the thirst-quenching water. Do you realize that you

are the thirst-quenching water to the Savior? It seems that the Savior is saying, "Nothing can satisfy Me except you. I have millions of angels in the heavens, but none of them can satisfy Me. I have come to the earth to seek the thirst-quenching water. You are the water." You may be quite humble and say, "No, He is my living water. How can I be His thirst-quenching water?" Nevertheless, the Lord needs you, for without you He can never be satisfied.

At first, both the Savior and the sinner were thirsty, and the Savior was hungry. The sinner was thirsty and came to draw water in order to satisfy her thirst. The Savior was hungry and thirsty. He sent the disciples away to buy food that He might eat and He asked the sinner for a drink of water. Eventually, neither the Savior nor the sinner drank or ate anything, yet both were satisfied. This is wonderful! The sinner drank of the Savior, the Savior drank of the sinner, and both of them were satisfied. The disciples were surprised. When they returned with the food, they urged Him to eat, but He said, "I have food to eat of which you have no knowledge" (4:32). The sinner was satisfied with the Savior's living water, and the Savior was satisfied with God's will in satisfying the sinner. To do the will of God to satisfy the sinner is the Savior's food. oh. the Lord as the Savior was thirsty for you and me! One day He got us and was satisfied.

C. The Sinner Came to Her Religious Inheritance

The sinner came to her religious inheritance to draw water for her satisfaction. While she was going to draw water, the Savior asked her to give Him water for His satisfaction. Whenever the Lord asks you for something, that is an indication that He needs it and that you need it also. When you are thirsty, the Lord also is thirsty. When the Lord asks you for something, you also are in need of that very thing. This is very meaningful. When you are homeless, He is homeless, and when He is homeless, you are homeless.

II. THE EMPTINESS OF RELIGION'S TRADITION AND THE FULLNESS OF LIFE'S LIVING WATER

In verses 9 through 14 we see the contrast between the emptiness of religion's tradition and the fullness of life's living water. The Samaritan woman asked the Lord Jesus, "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" (4:12). We see by this question that religion's father is considered to be the greatest. The Samaritans thought of Jacob as the greatest. They took him as their grandfather, thinking him to be the greatest.

The Samaritan woman also considered that Jacob's well was the best. This signifies that religion's inheritance is always considered as the best.

The Samaritan woman said to the Lord, "You have no bucket...where do you get the living water?" (v. 11). This signifies that religion's way is considered as the most prevailing. Although religion considers its way to be the most prevailing, yet religion's "water" never quenches the thirst of religious people. This is proved by the Lord's reply in verse 13. "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again."

Christ is greater than religion's father. "Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is that says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (4:10). If you preach the gospel in China, people will talk to you about Confucius. Every race and tribe claims to have someone great, but none is greater than Christ. Christ is greater than Jacob, Confucius, Plato, and every other kind of grandfather.

Furthermore, God's gift is greater than religion's inheritance. Would you like to have Jacob's well or God's gift? What is God's gift? If you say that God's gift is Christ, that answer is not totally accurate. The divine life is God's gift, for Romans 6:23 says that the free gift of God is eternal life. This divine life shall become in us a spring

of water welling up into eternal life (v. 14). This divine life is much better than Jacob's well. If you visit Jacob's well in Palestine today, you will find it under the control of an Armenian monk. When I visited there, everyone who wanted a cup of water from Jacob's well had to pay two dollars. However, all of that is tradition and means nothing. The water in that well is the same as any other.

To "ask" is more prevailing than religion's way. The living water of God quenches our thirst and becomes a spring of water welling up into eternal life. Death's thirst is quenched by life. In principle, this also is to change death into life.

The Lord Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again" (4:13). This statement is simple but its meaning is profound. The "water" here signifies the enjoyment of material things and the amusement of worldly entertainment. None of these can quench the thirst deep within man. However much he drinks of this material and worldly "water," he shall thirst again. The more he drinks of these "waters," the more his thirst is increased. For example, in education people like to have higher and higher degrees. After receiving a bachelor's degree, they want a master's, and after that, a doctorate. Others may desire to accumulate ten thousand dollars in a savings account, but after that, they want to have a hundred thousand, and after a hundred thousand, a million. The more you drink of the water of this earth, the more thirsty you become. Never try to quench your thirst with any kind of worldly water. Although the Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband, she still was not satisfied. Nothing could quench her thirst. Some sisters love clothing. However, no woman can be satisfied with any type of garment. After you purchase one, you will want a second and a third. If you have ten pairs of shoes, you will want to have fifteen pairs. Some women who have more than fifteen pairs of shoes still are not satisfied. This kind of "water" will never

satisfy people. There is only one "water" that satisfies people for eternity--Jesus Christ. Christ satisfies today, tomorrow, and for eternity. He is ever new, ever fresh. He always satisfies. So, the Lord could tell the Samaritan woman that whoever drinks of the water that He gives will not thirst, for that water will become in him a spring welling up into eternal life.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE NEED OF THE IMMORAL-- LIFE'S SATISFYING

(2)

III. THE WAY TO TAKE THE LIVING WATER

In John 4:15-26 we see the way to take the living water. The living water is good, but if we do not have a way to take it, it means nothing to us. What good is it to have something marvelous and excellent in the heavens if we cannot reach it? But here we find the living water and the way to take it.

The Lord Jesus was a simple, brief, yet prevailing preacher. He did not give a sermon; He simply had a short talk with the Samaritan woman. By that short talk, she was attracted. I hope that all the young people will learn the way of preaching the gospel from John chapter four. This chapter is a good example of gospel preaching. We all must learn how to talk with a sinner.

A. The Sinner Asked for the Living Water

The Samaritan woman was attracted and asked the Lord for the living water. "The woman said to Him, Sir, give me this water so I will not thirst, nor come here to draw" (4:15). The Lord was a good preacher. He seemed to say, "If you knew who I am and if you knew God's gift, and if you knew the living water that I give, you would certainly ask for it." The woman asked for it immediately. In our foolish talk with people, the more we talk, the more we keep them away. But the Lord Jesus spoke very briefly and the woman was attracted and asked for the living water.

B. The Savior Told Her the Way to Take It

1. To Repent of and Confess Her Sins--"Husbands"

Then the woman asked the Lord for the water He did not rebuke her, telling her to repent and make a thorough confession of her sins. No, the Lord spoke softly and gently saying, "Go, call your husband and come here" (4:16). The Lord seemed to be saying, "I want your husband. You ask Me for the living water, and I ask you for your husband. Let us trade. You trade your husband for the living water." This word was intended to touch her conscience with her immoral history that she might repent of her sins. "The woman answered and said, I don't have a husband. Jesus said to her, You have well said, I don't have a husband; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." Did the woman lie or tell the truth? It was a truth, yet it was a lie. She told a lie by speaking the truth. It was a truthful lie. This is the deceptive nature of fallen man. However, the Lord was gentle with her and did not rebuke her. He even appreciated her, saying, "You have well said, I don't have a husband; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband; this you said truly" (4:17-18). The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet." The Lord's words frightened her. She seemed to say. "Isn't this man a Jew? He has never lived in our town. How did he get to know my background? Who told him that I had five husbands and that the one I have now is not my husband?" This is the way to have a gospel talk. Do not talk vainly to people, but touch their conscience, not in the way of rebuking them, but in the way of unveiling them. By the Lord's gracious and wise words that woman's conscience was touched. The proper way to minister the gospel is to touch people's conscience.

The thirst of this Samaritan woman had led her to many wrong things, such as having five husbands and living with a man who was not her husband. That was the kind of life she found herself in. She sought the physical

things to satisfy her, but found only dissatisfaction. The six men represent the physical and material things. which could never satisfy people

Besides the physical things, she also had sought satisfaction in religion. Although she was such a simple person, she was also religious. She was very weak, yet it is strange that she talked about religion. Mere religion can never help. Furthermore, she had tradition, for the well of Jacob represents the traditional things. She had a traditional heritage which she inherited from her forefathers. But soon she found emptiness in her tradition. Therefore, this Samaritan woman had three categories of things--the physical things, the religious things, and the traditional things. These three categories represent everything we can get out of human life. There is nothing else in human life other than that which is physical, religious, or traditional. None of these physical, religious, or traditional matters can ever satisfy people, for the more they get these things, the more they become thirsty. There is never an end to their thirst.

The husbands of this woman are a sign. Christ should be the only husband. In 2 Corinthians 11, the Apostle Paul told us that he has espoused us to Christ. In other words, he has engaged us to Christ. Christ is the real husband. But this woman had five husbands besides one other man. The reason this woman was wicked and immoral was because she was thirsty. Because her many husbands could not satisfy her, she remained dissatisfied. When the first husband did not satisfy her, she sought satisfaction from her second husband. But her second husband did not satisfy her inner thirst either. Then she married the third one, but this one also could not satisfy her; neither could her fourth and fifth husbands satisfy, because the living water was her only need. Regardless of how much she drank the earthly water in her many husbands, she still felt thirsty. Therefore, the Lord told her that whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again. Anyone who drinks the water of physical, religious, and traditional things will

thirst again. Only the Lord Jesus has the living water that can quench our thirst.

What do her husbands signify? They signify anything that is other than Christ. Anything outside of Christ may become sinful. If we depend upon anyone or anything other than Christ, that may be quite sinful. The husbands of the Samaritan woman became the history of her whole sinful life. As we have seen, the Lord touched her sinful history in a very wise way. He did not condemn her sinfulness as a sinner or legally make her repent and confess her sins practically as some evangelists would. Since the Lord knows everything, He simply touched her conscience by asking her to bring her husband. By this way, the Lord helped her to confess her sins and repent.

Because the Lord's word about her husbands touched her conscience, she immediately changed the conversation to the matter of worship. She was quite clever in doing this. Although she was such an immoral woman, she still talked about the worship of God. This proves where religion is. People may discuss religion and still live in immorality. This woman did not confess her sins, but turned the subject from her husbands to that of worshipping God, saying, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men must worship." This change of subject was the subtlety of the Samaritan woman. The woman's problem with the matter of worship, like the questions in 8:3-7 and 9:2-3, was a matter of yes or no, which belongs to the tree of knowledge; but the Lord turns her to the spirit (vv. 21-24), which belongs to the tree of life (cf. Gen. 2:9-17). When the woman changed the subject from her husband to worship, the Lord Jesus took the opportunity to reveal to her the proper way of receiving the living water.

2. To Contact God the Spirit

Listen to the Lord's words about the matter of worship. "Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you

worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is of the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and reality; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality" (4:21-24). This word was given to instruct her regarding the need for exercising her spirit to contact God the Spirit. To contact God the Spirit with her spirit is to drink the living water, and to drink the living water is to render real worship to God.

In typology, the worship of God should be, (1) in the place chosen by God to set His habitation there (Deut. 12:5, 11, 13-14, 18), and, (2) with the offerings (Lev. ch. 1-6). The place chosen by God for His habitation typifies the human spirit, where God's habitation is today (Eph. 2:22, "An habitation of God through the spirit" (KJV) should read "a dwelling place of God in spirit.") The offerings typify Christ; Christ is the fulfillment and reality of all the offerings with which the people worshipped God. Hence, when the Lord instructed her to worship God the Spirit in spirit and reality, it meant she should contact God the Spirit in her spirit instead of in a specific place, and through Christ, instead of with the offerings, for now, since Christ the reality has come (vv. 25-26), all the shadows and types are over. The Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God is Spirit, that worshipping God means to contact Him, and that contacting Him is not a matter of place, but a matter of the human spirit.

When He said, "An hour is coming and now is," it meant that the age had changed. In the past, according to the Law of Moses, God ordained that His people worship Him at a specific place where He would establish His habitation with His name (Deut. 12:5). All of God's worshippers had to go to that unique place. That was a type. Now the age has been changed, and the type is fulfilled. Typically speaking, the place of worship should not be a place any longer; it must be the human spirit, where God is going to set up His habitation with His

name. Where is the unique place for God's people to worship Him today? It is our human spirit. According to Ephesians 2:22, God's habitation is in our spirit.

Why did God ordain in the ancient times that His people had to worship Him in one place? It was for the purpose of keeping unity. God would never allow His people to worship Him in any place other than the place He had chosen. If anyone had worshipped Him in another place, the unity among His people would have been damaged. Where can we keep the unity today? In our human spirit. In our mind, understanding, teaching, doctrine, and concept we all differ from one another. I do not believe that there is even one couple where the husband and wife think exactly the same. Everyone has different concepts. You have your concepts and I have mine. You have your way and I have mine. You have your view and I have mine. How could we ever be one according to our differing concepts, ways, and views? We must forget about them all and come to cur spirit. When we all turn to our spirit, we are one. So, learn never to argue with people about doctrine, but always direct them to their spirit. We all must be reminded that we have a spirit wherein is God's habitation. Our spirit is the place to worship God, that is, to contact Him. Whenever we worship God in our spirit, it means that we drink God as the living water. When you praise God with your spirit, you immediately have a drink. If you would say, "Praise God! O Father, I worship You," from your spirit, you would be drinking living water.

The Lord also said that now is the time for the true worshippers to worship God not only in their spirit, but also in reality. This is difficult for today's Christians to understand. However, if we consider the type, we shall understand what the Lord was talking about. In ancient times, God ordained that His people worship Him at the appointed place and with the offerings. The people could not worship God at any place they chose and they could not worship Him without the offerings They needed the

offerings because they were sinful. When they came to contact God, they had to offer many types of offerings--the trespass offering, the sin offering the peace offering, the meal offering, the burnt offering, the wave offering, and the heave offering. All the offerings were types of the various aspects of Christ. Christ is our real trespass offering. He is also our real sin offering, meal offering, peace offering, and burnt offering. Today, instead of worshipping God in a specific place, we should worship Him in our spirit. Furthermore, instead of offerings, we should worship Him with Christ as the reality of all the offerings.

Now is the hour, or the age, in which we must worship God in our spirit as the unique place and with Christ as the reality. How can we do it? How shall we apply the matter of worshipping the Father in our spirit? Suppose several brothers come together for the purpose of worshipping God, yet they do not exercise their spirit. Instead they exercise their minds. They begin to discuss the matter of worshipping God and soon are divided due to their conflicting opinions. They become unhappy with one another and separate. What these brothers need to do is simply to exercise the spirit, praise the Lord, call upon His name, and see what He will do. They should not exercise their mind by talking. They should exercise their spirit by calling on the Lord.

How shall we apply the second point, that is, to worship God with Christ? The traditional way is to call a hymn and then, after the hymn has been sung, to offer a prayer to our Father in heaven. That is the traditional religious way. However, when meeting together for worship, we must exercise our spirit. If we do this, the Holy Spirit who indwells our spirit will have the opportunity to move. He may move in one brother, giving him a burden to offer a living testimony of Christ. Then that brother will testify of his living experience of Christ. In doing so, he will offer Christ as one of the offerings. When you give a testimony of your experience of Christ, in the eyes of God, that is offering Christ to God. Eventually, such an offering will become food to the brother who gave

the testimony and to all of the other worshippers. This is not the traditional way of worshipping God; this is the way of worshipping in the spirit with the experienced Christ offered to God for His satisfaction and as food for all the other worshippers. This is the real worship of God.

May the Lord impress us with what is proper worship. The proper worship is continually to drink the living water. God the Spirit is the living water, and our organ for drinking the living water is our human spirit. Whenever we exercise our human spirit to contact God, the living Spirit, we drink of Him as the living water in His Son, Jesus Christ.

3. To Believe That Jesus Is the Christ That She May Have Life Eternal

Now we come to the last aspect of the way to take the living water--believing that Jesus is the Christ. When the Samaritan woman heard the Lord's answer to her question about worship, she still tried to turn away to another subject saying, "I know that Messiah is coming, He Who is called Christ; when He comes, He will declare all things to us" (4:25). She seemed to be saying, "You are telling me so many things, but we are waiting for the Messiah to come. When He comes, He will manifest everything." What an excuse! Then the Lord answered her, "I Who speak to you am He" (4:26). By this word, Jesus led her to believe that He is the Christ in order that she might have eternal life (20:31). We see from verse 29 that she believed. Although the Samaritan woman tried every way to escape the Lord, He, in His wisdom, caught her. Never try to escape the hand of the Lord. The Samaritan woman was convinced, believed in Him, and received the living water. There was a great change in her life. She was such an immoral person, but was still under the influence of religious tradition, taking care of yes or no, here or there, this way or that way. She was absolutely in a death situation. However, the Lord touched her and turned her from death to life. Undoubtedly, she was under the tree of knowledge, but the Lord turned her to the tree

of life. He changed her death into life eternal.

The Lord revealed to the Samaritan woman that the real satisfaction in human life is the Lord Himself. The Lord revealed to her three aspects about Himself: that He is the gift, the Giver, and the way to obtain the gift. The Lord mentioned at least three things about Himself. In verse 10 He said, "If you knew the gift of God," indicating that the gift of God was the Lord Himself as life eternal. He also told her, "You would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water," showing that the Lord Himself is the Giver. Finally, by careful reading, we shall discover that the way for the woman to obtain the gift was to contact or drink the Giver Himself.

IV. A LIVING TESTIMONY WITH A MARVELOUS HARVEST

A. The Sinner Believed, Was Satisfied, Left Her Preoccupation, and Testified

After the woman heard that the Lord Jesus was the Christ who was coming, she believed. There was a great change in her life. She left her waterpot, went into the city, and gave a living testimony to the people. This testimony brought in a marvelous harvest (4:28-42).

According to our natural concept, it takes time to help a person to be saved. We must drop this concept. People can be changed in a second. The Lord can turn people in such a fast way because, just as He did in His creation, He calls things not being as being. There is no need of the time element. According to our concept, a sinner needs time to consider, believe, and turn. This concept frustrates our gospel preaching and makes it impotent. We must have the faith that while we are talking with people, the Lord is working in a prevailing way. The Samaritan woman was turned in an instant. In the past, beyond our belief, we have seen many people turn in such a way. The Lord's way to turn people is in the Spirit, in the way of life, not in the way of education. Education takes time. It takes time to teach people. However, when the Lord

regenerates people, He makes them a new creation and calls things not being as being. We must have this prevailing faith whenever we talk to a sinner. While we are speaking with him, we must exercise our spirit to believe that the Lord is working in him. Spontaneously, something will happen to him, and he will be turned from death to life. Although the Samaritan woman was so immoral, low, and deep in sin, she was turned within a fraction of a second. Her whole life was changed. She went to the people and said, "Come, see a man Who told me all that I have done; is this not the Christ?" (4:29). This indicates that the woman believed that Jesus was the Christ and that by believing she received the living water and was satisfied. She was certain that Jesus was the Christ, and the Spirit came into her.

The picture in John 4 also shows us that after the woman contacted Christ, she gave up everything. She left both the well and the waterpot. She left everything and went into the city to tell the people about Christ, which means that once she contacted Christ, she gave up everything in order to have only Christ as her satisfaction. When she told the people in the city, "Is this not the Christ?" she recognized that He was the Christ. In the eyes of God, she had Christ already and was bringing Christ to her people. What a testimony! It is only when we contact Christ, recognize Christ, and receive Christ that we can be satisfied. Then spontaneously we shall give up everything that is other than Christ.

I can never forget an incident that occurred in 1937 when I went to the capital of China for several nights of meetings. After the last meeting, a young wife of a highly educated man said to me, "Mr. Lee, I am much influenced by your preaching and desire to believe in Christ. But I have a problem. I like to go the theaters and see the operas. If I am going to be a Christian, I am willing to give up all of my bad habits. But there is one thing that I cannot give up--that is the dramas and operas. This I could not give up. What shall I do?" She was very serious. I was afraid to tell her that it is not right for a Christian to go to the Chinese operas, because she would refuse to become a

Christian. Of course, I could not tell her that it was all right for her to become a Christian and still go to the theaters. I prayed that the Lord would give me wisdom. Finally, I said, "Suppose your little child is fond of a dangerous knife that is in his hands. What is the best way to take that knife out of his hands?" She said, "That would be easy to do, if you would scatter a lot of candy on the floor around him." I asked how that would help, and she replied, "The child would drop the knife in order to take the candy. Unless his two hands were full of candy, he would not drop the knife even if you told him to." I commended her on her answer and said, "Do you realize that once you receive Christ the same thing will happen to you?" Immediately, she became clear and was saved that very night.

Do you know why people are thirsting after so many things other than Christ? Simply because they are not satisfied with Christ. If they were satisfied with Christ, all of the other things would be forgotten. The well and the waterpot meant so much to the Samaritan woman, but after she recognized Christ, she spontaneously gave up those cherished things and went to the people, testifying that Christ was now her satisfying life. Do you have satisfaction in your human life? With what are you satisfied--with Christ, or with the physical, religious, and traditional things? We can be satisfied only with Christ and not with any other thing. If we are going to help others, we must first be satisfied with Christ in order to bring Christ as satisfaction to others. Only when we are satisfied with Christ can we let others know how to receive Christ and contact Him. The Samaritan woman did not go to her people with the doctrine of Christ; she first gained Christ and then went to them with Christ.

B. The Savior Satisfied with God's Will in Satisfying the Sinner

In the case of the Samaritan woman we see the picture of a thirsty sinner and a thirsty and hungry Christ. Both

of them were tired because both had walked a long distance to that well. Consequently, the Lord Jesus and the woman were very sympathetic with one another. Both were thirsty and weary, and the Lord was hungry. The Lord was hungry, so He sent the disciples to buy food. He was also thirsty, so He asked the woman for a drink. However, it is very strange to note that neither of them ate or drank, yet both of them were satisfied. The saved sinner was satisfied with the Savior, and the Savior was satisfied with the saved sinner. We know this by the fact that the woman gave up the well and her waterpot and ran into the city to tell about Christ. She was so satisfied that the people came to see if this was the Christ. We know that the Lord Jesus was satisfied because He told the disciples, who had returned with food and had asked Him to eat, "I have food to eat of which you have no knowledge" (4:32). When the disciples asked each other whether anyone had brought Him food to eat, He said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to finish His work" (4:34). The Lord's food was to do the will of Him who sent Him, which means that His food was to save and satisfy sinners. We sinners are the satisfaction to the Savior. Your hunger signifies that the Lord is hungry, and your thirst signifies that the Lord is thirsty. But when you are satisfied, the Lord also is satisfied. As long as there are thirsty sinners on earth, the Lord is thirsty in heaven. When sinners are satisfied, then the Savior is satisfied. The Lord had come to Samaria with a purpose--to find that sinner and to satisfy her. In doing this, He did God's will. And doing God's will was His food and satisfaction.

C. A Marvelous Harvest Was Reaped

In verse 35 the Lord said, "Do you not say, There are yet four months and then the harvest comes? Behold, I tell you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest." The Lord told His disciples that the fields were already white. Hence, they must go and reap the harvest The principle is also true today. We

must never say that it is not the time to preach the gospel. If we look on the field, we will see certain people who are really thirsty for Christ. Therefore, we must bring Christ to them and them to Christ. This is how to reap them for Christ.

In verse 36 the Lord said, "He who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit unto eternal life." The phrase "unto eternal life" is the same in Greek as "into eternal life" used in verse 14. It is used twice by the Lord in this chapter. The first time He said that if we receive Him, He will be a fountain, or a spring within us, bubbling up into eternal life (4:14). Christ will be a well or spring in us, bubbling up into eternal life. The second time He used this phrase was when He urged the disciples to go out and reap the harvest in order to gather fruit unto eternal life. In other words, after you have been saved and satisfied with Christ, you must bring people to Christ unto eternal life. Firstly, you must receive Christ unto eternal life for yourself; then you must bring others to receive Christ unto eternal life. There is a Christ for you to receive as the spring within you bubbling up into eternal life, and there is a harvest for you to reap as fruit unto eternal life. The Samaritan woman did exactly these two things. On one hand, she received Christ as the inner spring unto eternal life, and on the other hand she went to the harvest field to gather her people as fruit unto eternal life.

In verses 36 and 37 the Lord mentions sowing. Who did this sowing? John the Baptist did not go to Samaria. Some people think that some disciples of John or of the Lord Jesus went to Samaria and preached the gospel before that time, but I do not believe that. We may believe that the seed was sown by the Old Testament. The Samaritans were familiar with the first five books of the Old Testament. Thus, they came to know God and also something concerning the Messiah, the Christ, although it was not very clear or thorough. The Samaritans were not the same as the heathen. Through the Old Testament they obtained some knowledge of God and of Christ. I believe

that that was the seed. Yes, it was the prevailing Spirit of the Lord that worked on the Samaritan woman. However, if she had been the same as a heathen without any knowledge of the Bible, I do not think that the work could have been done on her in such a prevailing and fast way. The Lord Jesus did not have to say anything about God until she first said something. She initiated the conversation about God and Christ. The Lord Jesus did not say, "Woman, do you believe that there is a God? Do you know Christ?" The Lord only asked her for a drink of water. When she rebuked Him for asking water of a Samaritan woman, He spoke to her about the gift of God. We can see by the Lord's words that the woman already knew something about God and Christ. That was the result of the functioning of the first five books of the Old Testament, which they had. Therefore, before the Lord Jesus and His disciples came, many people had already been prepared.

The same is true in the United States. The seed has been sown throughout the country. We must realize that the harvest is truly ripe for reaping. Many people have been prepared by other ministries and by many of the Lord's servants during the past years. Many people have been prepared in their hearts and spirits to contact and receive Christ as their satisfaction, but they do not know how to do it. In the United States, even unbelievers and atheists know something about God and about Christ. They have even heard about salvation. What we need to do is to reap whatever has been sown. The Samaritan woman did not go with the doctrine about Christ to her people; she first gained Christ and then went to them with Christ.

Verse 39 says, "Many of the Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified." Through the living testimony of the Samaritan woman, many more sinners were brought to the Lord. When they contacted the Lord, they all believed and received Him as their Savior. It was a marvelous harvest through her living testimony.

In conclusion, we can see that the first two cases are

distinctly clear about two things. The first case shows that Christ brought us the divine life through regeneration or rebirth; the second case shows that Christ brought us satisfaction. These two aspects can be confirmed according to our experience. When we first received Christ, we were reborn or regenerated with the divine life. Then we were satisfied with the living water. These two cases are signs pointing to two different aspects of Christ being our life. We should not merely read the gospel as stories about miracles. We must read these narratives as figurative statements and we must discover the spiritual significance of these signs. Then we shall discover the spiritual and living principles concerning Christ who is life and satisfaction to man.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE NEED OF THE DYING--LIFE'S HEALING

I. JESUS BACK TO THE PLACE OF THE WEAK AND FRAGILE PEOPLE

Jesus returned to Cana of Galilee, the place of the weak and fragile people (John 4:43-46). Cana is in Galilee, a despised place (7:41, 52), which signifies the world of a low and mean condition where the weak and fragile people are. The Lord was here once during the first sign to change the death water into life wine. Now He comes back to the same place to do the second sign, which in the principle of life corresponds with the first sign--to change death into life.

II. THE WEAK AND FRAGILE PEOPLE DYING

This case, the third among the nine, reveals the dying people's need of healing. This case concerns the son of a royal official who was about to die. Mankind firstly needs regeneration, secondly satisfaction, and thirdly healing. We all need a certain amount of healing. In a sense, we are living; in another sense, we all are dying. When a baby is newly born, his mother would think that he is growing. Actually the baby is dying. Everyone on earth is dying. If you are young, still under thirty years of age, you may not have the sense that you are dying. However, when you reach the age of sixty or seventy, you realize that you are dying. A life span of seventy years may be likened to seventy dollars. Each year that is lived is the equivalent of spending a dollar. Once you have lived sixty years, you have spent sixty dollars. When you reach the age of sixty-nine, it means that you have only one dollar left. Once that dollar has been spent, you will be exhausted. So,

human beings are apparently living, but actually dying. This is why I do not ask my children or grandchildren to celebrate my birthday, for my birthday tells me that I am dying. Tell me, is your age increasing or decreasing? The longer we live, the less time we have to live. I do not want to reach the age of seventy. I would like to stay back, but I cannot do it. We all need healing.

We have been regenerated and, day by day, we may contact the Lord, the living Spirit, for our satisfaction. In addition to this, we need healing. We are all sick and dying people. We are fallen people, weak and fragile, who are dying and who need the Lord's healing. If you have the healing of the Lord Jesus, your dying will become living.

Let me share with you my secret prayer to the Lord. I have told the Lord, "Lord, the time of Your coming is near. Do me a favor--keep me from seeing death. Lord, I want to see You physically face to face. Keep me living until You come." Hallelujah, He is coming! While He is coming, He is healing. While He is on His way, He is healing our spirit, soul, and body. If you want to be healthy, you need to enjoy the healing of Jesus. Jesus is the real health food store. Come to Jesus, contact Him, and enjoy Him. If you participate in Jesus continually, you will have the best food, the real health food. How we need the healing of the divine life!

Romans 8:11 says, "But if the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from among the dead dwells in you, He Who raised Christ Jesus from among the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who indwells you" (Recovery Version). If we allow the indwelling Spirit to make His home in our being, this indwelling Spirit will saturate our dying, mortal body with resurrection life. Our mortal body will be enlivened, quickened, and healed with the divine life. Romans 8 reveals that our spirit, soul, and body all may receive the divine life. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, He, as the life-giving Spirit, comes into our spirit. Since He is the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit in Romans 8:2 is called the Spirit of life, meaning that the

divine Spirit is life. When we called on the Lord Jesus, this divine Spirit who is life came into our spirit and enlivened it. Therefore, our spirit is life (Rom. 8:10). When we set the mind of our soul upon the spirit, our mind also becomes life (Rom. 8:6). If we give ground to the indwelling Spirit, the Spirit will spread Himself from within our spirit through our soul into our body, making our mortal body a body full of life. Eventually, this divine life becomes a fourfold life: the life in the divine Spirit, the life that fills our spirit, the life that will saturate our soul, and the life that will permeate our body. Our whole being--spirit, soul, and body--will be filled, saturated, and permeated with the divine life. This is healing. Whenever the divine life enters into a part of our being, it heals that part. This means that the divine life changes the death of that part of our being into life. Death is swallowed up by life--this is healing.

We need regeneration, satisfaction, and healing. Many of us, particularly the sisters, need healing in our emotions. The sisters need healing in their unbalanced emotions, for there is a kind of sickness in their emotions. Why do you sisters cry so easily? Probably because of the sickness in your emotions. You need healing. The brothers need healing in their unbalanced mind and in their stubborn will. Why are you brothers so stubborn in your will? Once you make up your will, nothing on earth can change it. That is a disease, a sickness. We need healing. Praise the Lord that He is healing! To tell you the truth, even this morning I received some healing through my dear wife. My wife was not the healer, but she was the dispenser of the heavenly medicine. We all need healing. This healing is the transformation. The more we are healed in our mind, emotion, and will, the more we are transformed.

III. HEALING BY THE LIFE-GIVING WORD THROUGH BELIEVING

Although the royal official begged the Lord to come down and heal his son (4:47, 49), the Lord simply spoke the word, and the boy was healed. "Jesus said to him, Go,

your son is living. The man believed the word which Jesus said to him and went his way" (4:50). The royal official believed the word out of the mouth of the Lord. When he learned from his slaves that the boy was living, he and his whole household believed (4:51-53). Hallelujah for the life-giving word! We love the life-giving word, not the word in dead letters, but the word that is the Spirit. The Lord simply spoke the life-giving word, and the dying boy was healed. Today the Lord is still sending forth His healing word. When the dying people receive this word through believing, they are healed with life. Once the life-giving word has been transfused into us, whether or not we are conscious of it, we can never be the same. The life-giving word brings about a real change in our life.

When dying people receive the word through believing and are healed with life, this, in principle, is changing death into life. Death's deadening power is overcome by life. Praise the Lord for His healing life and for the life-giving word that heals all our sicknesses! Death is of the source of the tree of knowledge, and life is of the source of the tree of life. We were born into the sickness of death. The Lord's word of life heals our death. All we need is to receive and believe in His life-giving and healing word.

The case of the healing of the son of the royal official signifies that there is no need for us to contact the Lord physically. As long as we have the Lord's word, it is sufficient. Even though we do not have the Lord's physical presence, as long as we have His word and work, it is good enough, and nothing more is needed. When we have the word of the Lord, we shall be saved and filled with the Lord. Just His word is enough to heal and save us.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE NEED OF THE IMPOTENT-- LIFE'S ENLIVENING

In this message we come to the fourth case--the need of the impotent (John 5:1-47). This case exposes the vanity of religion.

I. THE INADEQUACY OF RELIGION'S LAW-KEEPING AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SON'S LIFE-GIVING

The case of the impotent man exposes the inadequacy of religion (5:1-9). No religion on earth is better than the Jewish religion, for it is the genuine and typical religion formed according to God's holy oracle. The Jewish religion was formed according to the Divine Word. It worships the one true God in the correct way. No other religion can compare with it.

However, religion does not belong to God's economy and it cannot fulfill God's purpose. God never intended to have a religion. Yes, God did give to His people His Holy Word, the Old Testament, and He did tell them how to contact Him. There is no doubt about this. However, God had no intention of having a religion. Religion is a human invention, a product of the fallen human mind. It is the best invention of human culture. But, concerning God's economy, religion is God's worst enemy. It is absolutely against His economy. I say again that God had no intention of establishing a religion. His intention was to give His Holy Word to His people, revealing to them that the coming One, the Son of God, would be their salvation and life for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This coming One would be everything to them--righteousness, holiness, redemption and glory. The Jewish people did not have this

realization. Instead, they selected portions of the commandments in God's Holy Word and used them to devise rituals and regulations. They put together these commandments, rituals, and regulations and formed a religion. What is a religion? The best definition of it is not found in Webster's dictionary. Religion is to worship God and to behave ourselves without Christ. Religion is just you trying your best to worship God, to behave properly to please God, and to be a perfect person--all without Christ. Although everything may be good--you worship God according to the regulations and you behave yourself--it is all void of Christ. It seems that people have Christ in Christianity, but mostly that is simply Christ in term. If you only have Christ in term, that also is religion. We must have Christ as reality. Only with Christ as our reality are we outside of religion.

When the Lord Jesus came, He came as the One who was prophesied in the Old Testament. He was the One who came to be salvation, life, righteousness, holiness, redemption, glory, and everything to God's people. But, when He came, God's people, the Jews, were fully occupied with their religion. They had no room in their hearts for this coming One. If you read the four gospels, you will see that wherever the Lord went and wherever He was, He was opposed by that typical religion formed according to God's Holy Word. Those religionists opposed this living One according to their religion. They thought that they were opposing Christ for God. They even sentenced this living One to death in their attempt to protect God. According to their realization, when Jesus said that He was the Son of God, He was speaking blasphemy, making Himself equal to God (5:18). It seems that they said, "We have only one God and no other. Our God is Jehovah Elohim. We don't have a God by the name of Jesus. If You say that You are the Son of God, You are making Yourself equal to God and are blaspheming. We must put You to death." That was religion.

In principle, the situation is the same today. Many religious people worship God and try their best to please Him, to behave themselves, and to make themselves

perfect. Yet, it is all without Christ. This kind of religion is always in opposition to Christ and to the genuine followers of Christ in life. This opposition is not revealed in John 3 or 4; we find it in John 5. In the case of the impotent man, the opposition from religion is completely exposed. This chapter unveils the inadequacy of the typical religion and its opposition to Christ. In this chapter, the main thing on the negative side that we must see is the inadequacy, the vanity, of this religion and the opposition of this religion to Christ. Praise the Lord that on the positive side this chapter shows us the adequacy, the sufficiency, of Christ, the Son of God, as life to enliven people. Christ as life is sufficient to enliven us.

This case is an allegory, and every aspect of it must be allegorized. For many years I read this chapter again and again. I did not understand it and I was very troubled. In studying the Bible, I was accustomed to finding the central point. But even after studying this chapter many times, I could not discover the central point. It was easy to find the central point in chapter three--regeneration--and also in chapter four--the living water. Tell me, what is the central point of chapter five? I used verse 24 of this chapter quite often in gospel preaching, but I still did not grasp the central point of this chapter as a whole.

A. The Inadequacy of Religion's Law-keeping

The central point of this case, on the negative side, is to show the inadequacy of law-keeping in the typical religion. Law-keeping was the main thing in Judaism. Every Jew respects the law and believes in keeping it. The Jews realize that, apart from keeping the law, they have no way to please God, to behave themselves, and to perfect themselves. Any typical Jew will tell you that, next to God, nothing is as great or as important as the law. God is number one and the law is number two. So, law-keeping is everything to that typical religion.

1. The Good Things of the Typical Religion

The Jewish religion includes at least seven items: the holy city Jerusalem, the holy temple, the holy feast, the holy Sabbath, the angels, Moses, and the Holy Scriptures. When you add these seven items together, they equal Judaism, the Jewish religion. These items are excellent and wonderful things. If you ask me what is in Judaism, I would tell you at least seven things: 1) the holy city, 2) the holy temple, 3) the feasts for enjoyment, 4) the Sabbath days of rest, 5) the visiting angels, 6) Moses, the law-giver, and 7) the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Along with these seven items of Judaism, there was also the means of healing, because there was the healing pool of water. The significance of this picture is that the means of healing is always with the typical religion. Judaism is the typical religion which has something that can heal you. The pool in Jerusalem signifies that the means of healing is in that typical religion.

But there is a requirement--you must have strength in order to walk and act. Whenever a chance is given for you to receive the benefits of this religion, you must have the strength to be first and the ability to walk. This case is a sign, showing us that here is a typical religion with many good and holy items which can heal you, but it requires your strength to walk and act. Even though you are second, you will not obtain the benefits of this good religion, because you are not first.

2. The Practice of the Law-keeping

Let us now consider some aspects of the practice of law-keeping. The sheepgate (5:2) signifies the entrance to the law-keeping religion's sheepfold (10:1). The name of the pool, Bethesda, means house of mercy, signifying that the people who practiced law-keeping realized that they needed the mercy of God because they were impotent, weak, and wretched, as portrayed in Romans 7:7-24. The

porches, like a sheepfold, signify the law-keeping religion's shelter, and the number five denotes responsibility. The angel who stirred up the water signifies the agent through which the law, which could not give life, was given (Gal. 3:19, 21). The stirring up of the water to make people well signifies the practice of the law-keeping trying to make people perfect. By considering these aspects, we can see the situation of law-keeping, which is the major thing in the typical religion.

3. The Impossibility of the Law-keeping

It is impossible for man to keep the law. No one can do it. Just as people cannot walk up to the heavens, neither can they keep the law. Romans 8:3 says that it is impossible to keep the law, because the law is weak through the flesh. All flesh is too weak to keep the law. This is clearly portrayed in the case of the impotent man.

The impotent man had been sick for thirty-eight years. He was unable to move. He was filled with expectation when he saw the waters stirring, but it was impossible for him to get there in time. Because he was impotent, unable to move, he could not receive healing. Likewise, due to our impotence, we cannot keep the law. The law is good, holy, and spiritual. There is no problem with the law; the problem is with us.

Man is not only sick, but also dead. We know from 5:25 that, in the eyes of the Lord, the impotent man was a dead person. How can a dead person walk? If he is to walk, he must first be made alive. As long as you cannot make a dead person live, he can do nothing. Galatians 3:21 says that the law cannot give life. The law only makes demands upon people; it never supplies them with life. Due to the lack of life, man is absolutely unable to keep the law. If you are still religious, still trying to keep the law, let me ask you a question. Are you dead or alive? You must admit that you are dead. Since you are a dead person, how can you keep the law? A dead person can do nothing.

Because of the weakness of the flesh and because of the

lack of life, it is impossible for man to keep the law. Although there are an angel, the water, and the stirring of the water, there is no way for you to fulfill the requirement of getting to the water to be healed. This is a clear picture showing us that the impotent and dead people find it impossible to keep the law. There is no hope for man with the law. With respect to the law, we are helpless and hopeless cases.

Today, we have an even better religion--even the best religion. But do you realize that the best religion requires you to do something? It requires you to walk, to act, and to be the first before you can obtain its benefits. Perhaps you have discovered that you are too weak to obtain what your religion has to offer. This indicates that you are where the impotent man was--under the five porches. We are like the impotent people under the law-keeping shelter.

4. The Sick People Under the Law-keeping Shelter, in Religion's Fold

A multitude of sick people lay in the porches. This signifies that under the law-keeping shelter, in religion's fold, there are many people who are blind, unable to see; lame, unable to walk; and withered, being short of life. They have no joy or peace, only suffering. The impotent man had no joy, even on the joyful day of the feast (5:1), and he had no rest, even on the Sabbath day (5:9). The sick people were helpless and hopeless, dead in the eyes of the Lord.

There was the means of healing in the law-keeping religion, but it did not profit the impotent man, because he had no strength to fulfill its requirements. Religion's law-keeping depends upon man's effort, man's doing, and man's make-up. Since man is impotent, religion's law-keeping becomes inadequate. The holy city, the holy temple, the holy feast, the holy Sabbath, the angels, Moses, and the Holy Scriptures--all of these were the good things of that religion, but they could do nothing for this impotent man. In the eyes of the Lord, he was a dead

person, in need not only of healing, but also of enlivening. With the Lord's enlivening there is no requirement. As we shall see, the impotent man heard His voice and was enlivened. The significance of this sign is that when the practice of law-keeping in the Jewish religion became an impossibility due to the impotence of man, the Son of God came to enliven the dead. The law could not give life, but the Son of God gives life to the dead (5:21). "While we were yet weak" (Rom. 5:6), He came to enliven us.

B. The Sufficiency of the Son's Life-giving

We have seen that this case on the negative side exposes the inadequacy and vanity of the law-keeping religion. That religion had so many good things--the holy city, the holy temple, the angels, the Holy Scriptures, the holy feasts, the holy Sabbath, and the pool, but none of these good things could help the dead people. The holy city could not help the impotent man; neither could the holy temple, the Holy Scriptures, nor the holy days. Although it was a feast day, he had no joy, and although it was the Sabbath day, he had no rest. Nothing could help him. He was a hopeless and helpless case. Suddenly, a little man came into this situation. It was not an archangel, but a little man named Jesus. He had no beauty or attraction, and no one paid attention to Him. He came directly to the sick man. Just as the Father in eternity past foresaw the Samaritan woman and the Son went to find her at Jacob's well, so the Father also foresaw the impotent man, and the Son came to him while he was lying at the pool. He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" That meant, "Would you like to be healed?" The impotent man knew nothing beyond the pool, the water, and the angel who stirred the water. He also knew that he had no hope or ability in himself. So he explained the situation to the Lord Jesus. Then the Lord Jesus said, "Rise, pick up your bed, and walk." The impotent man heard the enlivening word of the living, life-giving Lord and was healed. We may think that he rose up and walked before he was healed. But this is

not true. He was healed before he rose up, took his bed, and walked. Note the sequence in verse 9. "And immediately the man became well, and picked up his bed and walked." "And immediately the man became well" precedes "picked up his bed and walked." He was cured before he rose up. He was cured when he heard the voice of the living Son of God. It was his hearing of the living word of the Lord that quickened him. Formerly the bed carried the impotent man, but now the enlivened man carried the bed.

If I had been the impotent man, I probably would have said, "Sir, I can't make it. I have been relying upon this bed for thirty-eight years. The bed has been carrying me all this time. How can you tell me to pick it up? I can't do what you say." We should never argue with the Lord's word. We should simply say, "Amen," to whatever He says and do it accordingly. Do not argue or reason. If you reason, you will lose His blessing. How good it was that the impotent man not only rose up, but also picked up his bed and walked. He was not only healed; he was enlivened. According to verses 24 and 25, this is for him as a dead man to pass out of death into life and live. In the principle set forth in chapter two, this is the changing of death into life.

We do not need religion's pool with its water and we do not need the angel. Compared with Jesus, religion's pool and angel are poor indeed. When we have Jesus, we do not need anything else. What is the use of the holy city, the holy temple, and the holy angel? Neither the feasts nor the Sabbaths mean anything to us. They do not do us any good. It is Jesus who enlivens. We all have to see this. This is life's enlivening. This is the central point of this case on the positive side.

II. RELIGION'S OPPOSITION TO LIFE

A. Life's Enlivening Breaking Religion's Ritual

In 5:10-16 we see religion's opposition to life. "The Jews then said to the one who was healed, It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to pick up your bed"

(5:10). Life's enlivening breaks religion's ritual. Religion is offended by life and begins its opposition to life from this point. The Sabbath is for man (Mark 2:27) and should be a rest to man. Religion's law-keeping did not bring rest to the man sick for thirty-eight years, but life's enlivening did it in one second. Yet, the religious people cared only for the ritual of Sabbath-keeping; they had no concern for the sick man's rest. What a life we have! We do not need any religious things. As long as we have Jesus, all religious things mean nothing. As long as we have Jesus, we have life. Let religion with all its things go. They could not give us life, but Jesus does. Jesus enlivens us. Jesus gives us life. Life brings us joy. Life brings us rest. Life brings us light and everything we need. Praise the Lord!

The real significance of this case is the difference between religion and Christ, which is the difference between the law-keeping of religion and the enlivening of Christ. Religion's law-keeping is good, but we are weak. Religion's law-keeping may be effective but we cannot meet its requirements. There is no requirement with Christ, for when He comes to us, He speaks His living word so that we can hear His voice. If there is any requirement, it is simply to hear His living word. When we hear His voice, we pass from death into life. The contrast in this case is that religion requires, but Christ's word quickens.

B. Religion Trying to Quench Life

The law-keeping religion could not give life to the impotent man. When Christ enlivened this man with life, that religion persecuted Him, trying to quench life, because He did it on the Sabbath (5:16). That religion cared for the keeping of its Sabbath at the sacrifice of the impotent man's rest. But Christ cared for the man's rest at the sacrifice of their Sabbath-keeping. This surely offended that religion. In principle, the situation of today's religion is the same. The religious people still care for their religious rituals at the sacrifice of people's life matters. The Lord is still the same, caring at any cost for people's life matters at the sacrifice of all religious rituals. This is

why we who have been enlivened by Christ are opposed and persecuted by the people who cling to their religious rituals.

III. THE SON EQUAL WITH THE FATHER IN GIVING LIFE AND EXECUTING JUDGMENT

A. The Son Being Equal with the Father

The religious Jews persecuted Jesus because on their Sabbath He worked to enliven the impotent man. Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (5:17). In their religious concept, they were resting in keeping their Sabbath. But they did not know that there was no rest for the Father and the Son as long as the poor sinners were not saved. While they were resting in keeping their Sabbath, the Father and the Son were still working that the sinners might receive life and have rest. This not only offended the religious Jews, but also caused them to consider that Jesus was blaspheming. because, according to their concept, He "not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (5:18). In their consideration, that was a blasphemy to God. Yet, it was this "blaspheming" One who enlivened the impotent man. His enlivening of that man testifies that He is equal with God the Father in giving life to people.

B. Both the Father and the Son Working for Redemption and Building

Although God's work in creation was finished (Gen. 2:1-3), the Father and the Son were still working for redemption and building (John 5:17, 19-20). The religious Jews kept the Sabbath of creation. They did not know that because of man's fall the rest of that Sabbath was broken. Neither did they know that the Father and the Son were still working for fallen man's redemption in order to fulfill God's original purpose, which is the building of God's eternal habitation. What God did was the old creation.

What the Father and the Son are doing is the new creation through redemption for God's building. This work includes the Son's life-giving, which is manifested in this case. In this matter, the Father and the Son are one. Whatever the Father wants to do in the matter of life-giving, the Son does it accordingly.

C. The Son of God Giving Life to the Dead

The Son gives life to the dead. Verse 21 says, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He wills." In verse 24 we see that whoever hears the word of the Son and believes in Him who sent Him has eternal life and has passed out of death into life. Verse 25 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." The dead persons mentioned in this verse are not those who are buried in their graves, but the living dead ones. They are not dead physically, but, according to Ephesians 2:1-5 and Colossians 2:13, are dead in their spirit. In the eyes of the Lord, all of the people living on earth are dead in their spirit. The phrase, "An hour is coming and now is," refers to the very time when the Lord spoke these words. Many at that time heard His living words and consequently were made alive. Hence, "shall live" in this verse means to be alive in their spirit. It is not the resurrection in the physical body as is mentioned in verses 28 and 29. For twenty centuries, from the time that the Lord spoke these words until the present, thousands and thousands of people have heard the living voice of the Son of God and have been enlivened with life. We also have heard the living word of the Lord and have been made alive. We also were the impotent persons under the five porches, for we were blind, lame, and withered. In short, we were dead. Then the Lord came to visit us, and we heard the living word of the gospel that enlivened us and made us alive. We have truly passed out of death and have entered into life.

In the matter of life the Son is the same as the Father.

"As the Father has life in Himself, so He gave to the Son to have life in Himself" (5:26). Both the Father and the Son have life in themselves. So the Son can and does enliven people with life as the Father desires. In life's enlivening, the Son is truly one with the Father.

D. The Son of Man Executing Judgment Over the Unbelieving Ones

The Son of Man will execute judgment over all the unbelieving ones (5:22-23, 27, 30). As the Son of God (5:25), the Lord can give life (5:21), and as the Son of Man, He can execute judgment (5:27). Since He is a man, He is fully qualified to judge man. Acts 17:31 says that God will judge the world "by that man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained." Romans 2:16 says, "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." Second Timothy 4:1 says, "Jesus Christ shall judge the quick and the dead." The Father "gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man" (5:27). And the Father gave all judgment to the Son "that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (5:22-23). The Son will judge justly according to the Father's will (5:30). He is one with the Father in the matter of life's enlivening. He is also one with Him in the matter of judgment.

E. Two Kinds of Resurrection

Let us read verses 28 and 29. "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: those who have done the good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done the evil to the resurrection of judgment." All of the physically dead people who have been buried in graves will be resurrected. Please note the difference between these two verses and verse 25. In verse 25, the dead shall hear His voice, but in verse 28 all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice. Those who are in the tombs are different from those who are dead. Verse 25 refers to the

dead living on the earth; verse 28 refers to the dead buried in the earth. Those buried in their graves shall be resurrected at the Lord's second coming.

In addition to the resurrection in the spirit which we saw in verse 25, verse 29 distinguishes two kinds of physical resurrections. The resurrection in our spirit means that our spirit is made alive. This is also regeneration in our spirit. The regeneration in our spirit is a resurrection made by the Lord Jesus with the divine life, which is Himself. In addition to this, there are two kinds of physical resurrections. The "resurrection of life" is the resurrection of the saved believers before the millennium (the thousand years, Rev. 20:4, 6; 1 Cor. 15:23, 52; 1 Thes. 4:16). The dead believers will be resurrected to enjoy eternal life at the return of the Lord Jesus. Hence, it is called the resurrection of life. When the Lord Jesus comes back, all His dead believers will be resurrected and will be taken up with the living believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:17). Then the overcoming believers will reign as kings with the Lord Jesus for a thousand years. The "resurrection of judgment" refers to the resurrection of the unbelievers after the thousand years (Rev. 20:5, 12). All the dead unbelievers will be resurrected after the thousand years to be judged at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Hence, it is called the resurrection of judgment. We, the believers, will enjoy and participate in the resurrection of life, but the unbelievers will suffer the judgment of eternal perdition at the resurrection of judgment.

IV. THE SON'S FOURFOLD TESTIMONY

In 5:31-47 we see the Son's fourfold testimony: the testimony of John the Baptist (vv. 32-35); the testimony of the Son's work (v. 36); the testimony of the Father (vv. 37-38); and the testimony of the Scriptures (vv. 39-47). It is possible to have these four witnesses and yet not have Christ Himself. The Jews at one time were joyful over John the Baptist, but they did not realize that he was only the witness of Christ. The testimony of John the Baptist

was to direct them to Christ. The Jews also saw the works of Christ, yet they would not come to Him. They saw His signs, miracles, and wonders, but they would not realize who the Lord was and come to Him. The Father testified concerning the Son, but they did not have His word abiding in them, for they did not believe the Son whom He sent. They even searched the Scriptures that testified of Him, but they failed to come to Him that they might have eternal life.

To "search the Scriptures" may be separated from "come to Me." The Jewish religionists searched the Scriptures, but were not willing to come to the Lord. These two should be kept together. Since the Scriptures testify concerning the Lord, they should not be separated from Him. We may contact the Scriptures and yet not contact the Lord. Only the Lord can give life. We should never separate the Scriptures from the Lord Himself. Whenever we search the Word, we must come to the Lord Himself. We must make searching the Word and touching the Lord one thing. Whenever we study the Bible, we must open our spirit to the Lord. While our eyes are reading the words and our mind is understanding them, our spirit must be exercised to contact the Lord through the Scriptures. Then we shall not only have the understanding of the black and white letters in our mentality, but also have the life in our spirit.

All of the signs, manifestations, and gifts are merely witnesses by which we may contact Christ. The problem is that people today have the testimonies, but fail to contact the Lord Himself. It is possible to have the signs, the manifestations, the gifts, and the knowledge of the Scriptures, but not come to contact the Lord Himself. It is only the Lord Himself who will give you life. It is not the signs, the gifts, or even the Scriptures, but it is the Lord Himself who will enliven you and impart life into you.

Once more I want to stress the point that the Apostle John shows all of these cases to indicate man's real condition and to reveal Christ as our life supply. In the

first case, we were good persons; in the second, sinful persons; in the third, dying persons; and in the fourth, impotent persons. In the first case, the Lord is our regenerating life; in the second, our satisfying life; in the third, our healing life; and in the fourth, our enlivening life. By understanding these four cases, we can realize where we are and who we are, and we can know where the Lord is and who He is. Then we shall know what we need and what the Lord will supply to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

THE NEED OF THE HUNGRY--LIFE'S FEEDING

(1)

The Gospel of John is a book of pictures. It speaks of the divine life and of the functions of this divine life. Both the divine life and its functions are spiritual things. Since it is very difficult to describe them in human language, the Apostle John received the wisdom from the Lord to write his gospel, not only with plain words, but also with figures. Because plain words are inadequate, John also used figures and pictures. In a sense, every case is a picture. In chapter five we saw a vivid picture of the enlivening of the impotent man. In chapter six we have another picture showing us the need of the hungry and life's feeding.

I. THE HUNGRY WORLD AND THE FEEDING CHRIST

Verses 1 through 15 of John 6 reveal to us the hungry world and the feeding Christ.

A. A Contrast to the Foregoing Case in Chapter Five

The case in chapter six portrays a scene which reveals where we are in our condition. There is a contrast between the scene of chapter five with the one in chapter six. The scene in chapter five is in the holy city, but the scene in chapter six is in the wilderness. A pool is in the scene of the previous case, and a sea is in this case. The people in the former case are associated with the pool, and the people in the latter case are involved with the sea. The

pool is related to religion's healing, while the sea is related to the people's living. The person in the fourth case was very weak, needing healing and enlivening, but the people in the fifth case are hungry, needing food and satisfaction. The pool is sacred, being of the Jewish religion; the sea is secular, being of the human society. The person by the pool was impotent, needed life's enlivening, and was waiting for healing. The people in this case are hungry, need life's feeding, and are seeking for nourishment.

B. The Sea Signifying the Satan-corrupted World

In typology, the land signifies the earth created by God for man to live upon, and the sea signifies the world corrupted by Satan in which fallen mankind lives. The sea represents Satan's organized and systematized world where humanity is occupied and enveloped. In this world mankind is hungry and has no satisfaction. In this world mankind is troubled and has no peace. The scene in this chapter portrays all of humanity living in the world corrupted by Satan. They are not living on the land created by God. In the world corrupted by Satan there is no real satisfaction; there is always hunger. Neither is there any peace, for the wind and the waves are always on the sea making trouble for man.

C. The Mountain Signifying the Transcendent Position

In typology, a mountain signifies a transcendent position. Moses was brought to a mountain in order to receive God's revelation (Exo. 24:12). The Lord Jesus went to the top of a mountain when He was transfigured (Matt. 17:1-2). The Apostle John was also brought to the transcendent position of a mountain when he saw the eternal vision concerning the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10).

So, in this picture the sea is on a low level, and the mountain is in a transcendent position. The sea signifies the world corrupted by Satan, and the mountain signifies the high, transcendent position where Christ is and where we must be with Him. The Lord did not feed the people by the sea. He led the multitude to the top of a mountain. If you wish to be fed by Christ and to be satisfied with Christ, you must go with Him to a high place. Satisfaction with Christ depends upon our being led to and fed with Christ on the mountain. The mountain is above both the Satan-corrupted world and the God-created earth. Neither the sea nor the earth is a suitable place for us to feed on Christ. If we are going to feed on Him, we must be transcendent above the Satan-corrupted world and above the God-created earth. If we are to enjoy His feeding, we must be on the mountain with Him.

D. The Passover Signifying Christ as the Redeeming Lamb of God

The Passover in verse 4 signifies Christ as the redeeming Lamb of God who shed His blood for our redemption and gave His flesh for our feeding (1 Cor. 5:7). At the Passover, people slay the redeeming lamb, strike its blood, and eat its flesh (Exo. 12:3-11). This typifies Christ as the redeeming Lamb of God who was slain that we might eat His flesh and drink His blood, thus taking Him in as the life supply for us to live by.

In Genesis 2:9, Christ was typified by the tree of life. The tree of life, belonging to the vegetable life, is good for producing and generating, but has no blood for redeeming. At the time of Genesis 2, man was not yet involved with sin and thus had no need for redemption. However, in Genesis 3 man fell. Immediately after man's fall, God came in to deal with that fall by slaying sacrificial lambs to redeem Adam and Eve and to make coats of skins to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). Thus, the vegetable life itself is no longer adequate for fallen man; there is the

need of the animal life. We need life not only for feeding, but also for redeeming. So, in chapter six of John we firstly have the barley loaf, which belongs to the vegetable life and is good for feeding. As we shall see, since man has fallen and needs redeeming as well as feeding, the Lord Jesus turned the bread into flesh (6:51b). The bread is made from barley, while the flesh contains blood. Barley bread is of the vegetable life, but the flesh with the blood is of the animal life. Eventually, in John 6 Christ is shown not only as the tree of life signified by the bread, but also as the Lamb of God signified by the flesh and blood. In the Lamb of God there are two elements: the blood for redeeming and the meat, the flesh, for feeding. At the Passover, the people struck the blood and ate the meat. It is the same with us today. We accept Christ in the way of redeeming as well as in the way of feeding. He is both the vegetable life and the animal life, the feeding life and the redeeming life.

E. Five Barley Loaves Signifying the Generating Aspect of Christ's Life

The loaves are of the vegetable life, signifying the generating aspect of Christ's life. As the generating life, Christ grows in the land, the God-created earth. In order to regenerate us, He grew on the God-created earth for reproducing.

1. Barley Signifying Christ Resurrected

Barley signifies Christ resurrected. According to the Scriptures, barley represents the firstfruit of resurrection. The Lord told His people in Leviticus 23 to offer the firstfruits of their harvest each year. In the land of Palestine, barley ripens earlier than any other crop and is the first of the harvest. Hence, it typifies the resurrected Christ (Lev. 23:10). Therefore, barley signifies the resurrected Christ, who is our life supply. As the firstfruit,

He can become our bread of life. So, barley loaves represent Christ in resurrection as food to us. The feeding Christ is the resurrected Christ.

Perhaps someone will ask how Christ could have been resurrected in John 6 when He had not yet been crucified. Even before His crucifixion, Christ was the resurrection. In John 11:25 He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." He did not say, "I shall be the resurrection," for He was the resurrection already. When the Lord told Martha that her brother would rise again, she, through her poor expounding of the Scriptures, postponed the resurrection for two thousand years to the coming age. When she did that, the Lord seemed to say, "I am the resurrection now. With Me, the eternal One, there is no time element. The past, present, and future are all the same to Me." Eternal means to have no time element. Both before and after His crucifixion, He is the resurrected Christ. It is the resurrected Christ who can be life to us and can be bread to feed us. We are feeding on the resurrected Christ.

2. Five Signifying Responsibility

The number five signifies responsibility, the responsibility of Christ in feeding us. The number five is composed of four plus one. The number four represents the creatures (Rev. 4:6), and the number one represents the Creator (1 Cor. 8:6). The Creator and the creatures added together take responsibility. The number five is not composed of three plus two, but of four plus one. Look at your hand. It is composed of four fingers and a thumb. It would be very awkward if your hand had three fingers and two thumbs. Four fingers with one thumb enable the hand to do many things. The five barley loaves signify that the Lord as the Creator (one) added to the creatures (four) bears the responsibility to feed us. In His humanity, the resurrected Christ bears this responsibility.

F. Two Fishes Signifying the Redeeming Aspect of Christ's Life

The two fishes are of the animal life, signifying the redeeming aspect of Christ's life. As the redeeming life, He lives in the sea, the Satan-corrupted world. The barley comes out of the land, representing the earth created by God, while the fishes come out of the sea, signifying the world corrupted by Satan. The Lord Jesus came not only to the earth created by God, but also to the world corrupted by Satan. If He had come only to the earth created by God, He would only have been represented by the barley loaves. But since He also came into the world corrupted by Satan, He is also represented by the two fishes. He had nothing to do with the corrupted world. Just as fish are not salty though they live in salt water, so the Lord was not corrupted by Satan though He lived in the Satan-corrupted world. The Lord is like the fish that can live in the salty environment of the sea without being salted by it. In order to redeem us, He lived in the satanic and sinful world. But yet He was sinless, unaffected by the sinful world. As the generating life, Christ lived as a proper man in the God-created earth. As the redeeming life, Christ lived in the Satan-corrupted world without being affected by its corruption.

The number two means testimony (Rev. 11:3). The two fishes are a testimony that Christ is sufficient to bear responsibility in feeding us.

We have seen that barley, which is of the vegetable life, represents the generating life and that the fish, which are of the animal life, represent the redeeming life. Now we must ask, if the human race had never fallen, would Christ as our regenerating life still have been necessary? Yes. Before the fall of Adam, God put him in front of the tree of life. The tree of life has nothing to do with sin. Therefore, man must take God as his life by eating the tree of life. Even John 12:24 states that the Lord was the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died, after

which He was raised up to become many grains. This too had nothing to do with sin, for, according to the Scriptures, the vegetable life is to produce or to generate much fruit. The one grain of wheat bears many other grains. Hence, it represents the generating life.

As we have seen, before man fell, he ate only of the vegetable life (Gen. 1:29), but after he fell, he also ate of the animal life (Gen. 9:3). Before the fall there was no need for the shedding of blood. But after man fell he needed the animal life because redemption requires the shedding of blood. The vegetable life was sufficient before man sinned, but after he sinned the animal life became necessary.

The offerings in the Old Testament always had both the vegetable life and the animal life. For example, the Passover had the slain lamb, which represented the animal life, and the unleavened bread, which represented the vegetable life. These two different lives are necessary in order to meet all of our need. Also, the meat offerings of Leviticus were accompanied with the meal offering. The meal offerings were made of fine flour, vegetable oil, and frankincense--items of the vegetable life. In Leviticus, the meal offerings could never be accepted without the meat offerings. That was exactly what Cain did. He only offered vegetables to God and was rejected, while his brother Abel offered the sacrifice of an animal whose blood had been shed and was accepted (Gen. 4:3-5).

We need the Lord Jesus to be both our generating life and our redeeming life. By His death on the cross two things came out of Him--the blood to redeem us and the water to generate us (John 19:34). His shed blood brought redemption to us, and the water from His wounded side imparted His life to us. The five barley loaves were accompanied by the two fishes. It is impossible for barley to shed blood; therefore, it could never redeem us. The two fishes represent the animal life for redemption. The Lord is represented by both the barley loaves and the fishes, for He is our vegetable life to generate us and our animal life to redeem us.

G. Both Loaves and Fishes Signifying the Smallness of Christ Being the Life Supply to Us

It is interesting to note that the five barley loaves and two fishes came from a small boy, not a big man. This is very meaningful, because the Lord wants to indicate to us that He is our life, not as someone big, but as someone small. Both barley loaves and fishes are small items, signifying the smallness of Christ as the life supply to us. The miracle-seeking people considered Him as the promised prophet (6:14; Deut. 18:15, 18) and would have forced Him to be their king (6:15), but He would not assume the position of a giant in religion. Rather, He preferred to be small loaves and little fishes that He might be small enough for people to eat. All of this reveals the smallness of Christ. He is small enough for us to eat. Whatever we eat must be considerably smaller than we are. We are much bigger than the bread and fish that we eat. We cannot eat something that is larger than we are. If it were larger than we are, it could eat us. Everything we eat is even smaller than our mouth. If it is larger than our mouth, it must first be cut into pieces. A small boy brought five small loaves and two small fishes. This means that the smallness of the Lord Jesus is most precious to us.

Most Christians, including ourselves, always think of our Lord as someone great. But in John 6 the Lord Jesus does not want to be great. He wants to remain small enough to eat. There is a song that says, "How Great Thou Art," but we have a sweeter song which praises the Lord for His smallness. If the Lord were only great, we could never touch Him. Praise Him that He has become so small! Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years and yet have failed to realize how small the Lord is. To think of the Lord as a great prophet is merely a religious thought. If the Lard only became a great prophet and was enthroned as a great king, He never could have been a little piece of bread. He never could have been our food supply. Before He could become our food, He first had to become small. Thus, He was symbolized by five small barley loaves and two small fishes brought by one small boy. We need to be

impressed with the smallness as well as with the greatness of the Lord. He was even born in a small manger, brought up in a small town, and raised in a lowly family. He did not come to be a religious giant. He was a little Nazarene, having nothing to do with greatness or bigness. Oh, He is so small!

Are you bigger or smaller than a piece of bread? You must admit, or course, that a piece of bread is smaller. Since the Lord comes to you as a piece of the bread of life, you must say to Him, "Lord, I praise You that You are smaller than I am. Now You can become my food. If You were greater than I, You could never be my food." As far as the greatness of our Lord is concerned, of course, no one is as great as He is, but we must also be impressed that as far as the smallness of our Lord is concerned, no one is as small as He is. He is bread that is small enough for us to eat.

In Matthew 15 we see that the Lord not only became the loaves, but also the crumbs, which are small fragments of a loaf. Many of us were not qualified to take Him as loaves. However, surely we are qualified to take Him as crumbs. Do you remember what the woman of Canaan said to the Lord when she asked Him to help her and He said that it was "not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"? She said, "Yes, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matt. 15:27). The Canaanite woman was not offended by the Lord's hard words and by the fact that He referred to her as a dog. She seemed to be telling the Lord, "Yes, Lord, I am a Gentile dog, but the Gentile dog has his portion. The children's portion is on the table, and the dog's portion is under the table. Lord, You must realize that now You are not on the table but under the table, because the naughty children have cast You away. Now that You are under the table, You can be my portion." The Lord admired her faith. We all need to enjoy the Lord in such a lowly way. Do not wait to go to heaven to enjoy

Him. Get Him from under the table where He is right now. Praise the Lord that on the earth He is so small and available now! He is available at any time according to our appetite. However much we can take of Him, He will be that much to us. And the leftovers always surpass what we can eat

H. Twelve Baskets Signifying the Overflow of the Riches of Christ's Life Supply

This chapter not only brings out the smallness of the Lord, but also the richness of the Lord. Just five loaves are rich enough to feed five thousand people. The twelve baskets left over signify the overflow of the riches of Christ's life supply, which fed people over one thousand times. That five loaves fed five thousand people means that it fed them one thousand times. According to the Scriptures, the number one thousand signifies a complete unit. For example, one day in the court of the Lord is better than a thousand (Psa. 84:10). One thousand is a full unit. Hence, five loaves can fill five thousand people. This reveals how rich and how unlimited the Lord is. The multitude could eat as much as they wanted, for the supply was unlimited. Even two little fishes were sufficient for all.

Twelve baskets of fragments were left over. Why were there not five, eight, or eleven baskets left over? Because the number twelve signifies eternal completeness and eternal perfectness. This means that even the fragments are eternally full and eternally complete. Even a small, fragmented Christ is full of a richness which can never be exhausted. He is so small and yet so unlimited. Have you ever compared His smallness with His unlimitedness? He is the little Nazarene, yet He has been feeding all of the generations. He has never been reduced. Before the feeding of the five thousand, there were five loaves and two fishes; after the feeding of the five thousand, there were twelve baskets left over. Therefore, after the feeding

of the five thousand, more surplus remained than what was there originally. This portrays the richness of Christ, for there is always something left over after the multitude has been fed.

For twenty centuries, Christ has been feeding thousands upon thousands of people. Today, He is still rich, for there are still twelve baskets full. We need the revelation of the richness of the smallness of Christ. In form, He is the five loaves and the two fishes, yet thousands and thousands of people have been eating Him for twenty centuries. And He is still here. He can never be reduced or exhausted. Oh, how we must praise Him for His smallness in form and for His richness without limit!

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE NEED OF THE HUNGRY--LIFE'S FEEDING

(2)

II. THE TROUBLED WORLD AND THE PEACE-GIVING CHRIST

We live in a troubled world. The world is altogether troublesome. Family life, school life, and every type of occupation--all are troublesome. Who is at peace--the president, the senators, the congressmen? No one is at peace. Regardless of whom you are, you are troubled. We all have troubles. Do not boast that your marriage is the best. I do not believe that even one marriage is absolutely good; every marriage is at least somewhat poor. By God's sovereign ordination, we all must marry--there is no escape--but everyone who is married finds himself in trouble.

Christ comes into this troublesome world as the peace-giving Christ (6:16-21). John 6 not only portrays the hungry world, but also the troubled world. Christ is the feeding Christ to the hungry world and the peace-giving Christ to the troubled world. The world may trouble everyone, but it cannot trouble Him.

A. The Stirred-up Sea and the Blowing Wind Signifying the Troubles in Human Life

The stirred-up sea and the strong blowing wind signify the troubles in human life. Under the sea are demons, and

in the air are evil spirits. That is why we have trouble. How could we ever expect to have a peaceful day? We are in the wrong place for that.

B. Jesus Walking on the Sea Signifying His Overruling All the Troubles of Human Life

Jesus walked on the sea (6:19). This signifies that the Lord can overrule all the troubles of human life. He can walk on the troubling waves of human life, and all the unrest is under His feet. Christ walked on top of all the waves. It seemed that the more waves there were, the more He enjoyed walking upon them. The waves terrified His disciples, but He trod upon them. He seemed to say, 'Demons, please cause bigger waves. Then I will have more enjoyment. I can walk on top of your waves." This is the peace-giving (Christ.

When the disciples took Him into their boat, immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going (6:21). Do you want to have a peaceful life? If you do, then you must take Jesus into your "boat." Your "boat" may be your married life, family, or occupation. When He comes into your "boat," you will enjoy peace with Him on the journey of human life. If you receive Christ into your marriage, your marriage will be peaceful. If you receive Him into your family, your family will be at peace. If you accept Him into your job, your job will be peaceful. Without Christ, the world is hungry. Without Christ, the world is also troubled. But with Him, we have satisfaction and peace. He is the feeding Christ and the peace-giving Christ. Praise the Lord!

III. THE BREAD OF LIFE

A. Seekers After the Perishing Food

In verses 22 through 31 we find the seekers after the perishing food. They were seeking satisfaction. Regardless

of the kind of food people are seeking, they all are seeking satisfaction. These people were trying to do something and to work for God. They were also seeking for signs and miracles. The concept of fallen man toward God is always that he must do something for God and work for God. This is the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2. The Lord's concept concerning man toward God is that he believe in Him, that is, receive Him as the life and life supply. This is the principle of the tree of life in Genesis 2. The answer to the seeking after the perishing food is to receive the Lord by believing in Him (6:29).

B. Food Abiding to Eternal Life

In verses 32 through 71 we find the food that abides to eternal life. If we read this portion carefully, we find the Lord was incarnated, crucified, resurrected to indwell us, and ascended, and we see that He has become the life-giving Spirit who eventually is embodied in His living Word. Let us now consider each of these aspects.

1. Coming to Man by Being Incarnated to Give Life to Man

Verses 35 through 51 reveal that the Lord has come to man by being incarnated that He might give life to man. By what way can we take the Lord as food, as the bread of life? This chapter reveals the way figuratively, but for many generations people have overlooked it. First of all, the Lord said that He "came down from heaven" (6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). By what way did He come down from heaven? He came down by incarnation. He became a man by partaking of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14). He came in the flesh and He came as a man. The devil and the evil spirits hate this. The only way to test whether or not a person has an evil spirit is to ask the demon or spirit if he would confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). Incarnation is the first step that the Lord took in order to become our life.

Verse 35 says, "Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes in Me shall by no means ever thirst." The bread of life is the life supply in the form of food, like the tree of life (Gen. 2:9), which is also the life supply "good for food." He who comes to the Lord shall never hunger, and he who believes in Him shall never thirst. In the principle set forth in chapter two, this also is the changing of death into life. Death is of the source of the tree of knowledge, and life is of the source of the tree of life.

Verse 46 says, "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except Him Who is from God, He has seen the Father." The Greek preposition translated "from" means "by the side of." The sense here is "from with." The Lord is not only from God, but also with God. While He is from God, He is still with God (8:16, 29; 16:32).

In verse 47 the Lord says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has eternal life." To believe into the Lord is not the same as to believe Him (v. 30). To believe Him means to believe that He is true and real, but to believe into Him means to receive Him and be united with Him as one. The eternal life mentioned in this verse is the divine life, the uncreated life of God, which is not only everlasting as far as time is concerned, but is eternal and divine in nature.

2. Being Slain to be Eaten by Man

The Lord's death was the second step that He took to make Himself available for us to partake of as our food. He died for us, not in an ordinary way, but in a very extraordinary way. He was slain by being crucified on the cross. This death separated His blood from His flesh. If you were a Jew living during that time, you would have been very familiar with this. I once read an article describing how the Jews slew the lamb during the Passover. The article said that the Jews put the lamb on a cross. Of course, we all know that the Roman Empire used

the death penalty of the cross to crucify criminals, but the Jews used this method long before the Roman Empire to slay the lamb at their Passover. They took two wooden bars and formed a cross. They tied two legs at the foot of the cross and fastened the other outstretched legs to the crossbar. Then they slew the lamb so that all its blood was shed. They needed all of its blood to sprinkle on their door frames; therefore, the blood was completely separated from its flesh.

The Lord died in the same manner. In fact, His death occurred at the time of their Passover. We have seen that John 6 was placed in the setting of the Jewish Passover. Thus, the minds of the people were filled with thoughts about the Passover. With this as the background, the Lord told them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Instead of taking the shed blood of the Passover lamb and eating its flesh, they were now to understand that the Lord is the real Lamb for God's Passover. All of their former Passover lambs were a type of Christ. Now He is the real Lamb who will be slain for them. His blood will be shed for their sins, and His flesh will be eaten for their real life. On the one hand, His blood will redeem them from their sins; on the other hand, His flesh will supply them with life.

The Jews did not understand this and even neglected the Lord as the Lamb of God. But today we know that the Lord is the Lamb of God who died for us, shed His blood for the redemption of our sins, and offered His flesh for us to eat as our life. It is by faith that we take His blood, and it is by faith that we eat His flesh. Then we have Him as our life.

In order to be eaten by man, the Lord had to be slain. Nothing can be eaten unless it has first been killed. So, the kitchen is a place of slaughter. For example, it is impossible for us to eat a live cow or chicken. They must first be killed. Even an onion must first be killed before we can eat it. If it is not killed with a knife, it will be killed by our teeth. Likewise, the Lord had to be slain for us to eat Him.

In verse 51b the Lord says, "And the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." At this point, the bread becomes the flesh. We have seen that the bread is of the vegetable life and is only for feeding and that the flesh is of the animal life and is not only for feeding, but also for redeeming. Before the fall of man, the Lord was the tree of life (Gen. 2:9), only for feeding man. After man fell into sin, the Lord became the Lamb (John 1:29), not only for feeding man, but also for redeeming him (Exo. 12:4, 7-8). The Lord gave His body, that is, His flesh, to die for us that we might have life. The blood is added in verse 53, where the Lord says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." The blood is added here because it is necessary for redemption (John 19:34; Heb. 9:22; Matt. 26:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 3:25).

In verse 54 the Lord says, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day." Here flesh and blood are mentioned separately. When blood is separate from flesh, it indicates death. Hence, here the Lord clearly indicated His death, that is, His being slain. He gave His body and shed His blood for us that we might have eternal life. To eat His flesh is to receive by faith all that He did by giving His body for us, and to drink His blood is to receive by faith all that He has accomplished by shedding His blood for us. This kind of eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood is to receive Him, in His redemption, as life and the life supply by believing in what He did for us on the cross. By comparing this verse with verse 47, we see that to eat the Lord's flesh and drink His blood is equal to believing in Him, because to believe is to receive (1:12).

3. Resurrected to Indwell

We have seen that incarnation is the first step and that crucifixion is the second. Resurrection is the third step by which the Lord has made Himself available as our

life. Several times in John 6 the Lord mentions something about "life" and "living." On the one hand, He said that He was the bread of life; on the other hand, He said that He was the living bread (6:35, 51). Do you understand the difference between the bread of life and the living bread? Perhaps you may feel that both phrases mean the same. However, the proper way to study the Word is to investigate both phrases and determine the reason for the difference between them. The bread of life refers to the nature of the bread, which is life; the living bread refers to the condition of the bread, which is living. He is the living bread. Although He was crucified and slain, He is still living. He alone is the living One in resurrection. Verse 56 implies the matter of resurrection. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." This indicates that the Lord had to be resurrected that He might abide in us as our life and life supply. The Lord could not have abode in us before His resurrection. He could only abide in us after His resurrection. Thus, verse 56 indicates that He was going to be resurrected and become the indwelling Spirit.

In verse 57 the Lord says, "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me shall also live because of Me." Eating is to take food into us to be assimilated into our body organically. Hence, to eat the Lord Jesus is to receive Him into us to be assimilated by the regenerated new man in the way of life. Then we live by Him whom we receive. It is by this that He lives in us as the resurrected One (14:19-20). In principle, this also is the changing of death into life.

4. Ascended

Ascension follows resurrection. The Lord's ascension is referred to in verse 62. Responding to His disciples who were murmuring about His words, the Lord said, "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" Here in this verse His ascension is clearly

mentioned. Ascension is the proof of the completion of His redemptive work (Heb. 1:3). The Lord ascended to the Father, and the Father accepted Him. That was a proof that His work on the cross for our redemption was acceptable to the Father. Thus, the Lord was seated at the right hand of the Father. His work on the cross satisfied God the Father.

5. Becoming the Life-giving Spirit

Verse 63 says, "It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." At this point, the Spirit who gives life is brought in. After resurrection and through resurrection, the Lord Jesus, who had become flesh (1:14), became the Spirit who gives life, as is clearly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:45. It is as the life-giving Spirit that He can be the life and life supply to us. When we receive Him as the crucified and resurrected Savior, the Spirit who gives life comes into us to impart eternal life to us.

Many people understand verse 63 incorrectly, thinking that the flesh signifies humanity with its human nature. According to the context, the flesh here refers to the meat of the physical body, the same as in the previous verses where the Lord said that His flesh was edible. The Jews could not understand how He could give His flesh for them to eat. They thought that He would give them the meat of His physical body (v. 52). They did not understand the Lord's word rightly. To them it was a hard word (v. 60). At this point, the Lord said that it is the Spirit that gives life and that the flesh profits nothing. In other words, the Lord told them that He would become the Spirit. He would not be literally in the flesh, but would be transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. Thus, in verse 63 the Lord explained that what He would give them to eat is not the meat of His physical body; the meat, which is of the flesh, profits nothing. What He would give eternally is the Spirit who gives life, who is Himself in resurrection.

What kind of Christ have you received? Have you

received Christ in the flesh or as the Spirit? The Apostle Paul said that formerly some knew Christ in the flesh, but now they know Him in the flesh no longer (2 Cor. 5:16). Now they know Christ as the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Before His death and resurrection, the Lord was incarnated in the flesh; after His death and resurrection, He was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Therefore, the Christ we now receive is not the Christ in the flesh, but the Christ who is the Spirit. When we come to John 20, we shall see that on the evening of His resurrection, He came to His disciples and breathed on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). That was Himself after His resurrection, for after His resurrection He was transfigured into the Spirit. He was no longer in the flesh as He was before His crucifixion. Now He is the Spirit; therefore, they had to receive the Spirit. Before His death, when He was in the flesh, all He could do was be with and among His disciples, but He could not be in them. Now, as the Spirit, it is easy for Him to be within us.

Today, we do not need to contact the Lord physically. Since He is the Spirit, we can contact Him as the Spirit within us. He is the life-giving Spirit. Since He is the Spirit, we can take Him and feed upon Him as our food.

When we receive the Lord Jesus, we get the Spirit who gives life. We can prove this by the matter of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. When we call, "O Lord Jesus," we receive the Spirit. We call on the Lord Jesus, but we receive the Spirit. Why? Because the Lord Jesus today is the Spirit. The fact that we get the Spirit when we call on the name of Jesus is a strong proof that the Lord Jesus is the Spirit today. Whoever says, "Lord Jesus," is in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). Jesus is the name, and the Spirit is the person. The Spirit is the person of Jesus. At this point we need to read John 14:26. "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all things which I said to you." The Father sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, in the name of the Son. The Spirit is sent in the

name of the Son. Who is the Spirit? The Spirit is the person of Jesus. Thus, we have both the name and the person. The best way to get the Spirit is to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Whenever you call, "O Lord Jesus," you receive the person, and the person is the Spirit. Whenever we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we get the Spirit. The Spirit is the person of the dear Lord Jesus.

6. Embodied in the Word of Life

Christ, as the bread of life, is embodied in the Word of life. Although the Spirit is wonderful, it is too mysterious. We need something solid, visible, tangible, and touchable--the Word of life. In verse 63 the Lord says that "the words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." The Word is substantial.

The "words" in this verse is *rhema* in Greek, which means the instant and present spoken word. It differs from *logos,* which means the constant word, as in John 1:1. At this point, the words follow the Spirit. The Spirit is living and real, but rather mysterious, intangible, and difficult for people to apprehend, but the words are substantial. Firstly, the Lord indicated that for giving life He would become the Spirit. Then He said that the words He speaks are spirit and life. This shows that His spoken words are the embodiment of the life-giving Spirit. He is now the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, and the Spirit is embodied in His words. When we receive His words by exercising our spirit, we receive the Spirit who is life.

The Word is outside of us. When I receive the Word into me, it immediately becomes the Spirit. When I speak the Word out, the Spirit once again becomes the Word. When you receive the Word into you, the Word becomes the Spirit once more, and when you speak the Word out, it becomes the Spirit again. When we preach the gospel, we are actually preaching the Word. When people believe the gospel, they believe the Word. As strange as it may seem, when people receive the Word, the Word actually becomes

the Spirit within them. For example, if you came to the Lord through John 3:16, you might have prayed, "Lord, I thank You that You are so good to me. You have given Your Son to me." What happened within you when you believed these words? When you believed these words, something within you was quickened and became living. I do not mean that you received some knowledge in your mentality, but that something became so living in your heart and spirit. You believed the Word, yet you received the Spirit. The Word outside of you became the Spirit inside of you. It was the Word without, but it became the Spirit within. When you listened to the Word and received it, you somehow received the Spirit also. This is very mysterious and marvelous.

The Lord is the Spirit and the Word. The resurrected Christ is the Spirit, the Spirit is the Word, the Word is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the resurrected Lord for us to enjoy. Now we know what He is and where He is. Hence, when we contact the Word in spirit, we are actually contacting the Lord Himself as the living bread. When we receive the Word in spirit, we are receiving Christ Himself as the abundant supply of life. Now, day by day, we are participating in this wonderful, resurrected Christ as, our food, life, and life-supply. He is the Spirit that gives life and He is the Word of life.

In verse 68 Simon Peter said something very interesting. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." This chapter closes with the Word of life, which is the only way to receive the Lord. The problem today boils down to the Word. If you receive the Word, you will have the Spirit within; if you have the Spirit within, then you have Christ as the inner supply of life.

We have seen six steps whereby Christ has made Himself available for us to receive--incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, becoming the life-giving Spirit, and being embodied in the Word of life. The Lord has been incarnated, crucified, resurrected, ascended, has been transfigured from the flesh into the

Spirit, and has been embodied in the Word. The Word is the embodiment of the Spirit of the Lord. You cannot say that you do not know how to contact the Lord, for the Lord has been embodied in the Word. He is the Spirit and the Word. If you receive the Word, you will have the Spirit as your enjoyment of Christ.

Now we may appreciate the difference between the human concept and the divine thought. The human, religious concept is what the Jews asked in verse 28: "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Throughout the Scriptures, it is only in this chapter that the religious Jews asked such a question. Religious teaching always exhorts us to do and do. Man's concept is doing; God's thought is believing.

The work that God desired and predestinated for us to do is to believe into His Son. The preposition "in" in verse 29 ("on" in KJV) should be translated as "into" according to the Greek text. The Lord Jesus did not tell us to believe Him, but to believe *into* Him. John 6 shows two ways of believing--to believe Him and to believe into Him. After the Lord answered their question, the Jews retorted in verse 30, saying, "What sign will you do that we may see and believe you? What work will you do?" They said, "believe you," but that was not what the Lord said. The Lord told them to "believe into Him." The preposition is exactly the same as that used in Romans 6:3 for "baptized into Christ." As we have seen, to believe Him means to believe that He is true and that everything about Him is right. But to believe into Him means to receive Him and to be united and mingled with Him as one. When you believe into Him, there is a union and a oneness between you and Christ. In other words, you have come into Him and have received Him into you. According to the divine thought, there is nothing for us to do but to believe into Christ and receive Him into us day by day.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him." For us, the work of God is nothing other than eating Christ, receiving Him, and living by Him. We

must be adjusted in our human concept about working for God. Daily we must eat Christ in order to live by Christ. Several times in this chapter the Lord says that he who eats Him shall live by Him (6:51, 57, 58). Today's problem is not work, but life. What kind of life do you live? Are you satisfied with the life you are living? If you do not eat and drink of Christ, you simply do not have life. If you do not have life, how can you live? Verse 53 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." The divine thought is not to work for God, but to take Christ as our food and drink. By eating and drinking of Christ, we shall be filled with Christ. Then we can properly live for God.

The strongest and strangest sentence in the entire Bible is verse 57. "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me shall also live because of Me." The Lord who is the Almighty God and the Creator of the universe exhorts us to eat Him. Man could never have such a thought. If this word had not been spoken by the Lord, I believe that none of us would possess enough courage to say that we must eat the Lord. Of course, we can say that we must worship and fear the Lord, trust and obey the Lord, pray and work for the Lord. We may use many other verbs to explain what we must do for the Lord, but we would be afraid to think that we should eat Him. We all must eat three meals a day in order to live. In other words, we live by eating. Likewise, we must eat the Lord so that we can live by the Lord. The most important point in the whole chapter of John 6 is that the Lord is our food, the bread of life. To eat Him is not a once-for-all matter. It is a daily matter and even a moment by moment experience of the Lord. Whether in the East or West, people continually eat so that they may live. So, we all must also contact the Lord and eat Him. We are not merely weak people, but hungry people who need the Lord as our life supply. The Lord is edible because He is the bread of life. He is as edible as a piece of bread. We must exercise our spirit to feed on Him as the Word and as the Spirit. Then we shall receive Him into us, digest Him, experience Him, and apply Him moment by

moment. This is all--there is nothing else. We must forget about our doing and our working and learn to eat Christ and live by what we have eaten of Him. This is the divine way of life for our daily living.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

THE NEED OF THE THIRSTY-- LIFE'S QUENCHING

(1)

We have covered five of the nine cases in this gospel. In the first case, the Lord talked with a superior, moral man about the regeneration of life. Through the new birth, the Lord is our second life, the divine life. In the second case, the Lord spoke to an inferior, immoral woman about the satisfaction of life. The Lord Himself is the living water which satisfies the dissatisfied hearts. In the third case, the Lord healed a dying child. The Lord heals the dying people by His life-giving word through believing. In the fourth case, the Lord enlivened an impotent man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. This shows that the Lord enlivens the impotent by life. In the fifth case, the Lord fed the five thousand with the bread of life. This indicates that He is the living, heavenly bread with which to satisfy the hungry multitude. Therefore, in brief, the Lord regenerates with His divine life in the first case, gives the living water in the second case, heals the dying by the life-giving word in the third case, enlivens the impotent in the fourth case, and feeds the multitude with the bread of life in the fifth case.

Now in chapter seven we come to the sixth case--the need of the thirsty. This case is in contrast with the fifth case, the need of the hungry. In the previous case the Lord is clearly revealed as the bread of life to satisfy our hunger, but in this case the Lord brings the flow of living water to quench our thirst. In the fifth case the people are hungry, but in the sixth case they are thirsty. The fifth case presents the living bread, and the sixth case introduces the living water. The bread of life is for hungry people, and the rivers of living water are for thirsty people. For the thirsty, Christ is the quenching life. He is the very life that is able to quench man's thirst.

The thought that the Lord is our food and water is seen throughout the Scriptures. For example, in Genesis 2 the tree of life is a picture of the Lord as our life supply of food. Beside the tree of life in Genesis 2 there is the river of water, which is a portrait of the Lord bringing us the rivers of living water. In other words, this pictures the Lord's purpose in the creation of man--man must eat and drink. If he fails to eat, he will become hungry, and if he fails to drink, he will become thirsty. The Lord is the food to satisfy our hunger, and He has the living water to quench our thirst.

Later in the Scriptures, the children of Israel, as they traveled through the wilderness, also had both food and water. On the one hand, they had the manna from heaven as their daily food (Exo. 16:14-15); on the other hand. they had the living water flowing from the smitten rock to quench their thirst (Exo. 17:6).

In the Gospel of John, the Lord also is the living bread and He offers the living water to satisfy the hunger and the thirst of the multitude. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three Persons of the Triune God, are very much related to this matter of food and water. God the Father is the source, God the Son is the food, and God the Spirit is the drink. The first Person of the Triune God is the source of the second Person as the food, from whom the third Person flows out as the drink.

First Corinthians 10:3-4 also points out these two things. There, Christ Himself is the spiritual food and He is the smitten rock from which flows the spiritual drink. The Holy Spirit is the spiritual drink flowing out of the crucified Christ. Therefore, Christ is our food, and the Holy Spirit who flows out of Christ is our drink.

Finally, we come to the end of the Scriptures, where we see the New Jerusalem. Again, the flow of the living water is the Holy Spirit, and the tree of life growing in the flow is Christ (Rev. 22:1-2). Hence, there is a line running throughout the whole Scriptures showing us that Christ is our spiritual food, that the Holy Spirit is our spiritual

drink, and that man needs both to eat and to drink in order to satisfy his hunger and thirst.

The Gospel of John is a book of pictures. The writer used figures and pictures as well as plain words because the matters of life are too deep, profound, mysterious, and abstract. If John had only used plain words, it would have been difficult for people to probe into the riches. So John, under God's inspiration, used various pictures. In chapter four we have a picture of a thirsty Savior and a thirsty sinner meeting at Jacob's well. In chapter five we see a multitude of sick, blind, lame, and withered people waiting by a pool. In chapter six we see a wilderness, a mountain, and a stormy sea. On the sea is a boat, tossed to and fro, and the people in the boat are terrified. Suddenly a man comes to them walking upon the waves. This is the man who fed the hungry crowd with five loaves and two fishes. In chapter seven we see still another picture.

1. THE SCENE OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

A. In Contrast with the Scene of the Feast of the Passover in Chapter Six

The sixth case is a continuation of the fifth case, because the matter of food is related to water. In this connection, there is also another contrast. In the scene of the fifth case, there was the feast of the Passover. In the scene of this case in chapter seven, there is the feast of Tabernacles. The feast of the Passover is the first of the annual Jewish feasts, and the feast of Tabernacles is the last (Lev. 23:5, 34). The feast of the Passover, as the first feast of the year, implies the beginning of man's life (cf. Exo. 12:2-3, 6), which involves man's seeking for satisfaction and results in man's hunger. The feast of Tabernacles, as the last feast of the year, implies the completion and success of man's life (cf. Exo. 23:16), which will end and result in man's thirst. In the scene of the feast of the Passover, the Lord presented Himself as the bread of life, which satisfies man's hunger. In the scene of the feast of Tabernacles, the Lord promised that He would flow forth the living water, which quenches man's thirst.

The feast of the Passover occurred early in the year, when the people were working and laboring hard. The case of the feeding of the five thousand finds the people working to till their hunger, but failing to be satisfied. They labored, they worked, they sought something to satisfy, but they failed. The feast of Tabernacles, on the contrary, occurred at a time when the harvest was over. The people had reaped the corn and the wine (Deut. 16:13-14). Everything of the harvest had been reaped, and the people were to come together at the feast of Tabernacles and enjoy everything with their families and even with their servants. We must realize that during the feast of Tabernacles the people do not labor because the work is over, the crop has been reaped, and the corn and wine have been harvested. That was the time to rejoice in their enjoyment--but they were still thirsty! The sixth case reveals that their thirst was not quenched even by their success.

If you read the verses concerning the Passover in Exodus 12, you will see that the Passover indicates or implies the beginning of life. The Passover, of course, is for salvation. When we were saved, we had a new start. The Passover was always in the first month of the year. Hence, it marked a new beginning. In a sense, all of the young people are in the Passover, for their life has just begun and they have many high expectations. Although perhaps you have not yet graduated from college, you expect that after graduation you will be a professor, doctor, or attorney. This is the feast of the Passover. We have already seen that the feast of the Passover always ends in hunger. After your graduation there will be nothing but hunger. The higher position you attain in your profession, the more hunger you feel. The more money you earn, the more dissatisfied you will be. In John 6, the feast of the Passover, as the initial step in life, ends in hunger.

B. Signifying the Completion and Success of Life with Its Enjoyment in a Religious Way

After the full harvest of their crops, the Jewish people observed the feast of Tabernacles to enjoy what they had

reaped in the worship of God (Exo. 23:16; Deut. 16:13-15). Hence, this feast signifies the completion, achievement and success of man's career, study, and other matters of human life, including religion, with the joy and enjoyment thereof. Thus, the feast of Tabernacles implies the completion of your job, achievement, and career. Although you may be successful in your occupation or career, you must realize that it will all issue in thirst. Eventually, after working your entire life, you will be thirsty, because everything has a last day. Everything ends. The last day is always a great day. After people attain a certain success, other people will give them a memorial day. A person's memorial day is always his last day. It is the end, and the end is empty. It results in thirst. In John 6 we have the beginning of life, which results in hunger; in John 7 we have the success and completion of life, which end in thirst. The previous case sets forth the people laboring, working, seeking, and striving to find something to satisfy their hunger, but they fail to get it. This case sets forth the people already having everything they need, but they find that it does not quench their thirst. They have obtained everything; they have enjoyed everything. But with all of their success, with all of their gain, even with all of the things connected with their feasts--their religion and their temple--their thirst cannot be quenched. Therefore, these two cases compare those who are working with those who are resting. Nevertheless, regardless of whether you are working or resting, you cannot fill your hunger or quench your thirst.

However, the Lord is the food to the people who labor and He will afford living water to those who rest. Actually, humanity exists in only one of two conditions. One is that because they lack something they must seek, work, strive, and labor; the other is that because they have everything they may rejoice and enjoy their riches. In other words, at first you find that you do not have anything; therefore, you must work and labor hard. For example, perhaps you are in the first year of college and you have to labor over your studies. This is like the feast of the Passover. After

you have graduated and received your degree and have an excellent occupation, you are rich. This is like the feast of Tabernacles because the work and labor are over. Now you are at rest and are in the position to rejoice and enjoy the benefits of your labor.

Which feast are you attending--the feast of the Passover or the feast of Tabernacles? Regardless of which feast you are attending, you are still hungry or thirsty. Whether you are in a poor or rich condition, whether you are in a state of poverty or plenty, you will realize that you are either hungry or thirsty. Many foreign students come to the rich country of the United States for an education, but in reality, they are simply hungry. After they work hard for several years and finally achieve their Ph. D. degree, some will become very wealthy, but they will still be thirsty.

Perhaps as a young person you are considering marriage. This reveals that you are hungry for a wife, hungry for a helpmate, hungry for a family and children. I must tell you that although you may marry the best wife, have the best children, and possess the best of everything, you will eventually be seventy or eighty years old. That will be your feast of Tabernacles in which you will rejoice in everything and enjoy everything. At that time, you will discover that nothing has been able to quench your thirst. At the Passover, you were hungry, but after the feast of Tabernacles, you were still thirsty. When you made out your application for college, you were hungry, but after your graduation, you were still thirsty. When you were first married, you were hungry, but now, after you are married, you sense that you are still thirsty.

Praise the Lord that Christ is the bread of life for those who are laboring at the feast of the Passover. A college education can never be the bread of life. Only the Lord Himself can be our satisfaction. Furthermore, only Christ can quench the thirst for those who are resting and rejoicing at the feast of Tabernacles. Even when people have everything, the corn and the wine, they realize that an inner thirst still persists. They may rejoice and enjoy

the produce that is in their hands, yet only the Lord has the living water to quench their thirst.

If you see the thought concerning these two feasts, you will see the two phases of man's condition and the two aspects of Christ as our supply of life. On one hand, He is the bread of life while we are laboring; on the other hand, He supplies us with the living water while we are resting. Once you see this thought, you will understand the whole of John 7. Although it is a long chapter, it is brief in thought. The thought is that when you have succeeded in all of your achievements, when you have enjoyed all of your possessions, when you have rejoiced in all of your best circumstances, you will then realize that your thirst has not been quenched. Nothing is adequate to quench your thirst. Only the Lord can quench your thirst by affording you the living water.

C. A Reminder of the Need of the Eternal Tabernacle with the Water of Life Flowing in It

God ordained this feast of Tabernacles so that the children of Israel would remember how their fathers, while wandering in the wilderness, lived in tents (Lev. 23:39-43) with the expectation of entering into the rest of the good land. Hence, this feast is also a reminder that people today are still in the wilderness and need to enter into the rest of the New Jerusalem, which is the eternal tabernacle (Rev. 21:2-3). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also lived in tents, looking forward to this eternal tabernacle (Heb. 11:9-10), in which there will be "a river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" to quench man's thirst (Rev. 22:1, 17). At the end of such a feast with such a background, Christ cried out the promise of the rivers of living water, which will satisfy man's expectation for eternity (John 7:37-39).

The feast of Tabernacles reminded the people of their need of the eternal tabernacle with the river of life flowing in it. Many years ago I read some articles that said that when the Israelites celebrated the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem in the ancient times, they set up a huge rock and over the rock they had waters flowing as a reminder

that their forefathers wandered in the wilderness and drank of the waters that flowed out of the cleft rock. Near the rock there might also have been tents showing how the forefathers lived in tents and wandered in the wilderness, but had the cleft rock with the living water to quench their thirst. All of this signifies that all of human life is in the wilderness. Whether you are a trash man or the President, a laborer or a professor, you are wandering in the wilderness. Whether you live in a high-rise apartment or a brick house, you are living in a tent. A tent signifies a temporary dwelling. Compared to the New Jerusalem, even a palace is a tent. We all are pilgrims wandering in the wilderness, living in tents, and needing to drink living water out of the rock. This reminds us that one day the real feast of Tabernacles will come. That will be in the new heaven and new earth within which the New Jerusalem will be the eternal tabernacle. Revelation 21:3 says that the New Jerusalem is the tabernacle of God with man. It is the real, constant, eternal tabernacle. In the tabernacle of the New Jerusalem there will be the river of water flowing continually to quench the thirst of God's elect. Thus, the feast of Tabernacles reminds us that we have such a future and causes us to realize that we can never be satisfied with the things of this age. Those things are the things of our pilgrimage. All of them will end. We are travelers. We are journeying toward our final goal--the eternal tabernacle of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth. We do not have the real quenching water here; it is there in the New Jerusalem.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE NEED OF THE THIRSTY LIFE'S QUENCHING

(2)

In chapter five we saw the contrast between life and religion, but the actual persecution had not started yet. The persecution began in chapter seven.

A. Religion's Plot and Religion's Feast

While the religionists were having a feast, they plotted to kill Jesus (7:1-2). This is an accurate picture of today's religion, for religion, in principle, is the same today. On the one hand. the religionists worship God, while on the other hand they plot to kill God's real seekers. If you are a true seeker after life, you must be prepared to find that religion will attempt to kill you. This has happened from the first century down to the present time. In every century the real seekers after life have been persecuted by the religionists. Madame Guyon, for example, was imprisoned by the religionists of her day. As long as you go along with the Lord according to the inner life and not according to the outward things, you will be persecuted by the religious people.

The Lord is God the Creator (1:1, 10). However, as a man He suffered the persecution of His creatures (7:1). It was not an easy thing for the Creator to suffer the persecution from His creatures. What patience He must have had! What humiliation it must have been! But the Lord did it. Even the religious feast provided an opportunity for this persecution (7:2, 11). The religionists took advantage of the religious feast to persecute the Lord Jesus.

B. Life's Suffering of People's Unbelief

The persecuting Jews were seeking to kill the Lord Jesus (7:1, 21 25, 30, 32, 34). Since the Jewish religionists were plotting against the Lord Jesus, He had to be

somewhat careful. If He had been even a little careless, He would have fallen into their hands. He was not able to act freely. Although the Lord is the Almighty God, He, as a man under persecution, was limited in His activity. While the religionists were seeking to kill Him on the one hand, His unbelieving brothers were challenging Him to seek worldly glory on the other hand (7:3-4). His brothers seemed to say to Him, "Why don't you go to Jerusalem? You should make a big name for yourself." Both the persecution of the Jews and the challenge from His brothers came from one enemy, Satan. Satan stirred up the Jews to seek to kill the Lord and he stirred up His unbelieving brothers to challenge Him to go to Jerusalem and to make a name for Himself that He might receive glory. The situation is the same today. Occasionally some brothers propose that we do certain things to get a name and be publicized. But it is awful to be publicized and to have a name. If you are going to have a name, it is better to get a bad name.

C. Life's Limitation in Time

In 7:6-9 we see that the Lord was limited in time. The Lord said to His brothers, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready" (7:6). Although the Lord is the eternal, infinite, unlimited God (Rom. 9:5), He lived on earth as a man, limited even in the matter of time. The Lord was willing to lose His freedom, to be bound in the matter of time, and to do the will of the Father so that He could minister the living water of life to us. The whole of chapter seven reveals how the Lord acted as a man limited in every respect.

D. Life's Seeking of God's Glory

The Lord is the Almighty God (Isa. 9:6), but as a man under persecution He was limited in His activity (John 7:10). He would not act freely. Although the Lord is the omniscient God, He, as a lowly man, appeared to be illiterate. "The Jews then marveled and said, How does

this man know letters, having never learned?" (7:15). Although the Lord had little education, He knew everything. He not only knew the letters; He knew the minds, hearts, and spirits of men. The Lord would not seek His own glory, but the glory of God (7:17-18).

E. Life's Source and Origin--God the Father

The Lord's source and origin are God the Father (7:25-36; 13:3). Although His source was God the Father, He came as a man from Nazareth of Galilee (7:27, 42, 52; 1:45--46). For quite a while I was not happy with the Lord concerning what I felt was His lack of frankness in John 7. It seemed to me that He was somewhat sneaky. He told people that His source was God the Father, but He came from Nazareth. There is a vital principle here: with everything concerning the Lord, the outward appearance will never look good, but the inward content will be marvelous. This also is true of the Lord's recovery today. If you look at the recovery according to the outward appearance, it does not look very attractive. However, the situation is entirely different inside. Do not be troubled by the outward appearance. The people who looked at Jesus outwardly saw Him as just a Nazarene. He had no form, comeliness, beauty, or attraction. But within, He is the very God. At times I told the Lord, "Lord, why are so few of the people whom You have brought into Your recovery in this country good looking? Even some do not dress appropriately for the meetings." But I have come to see that there is a treasure in those earthen vessels. The Lord has told me not to care for the outward appearance. The Nazarene has an unattractive appearance but an excellent and heavenly content.

III. LIFE'S CRY TO THE THIRSTY ONES

A. The Last Day Signifying the Ending of All the Enjoyment of Any Success of Human Life

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood and cried out to the thirsty ones (7:37-39). The last day signifies the ending of all the enjoyment of any success in

human life, regardless of the kind of success you have, there will be a last day. For instance. although you may have a marvelous marriage, your marriage will not last forever.

The phrase "the last day" occurs in both chapters six and seven (6:39-40; 7:37). However, these are two different kinds of last days. The last day in chapter six is the ultimate last day in the remote future when the Lord will raise us up. The last day in chapter seven refers to the many last days during our human life. The greatest last day is in the future, but before that day, during our human life, there are many last days. There will be a last day for an article of clothing that you value; there will be a last day for your marriage. Everything has its last day. The feast of Tabernacles continued for seven days, but the seventh day was the last day of the feast. The last simply means an end. Regardless of how wealthy you are, there is an end. Regardless of how healthy you are, there is an end. There is a last day for your riches, a last day to your health, a last day with your family, a last day with your dear wife or husband, a last day with your parents, a last day with your children, a last day with all of your circumstances--in short, a last day!

When I reached the age of forty, people began to tell me, "Life begins at forty." But others told me, "Brother, you must realize that after forty, life is in the afternoon. When you were born, life began at dawn. At forty, life has reached the noon hour. After forty, life is in the afternoon. Probably sometime after sixty, life will be ended." Sooner or later, there will come the last day of life.

Look at the picture. Israel labored for the whole year until they harvested the corn and wine. They received everything by the labor of their hands. Finally, their labor was over, and all that was left for them to do was to come together and enjoy their harvest for seven days. The seventh day was their biggest day, yet it was the end. The last day was the day that they were all dismissed.

B. The Cry to Come and Drink

While the people were being dismissed on the last day of the feast, the Lord stood up and cried, "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink" (7:37). The people were not satisfied. The things that they were enjoying during the past seven days had failed to quench their thirst. If they would come and drink of Christ, they would have rivers of living water flowing out from within their innermost being. The living water is the Holy Spirit who will flow out of the smitten rock.

As we shall see, when the Lord spoke these words, the Holy Spirit was "not yet," because the Lord had not yet been smitten and had not yet been glorified (7:39). What does it mean for the Lord to be glorified? It simply means that He was to be resurrected (Luke 24:26). The Lord was transfigured from His frail body into a glorious Spirit by means of His death and resurrection. Before the cross the Lord was the rock, but He was not yet smitten or crucified on the cross. When He was crucified and resurrected, the living water flowed out of Him and into us in order to quench our thirst. At the last day of your feast--at the end of your rejoicing and enjoyment when you still feel thirsty you must come to this Jesus and receive the living water to quench your thirst.

There was a young lady who lived in a very wealthy family. She sought enjoyment continually. Once she attended a dancing party with the highest class of people in England. She enjoyed it very much and had a wonderful time. After the party was over, she came home. As she was taking off her dancing garments, she felt so thirsty. She threw away all of her dancing garments and shoes, exclaiming, "How can these things help me!" After rejoicing in all of her enjoyments, she still felt very thirsty. Then an inner voice whispered within her, "You must pray to God." But she said to herself, "I do not believe that there is a God; how can I pray to Him?" But the voice continued to whisper, "Just try to say something

to God. Say: "God, if there is a God, just satisfy me." Finally, she prayed in such a way. The very next day her whole life was changed. She was satisfied. Her thirst was quenched by the living water given by the Lord.

If you study the biographies of the saints, you will discover many other similar stories. Many people who were highly educated, very successful, and very wealthy had much to rejoice in, but eventually they felt that they had failed because everything became dry to them. But then came the call, "Whoever is thirsty, come to Me and drink." Although you may be enjoying many good days, there will eventually come the last day when all of your enjoyment is over and you will feel thirsty. Remember, it is only the Lord Jesus Himself who can offer you the living water to quench your thirst.

C. The Flow of Rivers of Living Water

The Lord Jesus said, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (7:38). In 4:14 the Lord said that whoever drinks of the water that He gives us will have in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life. In chapter seven the Lord goes somewhat further, saying that anyone who drinks of Him will have the flow of the rivers of water of life. The Lord did not speak of just one flow but of rivers. The unique river of living water is the Holy Spirit. Out of this unique river, many rivers will flow out. These "rivers of living water" are the many flows of the different aspects of life (cf. Rom. 15:30; 1 Thes. 1:6; 2 Thes. 2:13; Gal. 5:22-23) of the one unique "river of water of life" (Rev. 22:1), which is God's "Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2). One river is the river of peace, and other rivers are joy, comfort, righteousness, life, holiness, love, patience, and humility. I do not know how many rivers there are. These rivers of living water flow out from the depths of our being. This is Christ as life. In the principle set forth in chapter two, this flowing of the rivers of living water is also the changing of death into life. Death is of the source of the tree of knowledge, and life is of the source of the tree of life.

What would happen if we came to a meeting and we all sat there without the flow of living water? It would surely be a dead meeting. If no one had anything to flow out, death would be prevailing. However, if everyone would flow with some rivers, eventually the meeting would be flooded over. It would be full of life. This is the changing of death into life.

D. The Spirit Was Not Yet

Verse 39 says, "But this He said concerning the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified." Many Christians do not understand the words "not yet" in this verse. The King James Version adds the word "given" in italics, showing that the translators were troubled by this verse. But verse 39 does not mean that the Spirit "was not given"; it means that the Spirit was "not yet." The Spirit was not there yet. The Spirit of God was there from the very beginning (Gen. 1:1-2), but the Spirit as "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9), "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19), was "not yet" at the time the Lord Jesus spoke this word, because He was not yet glorified. Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected (Luke 24:26). After His resurrection, the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Jesus Christ, who was breathed into the disciples by Christ in the evening of the day He was resurrected (John 20:22). The Spirit is now the "another comforter, who is the Spirit of reality" promised by Christ before His death (John 14:16-17). When the Spirit was the Spirit of God, He had only the divine element. When He became the Spirit of Jesus Christ through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, He had both the divine and human element, with all the essence and reality of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. Hence, He is now the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ as the living water for us to receive.

We have seen that Jesus was glorified when He was resurrected. In resurrection, the Lord became the life-

giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The last Adam, who was Christ in the flesh, became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. Since then, the Spirit of Jesus Christ has both the divine and human elements, including the reality of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ.

In Genesis 1 we have the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is just God Himself coming out to reach His creation. At the time of Genesis 1, within the Spirit of God there was only divinity. One day God became incarnated to be a man who was Jesus Christ. Thirty-three and a half years later, Christ was crucified. After crucifixion, He passed through resurrection and ascension, and the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated and resurrected Jesus Christ. Now the Spirit of Jesus Christ is reaching out to touch human beings. Formerly, it was the Spirit of God reaching out to touch God's creation only with divinity, but now the Spirit of Jesus Christ comes out to reach human beings with divinity, humanity, the effectiveness of His all-inclusive death, and with the element of resurrection. Before Christ was resurrected, such a Spirit was "not yet."

We may use the illustration of a glass of pure water into which many other ingredients are added. The pure water passes through one stage, and the milk is added. It passes through other stages in which honey, tea. and salt are added. Eventually, it becomes an all-inclusive drink. Before the pure water passed all these stations, such a wonderful drink was "not yet," although the pure water in the glass was there already. Now it is an all-inclusive drink. Likewise, the Spirit promised by the Lord Jesus in 7:39 and 14:16-17 is not the Spirit with only divinity as His content, but the Spirit with divinity, humanity, the all-inclusive death, resurrection, and ascension. Now we not only have the Spirit of God, but also the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is such an all-inclusive Spirit that gives us the flow of the rivers of water of life.

Sometimes when a child needs medicine, his wise mother will hide the medicine in a drink. When the child takes the drink, he gets the medicine. There is medicine in

the all-inclusive Spirit. This medicine is the killing death of Christ that is in the Holy Spirit today. The more you say, "O Lord Jesus," the more you receive the all-inclusive Spirit. After a few minutes, you may feel the Spirit killing your temper, pride, selfishness, and other negative things. Have you ever tried to reckon yourself dead according to Romans 6? If you have, then you know that the more you reckon yourself dead, the more you are alive. However, within the all-inclusive Spirit is the killing of the cross. The death mentioned in Romans 6 is now included in the Spirit as revealed in Romans 8. So, this all-inclusive Spirit constantly puts you on the cross as mentioned in Romans 8:13. The killing effect of the death of Christ is not merely on the cross, for, if it were, it would not be prevailing for us. That killing effect today is in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. As this Spirit moves within us, the killing effect of the cross penetrates into our being. He will kill every negative element in our being. Furthermore, in this all-inclusive drink there is the nourishing ingredient. In this Spirit is all that we need.

IV. DIVISION CAUSED BY LIFE'S APPEARANCE

In 7:40-52 we see the division caused by the Lord's appearance. Jesus was truly a troublemaker. He caused divisions. Today, the life-seeking people will also make trouble and cause divisions. Christ, the seed of David, was born in Bethlehem (7:42; Luke 2:4-7), but He appeared as a Nazarene from Galilee (7:52). Although the Lord was born in Bethlehem, He was raised in Nazareth, a town that was despised by the people of that time. He was the seed of David, but He came as a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23). He grew up as a "root out of dry ground," having "no form or comeliness," "no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:2-3). So we should not know Him according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16), but according to the Spirit. Because the Lord was raised in Nazareth, people did not consider Him as one born in

Bethlehem. Some comprehended Christ according to His outward appearance (7:27, 41-42, 52) by taking the tree of knowledge resulting in death (Gen. 2:17). Listen to their talk. "Does then the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (7:41-42). This talk is simply the exercise of the mentality. This mental reasoning is in the principle of the tree of knowledge. However, some apprehended Christ according to His inward reality (7:40, 50-51) by taking the tree of life resulting in life (Gen. 2:9). Do not pay attention to the outward appearance. You must see what is inside. Is there Christ within? We all must know Christ according to the inward reality and not according to the outward appearance.

The Gospel of John as a whole gives us a very impressive picture. One day the Lord Jesus went to Bethany and stayed in a little house with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (John 12:1-2). In Jerusalem at that time was the temple. In that holy temple were the priests dressed in their priestly robes offering the sacrifices on the altar and burning the incense in the proper way. Everything in the temple was attractive. But in that little house in Bethany there was nothing--no priests, no priestly robes, no altar, no offerings, and no incense. There were just two poor sisters and one brother. At that time, was the very God in the temple or in that little house? He was in that little house. Suppose you were seeking God at that time. Where would you have gone--to that little house or to the temple? We all would have gone to the temple. Probably none of us would have gone to that little house. However, Jesus, the very embodiment of God, was not in the temple but in that little house. Eventually, there would have been a division among us with a large number going to the temple and a small number going to the little house where Jesus was. Those who went to the temple would have thought it foolish to go to that little house to find God. Thus, we must learn to follow the Lord Jesus

according to the inward reality and not according to the outward appearance. This principle will remain forever. Praise the Lord that He is with the lowly.

While the Lord was on earth, He did not have an attractive appearance. Today in the church life in His recovery it is the same; there is no attractive appearance. However, if you get inside of the church life in the Lord's recovery, you will see the beauty of Christ there. He is not the Nazarene--He is the seed of David. This is Christ! Hallelujah!

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE NEED OF THOSE UNDER THE BONDAGE OF SIN-- LIFE'S SETTING FREE

(1)

In the record of this gospel, nine cases have been selected to prove that the Lord Jesus is the life and the life supply to people. The first six cases, in chapters three through seven, form one group of signs, signifying, on the positive side. the aspects of the Lord as our life and life supply: the regenerating, the satisfying, the healing, the enlivening the feeding. and the quenching. The last three cases, in chapters eight through eleven, form another group of signs signifying, on the negative side, that the Lord is life to us to deliver us from the three main negative things: sin, blindness, and death.

As fallen human beings, we are constantly troubled by sin, blindness, and death. Blindness actually means darkness. When you are blind, you are in darkness, for nothing causes so much darkness as blindness. Blindness, darkness, and death come from sin. Sin is the basic factor of blindness, darkness, and death. If we are sinful, we are surely blind because blindness always accompanies the sinful things. Sin brings in death, but between sin and death there is always blindness. After you have sinned and before you reap death, you have darkness. Therefore, sin, blindness, and death are the three negative things that the Lord must deal with. The only way these negatives can be dealt with is by the Lord becoming our eternal and heavenly life.

The case in John 8, the seventh case among the nine, fully covers the matter of sin. No chapter in the entire Bible covers the problem of sin as widely and thoroughly as does the eighth chapter of John. In this chapter we have the answer to all the problems of sin. As we shall see, following this, in chapters nine and ten, the matter of blindness is dealt with in a thorough way. Lastly, in chapter eleven, the matter of death is thoroughly taken care of. After chapter eleven, there will be no additional cases because the positive cases have been covered and the negative things have been dealt with. Now let us see how the Lord as life deals with the first negative thing--sin.

I. THE RELIGION OF LAW VERSUS THE GREAT I AM

This case reveals that the religion of the law (8:5, 1, 7), as represented by the temple (8:2, 20), cannot set people free from sin and its death, but that the Lord Jesus as the I Am, becoming the Son of Man lifted up on the cross for the serpent-poisoned people, can do what religion and law cannot do. The religion of law-keeping is versus the great I Am. This chapter reveals that among human beings on earth there are two things--a religion and a living Person. This religion is excellent, high, and superior. It is not a heathen religion or a religion of superstition. It is the typical religion, which helps people to worship God, to know God in the outward way of letters, and to assist people to keep the law of God in order to please God and to perfect themselves. This religion is the best, and all the typical Jews are proud of it. If you consider the orthodox religion of the Jews, you will realize that it is the highest religion. It is not false; it is absolutely real and genuine. Everything related to this religion is the best. This religion has many holy things. Among these many holy things is the Holy Word of God. No one can deny this.

The Jewish religion is the only real religion. Islam is a counterfeit of Judaism, and the Koran, the Moslem Bible, is the counterfeit of the Old Testament and part of the New Testament. Mohammed did not compose anything new. He simply copied the Old Testament and parts of the

New Testament. Thus, Islam is a counterfeit religion. Besides Judaism and Islam, there are no other religions. Buddhism is not a typical religion; it is nonsense. Religion helps people to worship God by teaching them in the proper way. However, in Buddhism there is no God. In Buddhism everyone can become a Buddha. According to Buddhism, if you practice until you attain a certain degree of perfection, you can become a Buddha. This is absolute nonsense; it contains no proper teaching whatsoever. Hence, it should not be considered as a proper religion. What about the teachings of Confucius? They are not a religion; they are ethical teachings. The teachings of Confucius tell people how to behave, but they do not tell them how to worship God. Never consider the teaching of Confucius as a religion. Therefore, there is on earth only one typical, genuine, and true religion, the religion formed by the Jews according to the Holy Word. Christianity, including catholicism, is an outgrowth of Judaism. Thus, there is only one typical religion on earth.

There is only one Bible. We have already pointed out that the Koran is a satanic counterfeit of the Holy Word. No one can invent something like the Bible. Who could write another Bible? Could Plato or Confucius? No one can write another Bible because there is only one God, and only God can write such a wonderful book. Since God would never write another Bible, there will never be another one. No one can write it. Whoever is able to write such a book as the Bible is qualified to be God. Who can imitate such a book? Who can imitate the depths of its wisdom? If you can do it, you must be God. Do you believe that the Gospel of John was merely written by a fisherman of Galilee? Do you believe that John himself could write such a book? "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God," "I am the light of the world," "I am the bread of life," "I can give you living water"--only Jesus can say such things. Only Jesus can write such a book as the Gospel of John. However, God's elect, His

chosen people, had the wrong concept. They did not pay full attention to the focus: that God Himself in the Son and as the Spirit wants to come into man to be his life and his everything. God's people missed this mark, collecting all the regulations, laws, and other good points, and putting them together to make a religion with which to kill themselves. How pitiful! Thus, by the time of John 8, there were two things on earth: a religion and a living Person. We all must see this contrast.

The Jewish religion was genuine and wonderful. It was good in every respect except one--it was versus the great I Am. Religion may be good, but it cannot give you life. It cannot help you because you are dead. A dead person does not need something good; he needs something of life. Only life can help a dead man. Suppose you say to a dead person "Poor man, here are gold and diamonds. You shouldn't be dead. Look at the gold--how valuable! Look at the diamonds--how precious!" It would be foolish to speak to a dead man in such a way. He could hear nothing. In chapter five we saw the porches near the pool on which were the blind, the lame, and the withered. If you were to preach to such people they would say, "Don't waste your time. I don't need something good. I need life."

Who is the Lord Jesus? He is the very Jehovah, the I Am. According to Genesis 1, God's name in relation to His creation is Elohim, God. After creation, however, in Genesis 2, when God was attempting to form a relationship with man, God's other name was mentioned--Jehovah, I Am that I Am. Jehovah is God's name in His relationship with mankind. At the time of John 8, Jehovah stood there in the form out a little man by the name Jesus, which means Jehovah the Savior. Again I say that you must learn the lesson not to care for the outward appearance. If you merely care for the outward appearance, you will certainly miss the mark. The Jewish religionists of the day missed the mark because they despised that little Jesus. Jesus had no form, comeliness, beauty, or attraction. Nevertheless, He was the great I Am.

A. Becoming the Son of Man

This great I Am, God Himself in relation to man, became the Son of Man. This is very meaningful. For Jehovah to become the Son of Man means that He had to humble Himself, to lower Himself. This was more than necessary due to all the negative problems that are in man. Sin is in man. The serpent, the Devil, is also in man. Man is the focus of every problem. If God was going to solve all the basic problems of man, He had to become a man Himself. Satan knows the importance of this. Satan was not afraid of the Lord Jesus being the Son of God. He was afraid of the Lord Jesus being a man. Therefore, Jehovah God became a man.

B. Lifted Up on the Cross for Man to Cast out the Devil

As a man, He was willing to be lifted up (3:14) as was the brass serpent in the wilderness (Num. 21:4-9). When we say that the Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross, we mean primarily that He died there for our redemption and removed our sin. But what does the Bible mean when it says that Christ was lifted up? It mainly refers to His dealing with the serpent, the devil. When most people read the words "lifted up," they lack the understanding of them. The Son of Man was lifted up as was the brass serpent not only to deal with sin, but also to deal with the serpent. John 12:31-32 indicates that when the Son of Man was lifted up, the ruler of this world, the Devil, was judged and cast out. Christ was not only crucified--He was lifted up. In His being lifted up, the serpent was exposed, judged, and cast out. The serpent, the Devil, was judged and cast out by Jesus' being lifted up. Who was there on the pole? The serpent. In the flesh of Jesus, God put the serpent on the pole and made a universal display that all the universe might see that His enemy, the serpent, was on the pole. Thus, Jesus was lifted up for the judging and casting out of the Devil.

THE ASPECTS RELATED TO SIN

A. No Man Without Sin

The religionists were trying their best to find fault with the Lord Jesus. After chapters five and seven they attempted to put Jesus into a difficult situation. They caught a sinful woman and brought her to the Lord Jesus. According to the law, such a sinful woman had to be stoned to death, but the religionists did not do it. They brought her to the Lord in an attempt to trap Him. They said, "Teacher, this woman has been caught committing adultery. Moses commanded us to stone such a person. What do You say?" The religionists were quite bold. They asked the Lord a very tricky question. If He had said that they had to stone her to death, then He would have lost His position as the Savior and Redeemer. Could a Savior say that such a sinner must be stoned to death? Of course, the Lord, as the Redeemer and Savior, could not say this. But, on the other hand, if He said that they should not stone her to death, then they would have said that He was breaking the law. This question was a subtle trick of the enemy. The religionists thought that they were very wise. Actually they were stupid. They thought that the Lord Jesus would find it difficult to answer and that they had an excellent opportunity to catch Him.

When the Lord was asked this question, He did not say a word. The wisest way to answer a question is not to answer, to answer later on, or to answer slowly. The Lord's first reaction to their question was not to answer it quickly. We also must learn this wisdom. When people come to you with an urgent question, you must learn from the Lord. He simply stooped to write on the ground. Silence cools people down, like cold water cools boiling water. When the Lord stooped to write, He was cooling down the situation. At the same time, by cooling down the hot situation, the sinful woman was comforted. I believe that by stooping to write on the ground the Lord Jesus was indicating to the religionists that they should not be so

proud, that they had to humble themselves a little. They had to realize that they were as sinful as that woman.

When I was young, I tried to discover what it was that the Lord Jesus wrote on the ground. Throughout many generations no one has been able to tell what He wrote. I would guess that the Lord might have written, "Who is without sin among you?" While the Pharisees were asking what should be done with such a woman, the Lord Jesus might have written in big letters, "Who is without sin?" Everyone was staring at the Lord as He stooped to write on the ground. Then the Lord stood up and said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7). The Lord seemed to be saying, "You may stone her to death, but someone must take the lead. No one is qualified to take the lead in this except the one who is without sin. Let the one who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her. This word pierced their conscience. I believe that even before the Lord spoke these words while He was still writing on the ground that their conscience was touched. What did the religionists do? Beginning with the older ones and up until the youngest, they went out one by one (8:9). The oldest, being the wisest, went away first. They knew that they were not qualified to take the lead in stoning the woman to death. But they were qualified to take the lead to run away. All the younger ones followed them.

Who is without sin? No one. Do not condemn others, for while you condemn others you are the same as they are, you are not qualified to condemn others. You are birds of the same feather. If you condemn another bird, you simply condemn yourself. Only the great I Am is without sin, and only He is qualified to condemn sin. What wisdom the Lord Jesus has! After the religionists left, notice how lovingly and gently the Lord expressed Himself to the sinful woman. He asked her if anyone condemned her, and she said, "No one, Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you" (8:11). That was music to the woman's terrified soul.

This incident manifests the Lord's wisdom. The people came to condemn the sinful woman, but the Lord's question convicted them of their own sinfulness. When people come to you with questions, you should be careful and turn the question upon themselves. You should answer them by asking them about themselves. Then you will strike their conscience and convince them. Eventually they will be convicted and run away.

B. The Source of Sin--the Devil

The Devil is the source of sin (8:44). Sin is the nature of the Devil, and sin, the nature of the Devil, is a lie. Sin is a lie, a falsehood. Everything that is sinful is unreal. The issue of the lie is death and darkness. Death and darkness, as falsehoods, are opposed to reality. Since the devil is the father of liars, he is the source of sin. The divine element of God, working as life and light within man, sets man free from the slavery of sin. But the evil element of the devil, working as sin by death and darkness within man, enslaves man to sin. His nature is a lie and brings in death and darkness. With darkness is falsehood, the opposite of the truth, the reality.

The Devil is the evil father who has brought forth sinful children (1 John 3:10). The sinful children are all the followers of the Devil. Thus, in 1 John 3:10, we have the term "the children of the Devil." Because the Devil is the father of sinners, the sinners are "the children of the Devil." The Devil is the old serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), and the sinners are also the "serpents, the brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33; 3:7). Hence, they need the Lord to be lifted up for them in the form of the serpent on the cross (John 3:14)

C. The Slaves of Sin

Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin (8:34). A slave is always under a certain bondage. Satan, the Devil, has brought all humankind under the bondage of sin by imparting himself into man as the sinful nature that

compels man to sin. It is impossible for anyone to free himself from such a slavery.

D. The Result of Sin--Death

The result of sin is death (8:24, 51-52). In verse 24 the Lord said, "Unless you believe that I am, you shall die in your sins." Death came in through sin. "Death passed to all men because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). As long as one has sinned, he is destined for death. Thus, the result of sin is death.

E. The Main Items of Sin

The three main items of sin are adultery or fornication, murder, and lies (8:3, 41, 44). These items are the most sinful aspects of sin. Consider--can you find another aspect of sin that is as sinful as adultery, murder, and lying? Nothing is more sinful than these three aspects, which represent the whole relationship of sin. All sinful things are included in these three categories. Adultery or fornication means confusion. Anything that confuses humankind is a type of adultery or fornication. Murder is killing. and lying is cheating. Anything that is sinful either confuses, kills, or deceives people.

III. HOW TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF SIN?

A. Only One Man Without Sin

This chapter reveals something more on the positive side, for we are told how we can be delivered from sin. Firstly, this chapter reveals the only One who is not sinful. Throughout the whole universe, who is the One without sin? It is only the Lord Jesus Himself. He is without sin (8:7, 9).

B. Only Jesus Being Qualified to Condemn Sin but He Would Not

Who is qualified to condemn you? Who has this position? Only the One who is without sin. The only One

who is qualified and has the position to condemn you is the Lord Jesus Himself, for He is without any spot of sin. Although He is qualified to condemn you He would not do it.

C. Lifted Up for Sinners' Sin

The Lord Jesus was lifted up for the sinners' sin (8:28). Sin is the embodiment of the serpent, and the sinners' sin is the poison of the serpent. For redemption, the Lord Jesus had to be the Lamb of God, but for dealing with the serpentine nature, the Lord Jesus had to be lifted up in the form of the serpent. In order to deal with the sinful, serpentine nature of mankind, He had to be lifted up on the cross in the form of a serpent.

D. Qualified to Forgive Man's Sin and Able to Set Man Free from the Slavery of Sin

The Lord is qualified to forgive man's sin and able to set him free from the slavery of sin 8:32-34). The Lord not only gives us life, but He also enters into us as our life. Satan's subtlety was not only to cause us to do something wrong; it was to inject himself into us. Thus sin is no longer merely objective, an outward wrongdoing. Sin is in the very subjective nature of our being. It is no longer outside of us; it is inside of us. It has even become our very self. It is in our nature. Therefore, anything that is outside of our nature cannot help us in dealing with the sin that is in our nature. We need another life to come into us. In human history, there is only one Person who is able to come into us and be our life to encounter the serpentine nature within us. Confucius or Plato cannot do it. The only One who can do it is Jehovah, the great I Am. Only He Himself can come into us as life to counteract the serpentine nature within us. Our slavery is not an outward thing; it is inward, even in our nature. We need another life, a stronger, richer, higher life, to set us free from this slavery. Only the Lord can be such a life, and He truly is such a life because He is the divine life. The divine

life is higher than the human life. It is also higher than the satanic life. When this divine life comes into us it defeats the serpentine life and nature.

E. Able to Save Man from the Result of Sin--Death

The Lord is able to save man from the result of sin, which is death (8:24, 51-52). Once sin has been dealt with, spontaneously the result of sin also will be removed. The religion of law is unable to do this, for it belongs to the tree of knowledge resulting in death (Gen. 2:17). Jesus is the tree of life resulting in life (Gen. 2:9). In principle, saving man from the result of sin is changing death into life.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE NEED OF THOSE UNDER THE BONDAGE OF SIN-- LIFE'S SETTING FREE

(2)

F. The Way of Setting Free

1. By the Light of Life

How does the Lord Jesus set us free from sin? He does it by coming into us as the light of life. This light is not outside of us; it is in us. When we received the Lord, He entered into us as our life. This indwelling life now shines within us. That is light. Gradually and spontaneously, this shining of the indwelling life sets us free. To be set free from the bondage of sin is not an overnight matter; it takes time. Although you may be enlivened in one second, it is not so simple to be freed from sin.

We may use our temper as an illustration. Everyone has a temper. If you do not have a temper, you are not a human being. A table has no temper. Regardless of how much you pound on a table, it will never lose its temper because it has no temper to lose. But how about you? Every person has a certain amount of temper. and this temper is the first expression of our serpentine nature. The primary expression of Satan in us is our temper. Whenever a person loses his temper, he has the appearance of a serpent. No one looks like an angel when he loses his temper. When you lose your temper at your wife, you look like a demon. When a kind mother loses her temper toward her child. the child will be frightened because his mother looks like a demon. When we lose our temper, the serpentine nature is expressed. Our temper

bothers us very much; it besets us all the time. During the fifty years that I have been a seeking Christian, nothing has bothered me more than my temper. How difficult it is to be freed from our temper From my experience I can testify that since the day the Lord Jesus came into me He has been my life. This life has been shining within me continually. The more Jesus shines within me, the more I am set free from my temper. Sometimes when I was losing my temper, this light shone strongly. Have you not experienced this as well? While you are losing your temper at your wife, the light shines. The more unbelievers lose their temper, the more temper they have to lose. However, when we, the seeking Christians, begin to lose our temper, we find that we have less and less temper to lose. Sometimes a brother or sister is stopped by the inward shining while he is losing his temper. Something inward shines over him, killing the serpentine nature. After fifty years of experience, I can say that now it is difficult for me to lose my temper. For fifty years the heavenly radium has been killing the serpentine nature of temper.

Radium treatment is given for certain diseases. The patient sits under the radium, and its rays are transfused into him. We have a heavenly radium within us, and this radium kills the serpentine nature. This is the light of life which sets us free from the slavery of sin.

2. By the Son as Reality

We are set free from sin not only by the shining of the light of life, but also by the Son as reality (8:32, 36). The reality is not the so-called truth of doctrine; it is the reality of the truth which is the Lord Himself (14:6; 1:14, 17). In 8:32 we are told that "the reality shall set you free." In 8:36 we are told that "the Son shall set you free." This proves that the Son, the Lord Himself, is the reality. Since the Lord is the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9), He is the reality of what God is. Hence, reality is the very divine element of God realized by us. When the Lord as the great I Am comes into us as life, He shines within us as light,

which brings the divine element as reality into us. This reality, which is the divine element imparted into us and realized by us, sets us free from the bondage of sin by the divine life as the light of man. The Son of God as the very fullness of the Godhead is the reality. While He shines in us as life, He works His reality, His divine element, into our being. This is not merely shining; it is a shining that brings the reality of what God is into our being. Eventually, day after day, and year after year, this divine element will be accumulated in our being. Thus, within our being there will be a certain amount of divine reality. No one can deny this.

I have been a seeking Christian for over fifty years. I do not say that I cannot fall or be stumbled. Perhaps tomorrow I shall be stumbled by my dear wife or by one of the brothers. Nevertheless, regardless of how much I may be stumbled, the divine element that has been wrought into my being during the past fifty years can never be lost. Even if I stumble, I will stumble with a great deal of the divine element.

By the shining of the inner life and by the working of the divine element in our very being, we are set free from the slavery of sin. This resembles the medical treatment designed to cure diseases in our blood. It is very difficult to eliminate the disease from our blood. We need medicine. If I take the medicine several times a day, the medicine will, on the one hand, destroy the germs and, on the other hand, add a positive element into my body organically. This positive element will supply nourishment to the tissues of my body. Eventually, the disease will be swallowed up. By such a metabolic process, the old element is discharged and replaced by a new element. This is the way that the divine life sets us free from the bondage of sin. It is not a matter of reckoning yourself dead according to Romans 6. Many of us have tried this in the past and found that it does not work. No, you must experience the living Jesus in you as the shining light and as the divine element that works inwardly. Eventually, the heavenly, divine element will be added into your being. This is our salvation.

How can the Lord keep us from sinning any more? How can He set us free from the slavery and bondage of sin? Simply because the great I Am has become our life, and this life is the light of life. When we received Him, He became our life, and this life becomes the very light that brings us out of the darkness of sin. Only the light of life can set us free from the bondage and slavery of sin. The Lord could forgive us because He is the Son of Man who died for us by being lifted up on the cross. Now the Lord can deliver us and set us free from the bondage of sin because He is the great I Am living within us. He now becomes the life that is the light within us. This light of life can set us free from the bondage of sin and deliver us out of the darkness of sin. We must realize, therefore, that we are set free only by Christ becoming our life and light. Furthermore, this life and light will also bring us into the truth, that is, into the reality. After you receive and enjoy the Lord Jesus as your life and light, you will find that this very divine life and light will bring you into reality. After you are brought into reality, you will be delivered from falsehood. The reason why people easily commit sin is that they were born in falsehood. Since they were born of the devil, the enemy of God, they were all born liars. The devil, the father of liars, is the greatest liar. Hence, the father of liars has brought all sinners into the darkness of falsehood. The devilish life has brought them into darkness, and darkness has brought them into falsehood. Thus, it is very easy for people to commit sin as long as they are in falsehood. But, praise the Lord, we now have received the Lord within us as our life and light. This life and light bring us into reality, which will free us from the bondage and slavery of sin.

In this passage there is the comparison between two fathers. One is the father of liars, the father of falsehood, murder, and adultery. Originally, we were born of this father. We should not think that we were merely born of our parents. On the one hand, we were born of our parents, but on the other hand, we were born of the evil

father of lies. He is the greatest liar, and we, the smaller liars, were all born liars. "You are of your father the devil" (8:44). We were born of this father of lies. Consequently, we were born sons of lies. We should not think that we were born Americans or Chinese, for each one of us was born a liar.

Praise the Lord that there is another father, the heavenly Father, the Father of light and truth. He is the great I Am, who became incarnated as a man. As the Son of Man, He was lifted up on the cross for our sin and died for us. Now, if we believe in Him and in what He has done for us, He, as the great I Am, the Father of life, will come into us to be our life and light. Then He will deliver us from falsehood into reality and from darkness into the kingdom of light, where we will be set free from the bondage and slavery of sin.

IV. THE PERSON OF THE LORD

There is still more in this chapter, for it reveals the person of the Lord. It shows us who the Lord is.

A. The Great I Am

The Lord is Jehovah, the great I Am (8:24, 28, 58). I Am is the meaning of the name Jehovah (Exo. 3:14) and Jehovah is the name of God in relation to man (Gen. 2:7). Hence, it denotes the Lord as the ever-existing God in relation to man. The Lord as the great I Am is the everlasting One who exists from eternity unto eternity. He is without beginning or end of time. As the great I Am, He is the self-existing One, ever existing for eternity. He is not only Jesus, a man from Nazareth; He is the great I Am.

To say that the Lord is the I Am means that He is whatever we need. It is like having a blank check on which you may fill the amount that you need. If you need light, you simply fill in light, and the Lord will be your light. If you need comfort the Lord will be your comfort. This kind of check will never bounce, for there is never a shortage of deposits in the heavenly account. Be bold to write in a big amount. What you write in is up to you. The Lord is

everything you need. Now it's up to you to fill in what you actually need. He is the great I Am.

B. Before Abraham and Greater Than Abraham

As the great I Am, the eternal, ever-existing God, the Lord is before Abraham and greater than Abraham (8:53). The Jews did not understand this and argued with the Lord. "The Jews then said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came into being, I am" (8:57-58). The grammar here is awkward, for the Lord said, "Before Abraham came into being, I am." According to grammar, He should have said, "I was." But He is the present One, the I Am. Whether it is past, present, or future, He is always the present One.

C. The Son as Reality

As we have pointed out by what is mentioned in verses 32 and 36. the Son is the reality. The Lord is the Son as reality for imparting all the divine element into His believers.

D. The Son of Man

Another aspect of the Lord is that He is the Son of Man. On the one hand, He is the great I Am; on the other hand, He is the Son of Man (8:28). The Jewish people lifted up the Son of Man, but they could not lift up the I Am. This seems quite strange, but according to verse 28, it is only when they lift up the Son of Man that they will know Him as Jehovah, the great I Am. He was lifted up for the serpent-poisoned sinners in the form of a serpent in order to cast out the old serpent (John 3:14; 12:31-34; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). He was lifted up in order to deal with the serpentine nature and with the serpent himself.

How could the Lord be the One who was sinless? Because He is Jehovah, the great I Am. How could the Lord condemn sin? Also because He is the great I Am. But now can He as Jehovah forgive sin? You must remember

that Jehovah could never forgive sin. If Jehovah forgave sin, He simply would have made Himself unrighteous. There is only one way for Him to forgive sin, and that is by being the Son of Man and being crucified on the cross. In other words, He could only forgive sin by redemption. Without redemption God Himself would have been unable to forgive sin. Without redemption there would have been no ground for the forgiveness of sin. Because He was lifted up on the cross as the Son of Man, bore our sins, and redeemed us from all of our sins, He had the position to forgive sins.

The whole Gospel of John also reveals that the Lord is the Word and the Spirit. There is such a thought throughout the whole gospel. Once you see the wonderful person of the Lord in this gospel, you will ask, "Where is He and how can I contact Him?" Praise the Lord that He is in the Word and in the Spirit, for He is the Word and He is the Spirit. You now have both the Word and the Spirit. If you contact the Spirit and receive the Word, you then have the Lord Himself. You have everything by abiding and continuing in the Word of the Lord (8:31). If you keep yourself in contact with the Word of the Lord, it means that you are abiding in the Lord Himself. By contacting the Word, you are contacting the source of the eternal and everlasting life.

Consequently, because you are always in contact with the Lord Himself, you will never taste death (8:51). This has been proved by history. When some of the saints were about to die, they did not taste death even though they were dying. For example, when D. L. Moody was dying, he died bravely. He died without tasting death, because he was abiding in the Lord and contacting the source of life. Likewise, if we will abide and continue in the Word of the Lord, we will also contact the source of life all of the time. Then we will never taste death. We will pass through death without tasting it.

The Gospel of John is a book of life. Many times in this gospel people ask the Lord questions with the intention of receiving a yes or no answer. However, the Lord never

answered yes or no. For example, in chapter four the Samaritan woman said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men must worship" (4:20). In other words, she was asking Him which place was the right place in which to worship. The Lord Jesus did not say which place was right. He said that God is Spirit and that we must worship Him in spirit (4:24). It is not a matter of here or there; it is a matter in the spirit in which we can contact God, the tree of life. The Lord Jesus did not answer her with a yes or a no, but turned her to the human spirit to contact God, the tree of life. The principle is the same in chapter eight when the Pharisees brought a sinful woman and asked the Lord whether or not she should be stoned. Again, the Lord did not give a yes or no answer. He said, "He who is without sin among you. let him to be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7). The Lord's answer turned them to the Lord, the tree of life. Later, when we come to chapter nine, we shall see that the disciples asked the Lord a question about the man who was blind from birth, inquiring whose sin, his or his parents, had caused him to be born blind. The Lord answered them by saying, "Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him" (9:3). Once again, the Lord answered by pointing them to God, the tree of life. The Gospel of John is a book of life and it never gives answers that are according to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but always turns people to the tree of life. There are no answers of right or wrong, good or bad, yes or no. There is only one thing--life. You do not need to be right, just like you do not need to be wrong. You need only to care for life. When you have life, everything is fine.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

THE NEED OF THE BLIND IN RELIGION-- LIFE'S SIGHT AND LIFE'S SHEPHERDING

(1)

As we have mentioned before, the nine cases in the Gospel of John are divided into two groups. The first six cases signify how the Lord as our life can deal with positive things, while the last three cases signify how the Lord as our life can deal with negative things. Let us review them once more. The first six cases reveal that the Lord as life is for regenerating, satisfying, healing, enlivening, feeding, and quenching. These six signs compose one group because they deal with the positive aspects of His life. The last three cases deal with the negative matters of sin, blindness, and death. Sin causes blindness and results in death. Therefore, these three--sin, blindness, and death--are grouped together showing how the Lord is our life in dealing with the negative things. In the first six cases the Lord brings us to something positive, but in the last three cases the Lord delivers us *from* something negative because He delivers us from sin, blindness, and death.

According to 20:30-31, the writer indicated that Jesus did many signs. From all of these cases, the writer selected only nine as signs. Therefore, these signs must be very meaningful, and the order in which they are presented must also be quite significant. For example, the first case is about regeneration, and the last is about the resurrection from the dead. Thus, the first case is about the regeneration in the beginning of life, and the last is about resurrection after the end of life. Furthermore, in the last group of cases, sin is placed first among the negative things because sin is the origin of blindness and death. Blindness originates from sin, and death is the ultimate end of sin. In this message we shall deal with the

matter of blindness. Some readers of the Bible are not clear that John 10 is a continuation of John 9. However, if you read carefully, you will see that chapter ten is a continuation of chapter nine. Hence, these two chapters form one section of the Holy Word. John 10:21 helps us to realize that chapter ten is a continuation of chapter nine, for the question is asked, "Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" Nevertheless, each chapter covers a different point. In these two chapters, two major aspects of the Lord's being are revealed: the Lord's giving sight to the blind and the Lord's shepherding of the believers outside of religion.

I. LIFE'S SIGHT FOR THE BLIND

This case continues to prove that the religion of law could not do any good to a blind man, but that the Lord Jesus, as the light of the world, could impart sight to him in the way of life (10:10, 28). This sign was performed on the Sabbath day. It seems that the Lord again did a sign purposely on the Sabbath day to expose the vanity of the rituals of religion.

Blindness, as sin in the previous chapter, is a matter of death. A dead person surely is blind. "...the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving." So they need "the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ" to shine forth to them (2 Cor. 4:4), "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). In the principle set forth in chapter two, this is also the changing of death into life.

A. Born Blind

Let us read 9:1-3. "And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him." The question raised by the disciples was according to their religious knowledge. They thought

that the blindness must have been due to the man's sin or the sin of his parents. This question, like those in 4:20-25 and 8:3-5, is a matter of yes or no, which belongs to the tree of knowledge resulting in death (Gen. 2:17), but the Lord's answer in 9:3 points them to God, who is the tree of life resulting in life (Gen. 2:9). We have seen that the Lord in the Gospel of John never answers such questions with an answer of yes or no, right or wrong. This is because the Gospel or John is a book of life, not a book of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, the Lord said that the man's blindness was so that "the works of God might be manifested in him."

Why is it that the Lord never answers with a yes or a no? Because yes-or-no answers are from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Good and evil are just like yes and no. While both yes and no belong to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in this gospel the Lord comes to us as the tree of life. The tree of life is God as our life. Consequently, in this gospel the Lord never answers people with a yes or a no. He always refers them to God. The Lord does not refer to yes or no for an answer, but to God as the tree of life. The Lord's answer in 9:3 brought His disciples directly to God, that is, it brought them to the tree of life. At this point, the disciples were still very religious, holding to their religious concepts, which belong to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but the Lord was trying again and again to turn them from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life. Those disciples were under the Lord's training in this matter for three and a half years. Even after that time, one of the disciples, Peter, had not thoroughly been delivered from the religious concepts, for in Acts 10:9-16 we see that Peter was still religious, still influenced by the knowledge of good and evil. Perhaps we consider ourselves as free from the tree of knowledge, but even now we may still be mainly under its influence.

When we were sinners, we lost our sight and could not see anything. Our blindness was due to our sinful nature. In chapter nine the man was born blind. signifying that

blindness is in the nature of a person when he is born. We sinners were blind by nature because we were born that way. Have you ever realized that every sinner was born blind? Therefore, if we confess that we are sinful, we must also admit that we are blind.

B. Receiving Light

1. By the Light of Life

When the Lord Jesus saw this blind man, He said, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5). The Lord is the light of life (8:12). Blindness comes from the shortage of the light of life. Every dead person is a blind man. Undoubtedly, the dead cannot see anything. Therefore, blindness indicates the lack of life. If you have life, then you have sight, for light opens your eyes. So, first of all, the Lord pointed out that the blind man needed the light of life.

2. By the Anointing of the Word of Life Mingled with Humanity

Verse 6 is very interesting. "When He had said this, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed his eyes with the clay." When I was a young Christian, not understanding the meaning of this verse I laughed at what the Lord did. What He did was very strange. No one likes to touch a person's spittle. But the Lord Jesus mixed His spittle with the ground and made clay. Then He used the clay to anoint the man's eyes. The Gospel of John is a book of pictures, and this incident is a picture. We should not understand it merely according to the black and white letters. We must pray and look to the Lord that we may receive the true meaning.

I cannot tell you how much time I have spent in studying this point. I consulted various books in my attempt to find an interpretation, but I did not find one. One day, not more than twenty-five years ago, I saw the matter of the mingling of the divine life with humanity. This word "mingling" has been in use by us for not more than twenty-five years. If you go to the Christian

bookstores, you will not find even one book that speaks about mingling. The most that the books speak of is union with Christ or identification with Him. Not one book discusses this matter of mingling. In 1958, when I first visited this country, I delivered a message on the mingling of the divine life with humanity. A preacher, a graduate of Oxford, immediately corrected my English, saying that mingling was not the right word and that I should use the word "co-mingling." I replied, "Whether this word is the right English word or not I am not sure because English is not my mother tongue, but I do know that there is such a fact between the divine life and humanity." Later, I received a confirmation from the book of Leviticus that the word mingling was the right word.

The word mingling is used in Leviticus 2:5. "And if thy oblation be a meat offering baked in a pan, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mingled with oil." This is a type. The fine flour typifies the humanity of the Lord Jesus, and the oil typifies the Holy Spirit, the divinity of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, in the Person of the Lord Jesus there is the mingling of divinity with humanity. Thus, when I visited this country the second time. I began to speak boldly about the mingling of the divine life with our humanity. Some cautioned me not to speak much about this, but rather to stay within the limits of identification and union. I said, "Brothers, I don't care for the human concept. I only care for the pure Word. How about Leviticus 2:5--the fine flour mingled with the oil? Do not come to me. You should go to Moses. He was the first one to use this word." Since 1963 the Lord has burdened us to publish the magazine entitled The Stream. Again and again in that magazine we have spoken about the mingling. Now many people are picking up this thought.

Now we may return to John 9 and apply to it this concept of the mingling of divinity with humanity. The clay in 9:6, as in Romans 9:21, signifies humanity. Man is clay. We all are clay. What is the spittle? Spittle here, as

something "that proceeds out of the mouth" (Matt. 4:4) of the Lord, signifies His "words which... are spirit and life" (John 6:63). Figuratively speaking, the spittle is the Word, which is spirit and life, that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. The Word that proceeds out of the mouth of Christ is spirit. Thus, to mingle spittle with the clay signifies the mingling of humanity with the Lord's living Word. The word "anointed" proves this, because the Lord's Spirit is the anointing Spirit (Luke 4:18; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 John 2:27). The spittle, then, signifies the Word, the outflow of the very element or essence of the Lord Himself. The clay was mingled with the spittle. This signifies that the Lord mingles His essence with us by and even with His Word. We are clay by nature, and the very essence of the Lord in the Word is the spittle. Formerly, when we were sinners, we were dead. When we heard the Word of the Lord, His Word came into us as those made of clay. When we heard and received the gospel, it was actually the spittle of the Lord that came into us, men of clay. In other words, the clay received something that proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord and was mingled with it.

The mingling of divinity with humanity is the most prevailing ointment on the whole earth. No other ointment can surpass it. The Lord anointed the man's blind eyes with the clay that was mingled with spittle. This signifies the anointing of the Spirit of life. The anointing of the Spirit of life follows the mingling of the Lord in His Word with the clay. Immediately after you receive the Lord through His Word, there is the anointing of the Spirit of life. The Lord's anointing the blind eyes with the clay made of His spittle signifies that by the anointing of the mingling of the Lord's Word, which is His Spirit, with our humanity, our eyes, which were blinded by Satan, may have sight.

3. By the Obedience to Life's Word and the Washing Away of the Old Humanity

After the blind man's eyes had been anointed with the clay, he was more blind than before. Now a thick layer of

clay covered his eyes. The Lord told him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (9:7). The man went, washed, and came seeing. To wash here is to cleanse away the clay. This signifies the washing away of our old humanity, as we have in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4, 6). That the blind man went and washed means he obeyed the life-giving Word of the Lord. So he received sight. If he had not gone to wash off the clay after being anointed with it, it would have blinded him even more. Thus, our obedience to the anointing brings us sight.

The word Siloam means sent. This is very meaningful. The anointing of the Spirit of life means that you are always in the position of being sent. The anointing puts us on the ground of being sent. Therefore, we must obey. The Lord Himself always stood on the ground of being sent by the Father and He was always obedient. Now the Lord puts us in the same position as His sent ones. After we receive the Lord in His Word and have His anointing, He puts us in the position of being sent. We must now be obedient to His sending. After you receive the Lord in His Word. what is the first step that you should take in order to be obedient? Once you have believed in the Lord and received Him in the Word the Lord will ask you to go to a "pool." The first step is that the Lord will send you to a "pool." He will send you to wash and be baptized. From then on, you must daily and throughout the day apply this washing. Day by day, you must realize that you are being washed during the whole day. Even today, I have been washed several times. An order from the Lord always follows the anointing of the Spirit of life within you: "Go and wash."

This chapter portrays the blind man, the Lord making the clay, the eyes of the blind man being anointed with the clay, and the Lord telling him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Once the blind man washed his eyes, the clay was gone. What is the clay? It signifies the natural life or the human self. When you went to be baptized, the old man, the old clay, was washed away. After the washing, it was buried in and under the water. Your old man was buried in the water after you were baptized. However, do you also

realize that you must apply the washing of the baptism day by day? In every day of your Christian life you have to apply the washing of baptism by putting the self and the nature of the old man under the water of death.

You must remember that the anointing within always demands that you apply the washing of baptism to yourself. If you do not apply this, you can never be obedient in following the anointing. The anointing within always demands that you go to Siloam and put yourself to death. You must bury yourself as the clay under the water of death. Perhaps you received an anointing this morning. If you neglect to apply the washing of baptism to yourself, you cannot obey that anointing. The command to put yourself under the water of death immediately follows the anointing. The anointing demands that you eliminate the old clay. When you do this, you will receive sight and light. According to our experience, after we follow the demand of the anointing to put ourselves into the water of death, we are very much in the light with the sight. Everything is clear to us because now we have both the sight and the light. The sunshine is actually within us. Our eyes are opened and we can see very clearly because we have received sight and are now in the light.

What would have happened if the blind man had refused to obey the Lord's command to go and wash? Although his eyes had been anointed with the clay, his refusal to obey would have made him even more blind. What the Lord had done thus far would have been a veil or a covering instead of an unveiling. Likewise, if we do not obey the anointing of the Spirit of life, the anointing will become a veil that covers our eyes instead of opening them. However, if we obey the anointing of the Spirit of life and put ourselves into death, our eyes will be opened. In short, we will have sight and will be in the light. Otherwise, our disobedience will cause the anointing of the Spirit of life to become a veil covering our eyes. Then we will become more blind and will be brought into deeper darkness.

When I first received this interpretation, I laughed. I

said. "My, the mixing of the clay with the spittle was strange enough. Now I have been given such a strange interpretation. At first I could not believe it. However, as I prayed and checked with my experiences. I came to believe it. If you do the same, you will see that this is the correct interpretation. Many times you have received sight by the Divine Spirit being mingled with your humanity. For a short while, your eyes were covered and, temporarily, you were more blinded than ever. Eventually, after obeying the life-giving Word, your old nature was washed away. Then you had a clear sky. Please check with your experience. This was the procedure every time you received light.

Simply reading or studying the Bible is inadequate. Without the mingling of the divine life with your humanity, you can never see the light of the Word. You may read it, but you cannot see it. Perhaps you have read a certain sentence in the Bible many times. But you just could not see the light in it. One day, you begin to see. Immediately your eves are covered and temporarily you are even more blinded. However, if you obey the living Word and say, "Amen, Lord Jesus," you immediately have the sensation that something has fallen off your eyes and you have light. Your old humanity has fallen away and you can see into the heavens. This is the way to receive light.

There are three steps which we must follow in order to receive sight for our eyes. First of all, the clay must both receive and be mingled with the spittle. In other words, you, the old man, the clay, must receive the Lord's Word as the spittle and be mingled with the Lord in His Word. Then the second step will follow--that is, after you have received the Lord in His Word, you will have the anointing. Finally, the third step follows the anointing: the demand to put the old self to death. The old clay must be put into the water of death. By these three steps your eyes will be opened. You will then have the sight and will always be in the light. Brothers and sisters, even today if you are going to have the sight and be in the light, you must first receive the Lord in His Word. Even though you have been regenerated, you must receive the Lord in His Word and be mingled with Him more and more. You are

still clay and you need the spittle out of the Lord's mouth, which signifies the very essence of the Lord Himself. Each time you receive the Lord in His Word, the anointing will follow. Then the anointing will command you, as a man of clay, to be put into the water of death and stand in the position of a sent one. A sent one never does his own will; he does the will of another. As a sent one, you must work and act as a sent one. A sent one does nothing according to his own will, but everything according to the one who sends him.

Do not consider that this story of healing the blind man is so simple. When I was young, I thought that it was simple and even funny. If I had been there, I probably would not have allowed the Lord to do this. I would have said, "It's not healthy and not sanitary. How terrible! How dirty' Both the clay and the spittle are dirty. You just put dirty things on his eyes. No, no! I would not do this!" This story seems quite funny, but with the help of the Lord's Spirit we can realize the wonderful principle contained in it. We can see that we must first receive and be mingled with the Lord in His Word. Then we will have the anointing of the Spirit of life within us, which will put us all into the position of being sent ones. We will then be willing to be put aside and to eliminate the clay that is in us. We will be willing to be buried under the water of death in order to put the self to death. Finally, our sight will be recovered and we will enjoy the light. We must live by this principle daily. This also is the changing of death into life.

C. Persecuted by Religion

It is a good thing to receive sight. However, be prepared to suffer persecution at the hands of blind religion. The blind man who received his sight was cast out (9:34), meaning that he was excommunicated, ostracized, from the Jewish synagogue. This means that he was put out of the sheepfold, as spoken by the Lord in 10:3-4. Although he was excommunicated from Judaism, he was received by the Lord Jesus.

D. Believing in the Son of God

The blind man came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God (9:35-38). The blind man received his sight by a kind of obscure believing. He believed, but he was not clear. He was simply innocent. He believed without really knowing who Jesus was. He believed in an innocent way. Although he did not know adequately who Jesus was, he did believe that Jesus was someone special and he argued about this with the Pharisees. Eventually, the Pharisees cast him out. Then, the Lord Jesus found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (9:35). The blind man replied, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" (9:36). He believed, yet he did not know the Lord Jesus. Then the Lord said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the One Who is speaking with you" (9:37). Then the blind man declared, "Lord I believe. And he worshipped Him" (9:38). He believed that the man Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, the blind man not only received his sight, but he himself was received by the Lord Jesus.

This means that the Lord, as the shepherd, entered the sheepfold, saw a little, blind sheep, opened his eyes, and then led that sheep out of the sheepfold. In one sense, the sheep was cast out; in another sense, the Lord led him out. The Pharisees cast him out, but the Lord Jesus carried him out. The Lord did not carry him out of hell but out of the sheepfold. As we shall see more in the next message, the sheepfold was Judaism, the law-keeping religion. The blind man, like the blind and lame people on the porches in chapter five, was kept on the law-keeping porch. Then the Lord Jesus came, not only as life, but also as the shepherd, to lead him out of the fold.

The Lord is sovereign. Many of us were in the fold of religion. Perhaps you were there as one who was lame. We all were on that porch. Thank the Lord Jesus for His

sovereignty. He came as life to heal our blind eyes and as the shepherd to lead us out of the fold.

E. Judged by Life

In 9:39-41, Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind. Some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, Are we also blind? Jesus said to them, If you were blind you would have no sin; but now that you say, We see, your sin remains." The Lord told the Pharisees that He came to judge. But He told Nicodemus that He came not to judge but to save (3:17). He found a seeking soul in Nicodemus; therefore, He will not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. However, He saw pride in the Pharisees; hence, He will come to judge them. Whether the Lord will come to judge or to save you depends upon your attitude. If your attitude is like that of Nicodemus, He will come to save you. If your attitude is that of the Pharisees, He will come to judge you. Whether the Lord will become a Judge or a Savior to you depends upon your attitude.

The Lord will seriously vindicate Himself when anyone is proud to assert himself with many claims. This simply indicates that he does not need the Lord. Consequently, the Lord will leave such a person in his blindness. We must be very careful not to proudly say that we can see. If we claim that we see, the Lord will leave us blind. The Lord said that He will give sight to those who cannot see, but that He will make blind those who claim to see. This is a serious vindication of the Lord. Thus, we must be humble and not proud. Pride simply means blindness and darkness.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE NEED OF THE BLIND IN RELIGION-- LIFE'S SIGHT AND LIFE'S SHEPHERDING

(2)

Now we come to John 10. This is a very interesting chapter, but it is also a misunderstood chapter. This chapter is actually a continuation of chapter nine. Verse 21 helps us to realize this, for the question is asked "Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" Both chapters center around the record of the case of the man born blind. The thought in this chapter is deep. On the surface, it seems easy to understand, but actually it is not easy to understand this parable or allegory. The Lord brought out this allegory about the sheepfold immediately after He cured the blind man who was cast out of the synagogue by the Jews. This incident, therefore, became the setting for the parable of the sheepfold.

II. LIFE'S SHEPHERDING FOR THE BELIEVERS OUTSIDE OF RELIGION

A. The Sheepfold, the Door, and the Pasture for the Sheep

We must now consider the significance of the sheepfold in this parable. It is not easy to define the sheepfold. Perhaps you know something about the Bible and especially about the gospels. Perhaps you were told from your youth about the stories from the gospels in Sunday School. Perhaps you have even graduated from seminary. Let me ask you this question: what do you realize about the sheepfold? What have you been taught about this

matter? The key to unlocking the secret of this parable depends very much upon the meaning of the sheepfold.

1. The Sheepfold Signifying the Law, or Judaism, the Religion of the Law

The sheepfold, in its better usage, signifies the law of the Old Testament, but in its common and ordinary usage, it signifies Judaism, the religion of the law. Originally, before the first advent of Christ, God gave His law to the people of Israel. What was God's purpose in giving them the law? Did He expect them to keep it? No, that was not His purpose. Galatians 3:23-26 reveals God's purpose in giving the law. "But before faith came we were guarded under law, being shut up unto the faith which was about to be revealed. So the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But faith having come, we are no longer under a child-conductor; For you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Before faith in Christ came, we were kept under the law. In other words, we were kept like sheep in a fold. The Greek word translated "kept" means confined. Before faith came--that is, before Christ came--the chosen people of God were confined under the law. They were "shut up" under the law. "Shut up" is a special word in Greek, meaning to be kept in custody or under special care in a ward. For instance, if the parents of a family pass away, the children might be put in the custody of their aunt or uncle. In other words, they are put under the care of someone else. This shows how the chosen people of God were placed under the custody of the law before faith in Christ came. The law kept God's people under custody "unto the faith," which is better translated as "for preparation to the faith" Galatians 3:24 says that "the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ." Actually, the translation of the Kings James Version for this verse is not adequate. In the Greek text it means that the law was our slave to bring us to our schoolmaster, who is Christ. In ancient times, the children of the rich, Jewish families

were escorted to their schoolmaster by a trained slave. Likewise, the law served as a slave to bring us to Christ. Before we were brought to Christ, the schoolmaster, we were under the care of a slave, the law. God the Father used the law as a slave to take care of us and to bring us to Christ. Before Christ came, we were put under the hand of the law which was to be our custodian. The law was responsible for the care and protection of God's chosen people and eventually it brought them to Christ. Once we have been brought to Christ, we are justified by faith. Since faith has come--that is, since Christ has come--we are no longer under the custody of the slave.

Now we understand what is the sheepfold. Before Christ came, God put His chosen people under the custody of the law. The law was the fold. For example, if you visit the ranch country, you will discover that the sheep do not stay in the fold most of the time. Most of the year the sheep stay in the pasture. The pasture is the permanent place for them to stay, but the sheepfold is merely a temporary place. Only when the pasture is not ready will the sheep be kept in the fold. The fold is used temporarily to keep and protect the sheep until the pasture is ready. This illustrates that Christ is the pasture, the permanent place for the Lord's children to stay. But before Christ came, God prepared the law as the sheepfold to keep and confine His chosen people temporarily.

However, when the Lord came, the Jewish religion had utilized the law to form Judaism. Judaism had become the sheepfold. Before the blind man was healed by the Lord, he was one of the sheep confined in Judaism. When he was cast out of the synagogue, he was actually driven out of Judaism. Therefore, he was put out of the fold. Formerly, he had been one of the sheep in the fold; now, he was cast out of the fold of Judaism.

2. The Sheep Signifying God's Chosen People

The sheep are God's chosen people. In eternity past, God with His foresight had chosen His people. In time,

before Christ came, God put His chosen people into the custody of the law. After Christ came, He wanted all of His people to come out of the law's custody. The blind man who was cast out of the Jewish synagogue and who came to the Lord Jesus is one of God's chosen people. He was under the custody of the law, but he was taken out of it unto the Lord Himself.

3. The Door Signifying Christ for "Going in" and "Going out"

What does it mean to say that Christ is the door? Most Christians think that the door is for people to enter into heaven. Perhaps some of you reading this message still hold on to this concept. But the door here is not for you to go to heaven, for this door enables people to go in and out. If this door were the door into heaven, how could people go out of it? This door is not the door into heaven.

The Lord is the door to the sheepfold. Originally, the fold was the law, and the Lord was the door into the law. The Lord was not only the door into the law; He is also the door for people to come out of the law. Verse 9 says, "I am the door; if any one enters through Me, he shall be saved. and shall go in and out and shall find pasture. Christ is the door, not only for God's elect to enter into the custody of the law, as did Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., in the Old Testament time before Christ came; but also for God's chosen people, such as Peter, James, John, and Paul, to come out of the fold of the law after Christ came. So the Lord indicates in verse 9 that He is the door not only for God's chosen people to go In, but also for God's chosen people to go out. Those who went into the law were people like Moses, the psalmists, and the prophets. Christ was the door for these people to go into the fold of the law. In other words, they went into the fold through Christ and for Christ. If we adopt this point of view when reading the writings of Moses, the psalmists, and the prophets, we will realize that they entered into the law of God through Christ. Christ was their entrance into the law. At the time

the Lord Jesus came, so many people were still in the fold. However, after the coming of Jesus, God no longer intended to keep His chosen people in the fold of the law. God wanted them to come out of the law into Christ. Thus, by that time, Christ no longer was the door for God's chosen people to enter into the fold; He was the door for those who were already in the fold to come out. The blind man was one who was coming out of the fold. Formerly, all of the servants sent by God went into the law through Christ. But although Christ had come, the fold was still full of sheep who were confined within it. What should they do? They had to come out of the fold through Christ. During the Old Testament age, God sent many of His servants into the fold of the law through Christ. Now during the New Testament age, God intends to bring His people out of the law through Christ as the door. Now I believe you understand that the sheepfold was the Old Testament law, which was utilized by the Jews to form the religion of Judaism. Then Judaism became the fold to confine all of the Lord's chosen people. But Christ has come and the pasture is ready. Therefore, there is no need for the sheep to be confined any longer in the custody of the Judaistic law. They must be released from the fold of the law that they might enjoy all of the riches of the pasture.

To summarize, Christ as the door is both the entrance and the exit of the sheepfold. Firstly, the Old Testament saints went into the fold, which was the law, through Christ as the door. Now the New Testament believers are to come out of the law through Christ as the same door. Next, the fold of the law was used by God as a slave to keep and take care of His children. It was used then to bring them to Christ Himself who was the schoolmaster. After they had been sent to the schoolmaster, there is no further need to remain under the hands of the slave. The fold of the law, which became Judaism, confined all of His chosen people. But Christ is the door through whom the New Testament believers may come out of Judaism and come into Him as the pasture. Moreover, the Lord is also the shepherd. He is not only the door of the fold, but also

the shepherd. He comes to call His people out of the fold, and His sheep can recognize His voice. He is the first one out of the fold, which is the law. Now He walks before His sheep, who all will eventually follow Him. Peter, James, and John came out of Judaism. Even Paul came out of Judaism. All of the Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus followed Him out of the Judaistic fold.

The blind man was one who came out of Judaism. He was cast out of the synagogue of Judaism. He was cast out of that fold because of the living Jesus. Therefore, the Lord took the opportunity to speak forth this parable. The Lord let the Jews know that their religion was just a fold. He made it known that the pasture is now ready and that it was unnecessary for the sheep to remain in their fold. Now is the time for the sheep to come out of the fold and to enjoy the riches of the pasture. The one the Jewish people cast out of their synagogue became one who enjoyed the Lord as the pasture.

The Lord is first the door, then the shepherd, and finally the pasture. The shepherd takes all of the sheep out of the fold through Himself as the door and brings them to Himself as the pasture. He is the shepherd who brought the sheep out of the fold; He is the door through whom the sheep are brought out; and He is the pasture to whom the sheep are brought. He simply brought the sheep out of Judaism through Himself, unto Himself, and for Himself. He is everything--the exit, the shepherd, and the pasture.

4. The Pasture Signifying Christ as the Feeding Place for the Sheep

Outside the fold is the green pasture. Pasture here signifies Christ as the feeding place for the sheep. When the pasture is not available in the winter time or in the night, the sheep must be kept in the fold. When the pasture is ready, there is no further need for the sheep to

remain in the fold. To be kept in the fold is transitory and temporary. To be in the pasture to enjoy its riches is final and permanent. Before Christ came, the law was a ward, and to be under the law was transitory. Now, since Christ has come, all God's chosen people must come out of the law and come to Him to enjoy Him as their pasture (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:3-5). This should be final and permanent. Now is the spring time, the right time for the sheep to come out to the pasture and feed on the green grass. The disciples Peter, James, and John were also ones in the fold, but they came out of it to feed upon Christ as the pasture. When they were in the old religion, they were starved to death in the fold. There was no door, meaning there was no freedom, and there was no pasture, meaning there was no feeding. One day, they met Christ, the living One, the shepherd, and He said, "Come and follow Me." They followed Him out of the fold and into the pasture.

If you follow the Lord as your shepherd, it will stir up a storm that will force you out of the fold. You do not need to strive or to exercise any effort to follow the Lord Jesus out of the fold, for, as long as you follow Him, the old religion will force you to get out. They will cast you out. The more you follow this living Jesus, the more religion will force you out. Religion cannot put up with Jesus, and Jesus will never remain in religion. These two are absolutely different, and there is no possibility of reconciling them. Jesus is life, and religion is something other than life. The living Jesus simply cannot tolerate religion. Praise the Lord that we are all out of religion and are feeding on the green pasture! The pasture certainly is not in the fold; it is outside of the fold. If you are going to enjoy the pasture, you must come out of the fold, once you come out of the fold, you will find yourself in the pasture. Hallelujah!

We need to say a word about who are the doorkeeper and the thieves and robbers. The doorkeeper is the Holy Spirit, and the thieves and robbers are those who pretended to be prophets. Those who did not enter into the fold by the door, but by climbing up another way are the

prophets who lived after the Old Testament prophets and before John the Baptist. During this time many came into the law not through Christ but by themselves. They pretended to be the prophets sent by God. But all of the proper Old Testament prophets came through Christ and for Christ. In other words, they came into the law through the door. After these Old Testament prophets, many people came into the law not through and for Christ, but by and for themselves. They were the thieves and robbers who damaged and spoiled God's people. A period of four hundred years existed between the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. For approximately four hundred years those thieves and robbers damaged God's chosen people. Consequently, the Lord said that the thief came to steal, to kill, and to destroy, but that He came that the sheep might have life and might have it abundantly (10:10). This means that the Lord came to impart Himself as life to His sheep because He is their pasture. As long as the sheep stay in the pasture, they will have the supply of life abundantly. By feeding on the pasture, the sheep will enjoy the pasture as their abundant life supply, for the Lord is their abundant life. They will enjoy the Lord and experience Him as their life more abundantly.

How could the Lord fulfill this matter of being the pasture of life to the sheep? It is by realizing that the grass, in order to be eaten, must pass through the process of death. All of the living grass eaten by the sheep must pass through the process of death. Hence, as we shall see, the Lord said that He had to lay down His life for His sheep. He first had to die that He might minister Himself as life to the sheep.

B. The Shepherd, the Divine Life, and the Soulish Life for the Flock

1. Christ Being the Shepherd

We have seen that Christ is the shepherd who calls His people out of the fold. He walks before His sheep, and His

sheep follow Him. As the shepherd, He takes the sheep out of the fold through Himself as the door and to Himself as the pasture.

2. Christ Laying Down His Soulish Life that the Sheep May Have the Divine Life

In verse 10 the Lord said, "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly," and in verse 11 He said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." In these two verses two different Greek words are used for life. In verse 10 the Greek word is zoe, which is the word used in the New Testament for the eternal divine life. In verse 11 the Greek word is psuche, the same word for soul, which means the soulish life, that is, the human life. These two verses indicate that the Lord Jesus has two kinds of lives. As a man the Lord has the psuche life, the human life, and as God He has the zoe life, the divine life. He laid down His soul, His psuche life, His human life, to accomplish redemption for His sheep (10:15, 17-18) that they might share His zoe life, His divine life (10:10), the eternal life (10:28), by which they may be formed into one flock under Himself as the one shepherd. As the good shepherd, He feeds His sheep with the divine life in this way and for this purpose.

The Lord's divine life could never be slain. What was slain in His crucifixion was His human life. In order to be our Savior, He, as a man, laid down His human life to accomplish redemption for us that we might receive His zoe life. He laid down His human life in order that we, after being redeemed, might receive His zoe life, the eternal life.

3. To Be Formed into One Flock by Life Under One Shepherd

The shepherd, the divine life, and the human life are all for the flock. In verse 16 the Lord said, "And I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one

flock, one shepherd." Who are the sheep that are not of this Jewish fold? They are the Gentiles. And what is this one flock? The one flock signifies the one church, the one Body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-16; 4:6), brought forth by life, which the Lord imparted into His members through His death (John 10:10-18). Before, the fold was Judaism; now, the flock is the church. The sheepfold was, and still is, Judaism, but the flock is the church. The flock is the church which includes two peoples--the believing Jews and Gentiles. The Lord brings both together into one flock and under one shepherd. Now, the one flock and the one shepherd are the one Body and the one Head.

Why are the shepherd, the divine life, and the human life all for the flock? Because the people in the flock are fallen persons in need of redemption. As a man, the shepherd had the human life. He sacrificed His human life in order to accomplish redemption for His flock. In this way His flock was redeemed. Then His flock received His divine life, and by this divine life the sheep live together as the flock. Thus, the flock is formed into one unit, into one entity. This is not accomplished by the human life, but by the divine life.

In the human life we are condemned and divided; in the divine life we are accepted and united. In the divine life we are all one entity, meaning that we are one flock under one shepherd in one life. If we live by our human life and not by the divine life, we will only cause trouble. Furthermore, we would become strangers and stray away from the flock. Whenever you live by your human life, you are no longer a sheep but a stranger. A sheep is a regenerated person with the divine life. We all must live by the divine life and thus become genuine, real, and pure sheep. Then we shall all be in the flock. As long as we live by our human life, we will resemble a wild animal, perhaps a devouring lion or a wild horse. If we do not live by the divine life, there can be no flock. The flock is produced, kept, maintained, and formed by the divine life. How good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity (Psa. 133:1). However, dwelling in unity simply means to dwell

in the divine life. Praise the Lord that in the divine life we are truly one and love one another. This is not possible in our human, psuche life, but only in the divine, zoe life. We receive this zoe life through the redemption accomplished by our shepherd who laid down His psuche life. He sacrificed His psuche life to accomplish redemption for us all that we might receive Him as our zoe life. Now we are in the zoe life under one shepherd to be one flock. This is not an organization; it is a flocking together in life. It is wonderful. Hallelujah! The flock is not a matter of religion, but of life.

C. The Eternal Life, the Son's Hand, and the Father's Hand for the Security of the Sheep

In 10:28-29 the Lord says, "And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father Who has given them to Me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand." The eternal life is for the believers' living. Both the Son's hand as the hand of power and the Father's hand as the hand of love are for the believers' protection. Eternal life shall never run out, and the hands of the Son and the Father shall never fail. So the believers are eternally secured and shall never perish.

When I first began to work in this country, many dear saints asked me if I believed in eternal security. I always answered, "Why not?" After awhile everyone knew that I do believe in the wonderful, eternal security. As long as we have eternal life, we have eternal security. What can be more secure than eternal life? I have the real insurance policy in my spirit. Not only do I have eternal life, but I have two hands--the Son's hand of power and the Father's hand of love. These two hands embrace me, and Satan is unable to snatch me out. I am eternally secured by the divine life and by these two divine hands. Praise the Lord! These hands are always on the alert, and no one can kidnap us. Therefore, we shall never perish. We have a divine living and an almighty protection. Thus, we, the sheep, are secured forever. Do not argue doctrinally about

eternal security. We enjoy the fact. Do you have eternal security? I do not ask whether you believe in eternal security but whether you have it. Regardless of whether or not we believe in the doctrine of eternal security, we are eternally secured.

D. The Persecution of Religion

In verse 30 the Lord said, "I and the Father are one." Here the Lord asserts His deity, that He is God (10:33; 5:18; 1:1; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Phil. 2:6). The Jews took up stones in order to stone Him, saying, "We are not stoning you for a good work, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, are making yourself God" (10:33). The Jews persecuted Christ because of His "blasphemy." It is the same today. Religion claims that we preach heresy. Religion was trying to protect its "belief." Actually, they had no belief. They had unbelief and they were protecting vanity. Therefore, they persecuted the Lord Jesus.

E. Life's Desertion of Religion and Life's New Standing

In 10:40-42 we see life's desertion of religion and life's new standing. Christ deserted Judaism and went to the place where John the Baptist preached the New Testament gospel. This is very meaningful. The Lord deserted Judaism and took a new standing for the New Testament. Today we are here on this new standing. We are following the shepherd, we are on the pasture, and we have a new standing.

The hour finally came that the Lord gave up Judaism. Although the religionists sought to take Him again, He escaped out of their hands (10:39). He went beyond Jordan into the place where John the Baptist earlier had baptized Him. The religious Jews had used the law to form Judaism, which had confined the chosen people of God. However, John the Baptist was absolutely separated out

of Judaism because he lived in the wilderness, which was outside of Jerusalem beyond the Jordan. John the Baptist lived in the wilderness, always pointing to Christ Himself. John the Baptist pointed to Christ because the age of the sheepfold was over and a new age had begun. All of the chosen people of God had to give up the fold and come to Him.. The testimony of John the Baptist was simply that of urging people to come out of the fold and to enter the pasture.

John the Baptist's announcement of Christ, the Lord went into the fold in order to bring the sheep out of the fold. Of course, He was not stealing the sheep. He went into Judaism in order that His sheep might hear His voice and come out of the fold. By coming out of the fold and by walking ahead of His sheep, He led His sheep out of the fold. After the Lord came out of Judaism, He went to the very place where John the Baptist had testified of Him. His going to the wilderness beyond Jordan was a sign of His coming out of Judaism and going to a place that was outside of Judaism.

This chapter finally says that many people went to Him and believed in Him (10:41-42). Do you know the significance of this? It simply means that many people followed Him as sheep follow a shepherd. He is the shepherd who went into the sheepfold to lead the sheep out. When He came out of the sheepfold, all of the sheep followed Him to a place where the testimony was that of giving up the Old Testament and realizing the New Testament. The testimony of the Old Testament was the sheepfold, but the testimony of the New Testament is Christ as the pasture. Are you a sheep? Do you prefer to remain in the fold when the pasture is ready? Do you still like to be confined and kept under the custody of the fold? Or will you come out of the fold and go into the pasture to enjoy the riches of Christ? Today, the Lord Jesus is no longer in Judaism. The Good Shepherd is no longer in the fold. He is staying where the testimony of the New Testament is established. He has given up the fold and is staying in the place where He is the pasture. Therefore,

you also must give up the fold and come to Him. This means that you must give up "Judaism" and come to take Christ as your everything. He is everything to you. Just look at the sheep. The pasture is everything to them. The sheep enjoy the pasture as the resting place, the food, the water, the life supply, and as everything else. You too must come out of the fold and go into the pasture--that is, you must come out of "Judaism" and go to Christ alone. You have to come out of the "law" and go to the place where Christ is enjoyed. Where is Christ now? Christ is outside of all the Judaistic types of groups and in the place where John the Baptist testified of Him.

Now you know the right meaning of this chapter, which is the conclusion of the case concerning the blind man who was healed. Before Christ came, all of God's chosen people were in a sheepfold. Now, since Christ has come, the time of the sheepfold is over. You must leave the fold in order to come to Christ. Now is the time for you to take Christ as your pasture and to enjoy Him as your everything. You must live in Him and take Him as your all.

Consider this picture. Look at the sheep and the pasture and see how much the pasture means to the sheep. If you are truly a sheep, you will tell people how you long to be out of the fold, because in it there is too much bondage and confinement. There is simply no freedom because you are kept under the custody of a guardian. Now you know where there is the pasture, the freedom, and the life supply.

Christ is the all-inclusive pasture. The fold is the law and Judaism. Christ, the very exit out of the fold, is the shepherd who leads you out of the fold and brings you to Himself who can be everything to you. He is now your pasture. Allow me to repeat once again. Where is Christ now? He is not in Judaism, but in the very place where the New Testament is testified. Christ is in the place where John the Baptist testified of Him. This is very meaningful because the Lord is now out of the fold and is

standing in a new position where He is everything to the chosen people of God. Therefore, you must come out of the old fold and go into the new pasture where Christ Himself is everything to you.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE NEED OF THE DEAD--LIFE'S RESURRECTING

(1)

The case of raising Lazarus from the dead is certainly a wonderful case. Here we see the case of a man who had died, who had been buried for four days, and who had begun to stink. Nevertheless, he was resurrected. Why do the other three gospels give us no record of this wonderful case? Although this case is marvelous, the other gospels say nothing about it. This case of resurrection does not fit in with the purposes of the other three gospels; it only suits the purpose of the Gospel of John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are gospels with purposes other than life. John is the gospel on life. Therefore, the Holy Spirit kept this case for John. This proves that the Gospel of John is a book of life.

I. THE DEAD AND HIS NEED

In 11:1-4 we see the dead and his need. Lazarus was not only sick but also dead (11:14). Thus, he did not need healing but resurrecting. In the Lord's salvation He does not merely heal the sick; He also gives life to the dead. So He remained two days until the sick one had died (11:6). The Lord does not reform people or regulate them; He regenerates people and raises them out of death. Hence, the first of the nine cases is on regeneration and the last is on resurrection, revealing that all of the different aspects of Christ as life to us, as unveiled in the other seven cases, are in the principle of regeneration and resurrection. This last case is the actual changing of death into life.

Before going into the matter of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, we must realize that the Gospel of John reveals two things. On the positive side, it reveals that Christ came to be our life. The Son of God is the Word of God, which is the expression of God. As the expression of

God, He came in the flesh to be our life. This central thought is found in every chapter throughout the entire gospel. On the negative side, this book also shows that religion, even the Jewish religion of Judaism, is very much against Christ as life. By reading this book carefully, you will even see how the sound and genuine religion opposes Christ as life. Within the first ten chapters of this gospel, the only opposition our Lord met came from the Jewish religion. Religion opposed Him, rejected Him, repudiated Him and persecuted Him. Eventually, at the end of chapter ten, He was forced to desert religion. He forsook the temple, the holy city, and all the good things of the Jewish religion and came to a new standing.

In every chapter from chapter one through chapter ten we can see one point concerning religion versus Christ. In chapter one we see that religion was expecting a great leader to come. Religion looked for the so-called Messiah, Elijah, or the promised prophet. However, Christ did not come as a great leader, but as the little Lamb of God to accomplish redemption and with a little dove to produce the transformed stones for God's building. Thus, even in the first chapter of this gospel we find an indication that religion takes the wrong way, a way other than the way of life. There is a great discrepancy between religion and life.

In chapter two we see that religion will try to destroy life, for religion will try to destroy Jesus. But Jesus as the divine life will raise Himself out of that destruction. Life not only can withstand destruction, but can raise Himself up out of the destruction of death.

In chapter three we see that Nicodemus, a high-class man, held a religious concept of the Lord Jesus, addressing Him as rabbi and referring to Him as a teacher sent from God. All such concepts are religious.

In chapter four we see that even a poor, mean, immoral, low-class Samaritan woman held a religious concept. At a certain point in her conversation with the Lord she began to speak about the worship of God. Although the religion among the Samaritans was not orthodox, it was a religion. The Samaritans had a

religious tradition and inheritance.

In chapter five we see religion's opposition to life fully aroused. This was due to the fact that the Lord Jesus enlivened the impotent man on the Sabbath day. To the Jews, it seemed that He broke their regulations about the Sabbath. Consequently, they began to oppose Him. In fact, they began to be very much against the Lord. By this case we can see how the rules and regulations of religion are in opposition to the Lord as life to the needy. The Lord who is our life is one thing, but religion with all of its rules and regulations is another. Christ as life and religion with its regulations can never go together.

We also see something of religion in chapter six. When the people saw that Jesus had fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes they said, "This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14). They were about to force the Lord to be their King (6:15). That was a religious concept. The Lord Jesus withdrew from them, for He wanted to remain as the small bread good for people's food.

We see another religious concept in chapter seven. The people at the religious feast were discussing Jesus, but Jesus stood and cried, asking them to turn from their dry religion and come to the source of living water.

We see more of religion in chapter eight. The religious scribes and Pharisees tried to trap the Lord by asking Him, in their religious way, how to deal with an adulterous woman. But the Lord answered in the way of life, exposing their folly in holding on to their religion and silencing them with shame.

The opposition of religion to life is strengthened in chapter nine. In chapter five the Lord enlivened an impotent man on the Sabbath. In chapter nine, He gave sight to a blind man. He purposely did this on the Sabbath day. Why did not the Lord Jesus go to the blind man before or after the Sabbath day? He did it purposely to break the dead rituals of dead religion. That stirred religion's opposition against life. The Lord purposely broke the Sabbath regulation before the eyes of the religious Jews. The eyes of the blind man received sight, but the eyes of the Pharisees received blindness due to their

opposition. The Jews thought that Jesus was very much against their religion because He broke the regulations of their religion. Hence, they became very angry with the Lord and began to oppose Him. They even excommunicated the man who had been healed by the Lord (9:34). When they cast the blind man out of their synagogue, they excommunicated him from their Judaistic religion. Then the Lord took the opportunity to tell them that Judaism was nothing other than a sheepfold which keeps the sheep for awhile. Now that the pasture is ready, the sheep will be released from the fold and brought into the pasture. The Lord Jesus let them know that since they had excommunicated the blind man from their religion, a sheep was released from that fold and brought into Christ as the living pasture. At the end of chapter ten, the Lord walked out of the fold of the Jewish religion.

In the first ten chapters of this gospel we see the fighting, the struggle, between religion and life. Eventually, the Lord deserted that religion and went outside of it. Where is He now? He is outside of religion. He has nothing to do with it. Now, in His new standing, there is no religious element. All the elements of religion have been excluded.

II. FRUSTRATION OF HUMAN OPINIONS

Now we come to the last case. This case is not in the Judaistic fold; it is outside of it. After the Lord went out of Jerusalem, He went to a home in Bethany of one brother and two sisters who loved Him very much. Before He came, something happened in this home. The brother, Lazarus, became seriously ill, and the sisters sent a message to the Lord, which means that they prayed to Him (11:3). There is nothing wrong with prayer. If you are in trouble, you must send a message to the Lord. At any time you can send a word to Him. You may send Him the information about any situation. But what He would do is up to Him.

Chapter eleven serves a very specific purpose: it shows us that besides the opposition of religion, human opinions

are the strongest frustration to life. Throughout the foregoing chapters, the problem that life faced was with religion. As we have seen, in every chapter life was opposed by religion. However, there is no religion in chapter eleven. But there is another kind of frustration--the frustration from human opinion. What is revealed in this chapter that frustrates the resurrection power of the Lord? It is the human opinions. This chapter vividly portrays how the human opinions frustrate the Lord's resurrection life. Once human opinions are subdued, resurrection life is manifested. This is not a matter in religion, but in the church, at the home in Bethany, which is a miniature of the church life. In Jerusalem, you are in religion; in Bethany, you are in the local church. In Jerusalem you have religion; in the local church you have the problem of human opinions. In chapters one through ten, Christ as life is fully revealed and, at the same time, religion is exposed. Now, in chapter eleven, Christ as the resurrection life is unfolded, but, at the same time, human opinions are brought to the surface. Although there is no problem of religion in the church, there is nevertheless another kind of hindrance, the hindrance of human opinion. The Lord is the resurrection life, but He is hindered by the opinions. This chapter is filled with human opinions.

Martha and Mary considered that the Lord should have come immediately. This was their opinion. But the Lord never acts on the basis of anyone's opinion; He always acts according to His own will. They thought that the Lord should come immediately, but the Lord purposely stayed away for two more days.

The Lord is the resurrection and the life and death is no problem to Him. It is easy for Him to swallow up death. Death may be a problem to us, but it is not a problem to Christ. He as resurrection can overcome death and swallow it up. However, when we come to applying Him as resurrection, we face the problem of human opinions. In

this message I want to impress you with this matter of our opinions. The problem in the local church life which keeps us from seeing the resurrection of Christ is our opinion.

If you read this chapter carefully, you will see that even the death of Lazarus was provided by God. In His sovereignty, God prepared the environment which allowed Jesus' follower to die. God's sovereignty provided such a death situation in order to unfold Christ's resurrection power. Without death there is no way to express resurrection. Resurrection needs death. How could resurrection be manifested without it? We need to praise the Lord for the death of Lazarus. If Martha and Mary had seen that resurrection can never be manifested without death, they would have praised the Lord when they saw their brother dying. They would have known that this death would manifest the Lord's resurrection. In such a case, there would have been no human opinion.

We may apply this to situations in the local church. There is always someone dying in the local church. Someone or something is always dying. Whenever the responsible ones see such a death situation, they are troubled and say to the Lord, "O Lord, isn't this your church? Don't You love the church? Don't You know that something in the church is dying? Lord, come quickly." This is a good prayer, but it is a prayer according to human opinion. The more you pray like this, the more the Lord will stay away. He will delay His coming in order to exhaust the human opinion.

When I first saw the light in this chapter, I was laughing. I had never seen how many opinions there were in this chapter. Surely the Lord knew that Lazarus was sick and He knew exactly how to handle the situation, even if they had not sent any news to Him. However, they sent the news to Him, but He was not moved by it. Sometimes it is very difficult to move the Lord. In a prayer meeting you may say, "Lord, we move Your hand," but the more you try to move His hand, the more His hand refuses to be moved. The Lord will never be moved according to your opinion. When He heard the news, His heart was

hard and unmoved. He remained where He was for another two days.

A. The Disciples' Opinion

In 11:8-16 we see the disciples' opinion. When the news came about Lazarus' sickness, the Lord's heart was not moved. The disciples must have been puzzled and perplexed. You can imagine how disappointed the disciples were. After two days, the Lord suddenly expressed the desire to see Lazarus. He said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going that I may awaken him out of sleep" (11:11). The disciples immediately said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover" (11:12). Here we see the disciples' human opinion. When the Lord did not want to go, they were puzzled, and when the Lord was about to go, they thought that it was not necessary to go. Once the Lord expressed His desire to go and see Lazarus, all of the disciples expressed their opinions. They told the Lord that it was dangerous to go because the Jews sought to stone Him (11:8). This is human opinion, which always contradicts the Lord's will. However, once the Lord made up His mind that He was going to see Lazarus, no one could change it. Eventually, the disciples agreed to go, but with a martyr's attitude fearing the Jews' persecution, for one of them said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (11:16). Many times in every local church the situation is exactly like this. There are plenty of opinions.

B. Martha's Opinion

When the Lord came, Martha was the first one to meet Him (11:20). But before the Lord could say anything, Martha opened her mouth and gave forth another opinion: "Lord, If You were here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). She was complaining that the Lord had come too late. The Lord said to her, "Your brother shall rise again" (11:23). This means that the Lord would raise him immediately. However, Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day" (11:24).

Martha expounded this word of the Lord so as to postpone the present resurrection to the last day. What an expounding of the divine word! What devastating knowledge of fundamental teaching that frustrates people from enjoying the Lord's present resurrection life! Then the Lord Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he should die, shall live; and every one who lives and believes in Me shall by no means die forever" (11:25-26). The Lord seemed to be telling her, "It is not a matter of time. There is no problem of time with Me. Nothing is too late, and nothing is too early. As long as I am here, everything will be all right, for I will raise up your brother." Then the Lord asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Martha replied, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who is coming into the world" (11:27). What she answered absolutely was not what the Lord asked. She was not clear about what the Lord was saying. Her old, preoccupying knowledge prevented her from understanding the Lord's new word.

Martha is like many Christians today who have a great deal of knowledge and doctrine. Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day." This sounds quite scriptural and correct. Then the Lord asked her if she believed that He would raise Lazarus up, and she said, "I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God." She believed in a certain kind of doctrine that the Lord is the Christ and the Son of God. She believed in the doctrine that the Lord will raise up all of the dead saints in the last day. She had all the knowledge, but it was not the living knowledge that the Lord taught. All of her different opinions were due to the fact that she had all the knowledge. Today, many Christians have opinions because they have so many teachings. When someone talks with them about the inner life, they immediately begin to share their opinions. Too much knowledge and too many doctrines breed endless opinions.

After Martha said that she believed the Lord to be the Christ, the Son of God, she went away and called her

sister Mary. Martha said, "The Teacher is here and is calling you" (11:28). However, I cannot find a word saying that the Lord had called for Mary. That was Martha's suggestion. It was her self-assuming opinion. Again we see in Martha a person who was so full of her own opinions. She was so active in her opinion that she could never be silent. Perhaps you also love the Lord very much, but, like Martha, you cannot be silent.

C. Mary's Opinion

Mary came to the Lord at Martha's word. She reiterated what Martha first told the Lord: "Lord, if You were here, my brother would not have died" (11:32). This also is an opinion, a complaint against the Lord.

The Lord never argued; neither did He accept their opinion. They simply did not understand that as long as the Lord was present everything would be all right. They could not realize this, for they were very sorrowful and even weeping. For this reason, the Lord groaned in His spirit and was troubled (11:33). He did not groan over the death of Lazarus, but over the fact that not one of the sorrowful ones knew that He was the present resurrection, and He was troubled by this. Then the Lord asked them where they had put Lazarus. They said to Him, "Lord, come and see" (11:34). This answer was very good. That opinion was the best. When the church has a problem, do not talk so much. Simply say, "Lord, come and see." At this juncture, the Lord wept in sympathy with their sorrow over Lazarus' death.

D. The Jews' Opinion

In 11:36-38 we see the Jews' opinion. They thought that the Lord wept (11:35) because He loved Lazarus. But some questioned why the Lord could not have kept Lazarus from dying. Those opinions plus the Jews' ignorance of the Lord's ability to raise Lazarus from the dead caused the Lord to groan again.

E. Martha's Opinion Again

When the Lord came to the tomb, He told them to take away the stone. Once again, Martha frustrated the Lord

with her opinion. She said, "Lord, by now he smells, for it is the fourth day that he has been there" (11:39). She felt that there was no use in moving the stone. In this chapter there is nothing religious, but there are many opinions standing in the Lord's way. Although the Lord is life to the people in the church, He meets a great number of human opinions from the people in the church. It is just like His meeting the opinions of the disciples, Martha and Mary, and their Jewish friends.

F. Opinions Belonging to the Tree of Knowledge vs. the Tree of Life

All opinions come out of man's mind. So they all belong to the tree of knowledge, which is versus the tree of life. The tree of life is actually the Lord Himself for our enjoyment. When we stay with our opinions, we are kept away from the enjoyment of the Lord as our resurrection life. When our opinions are subdued, it is easy for us to enter into the full enjoyment of the Lord Himself.

III. LIFE'S RESURRECTING

A. Giving Life to the Dead

The Lord as resurrection gives life to the dead. He is the resurrection and the life. In resurrection, this life is imparted into the dead to raise them up from death. This is life's resurrecting.

B. Needing Man's Submission and Cooperation

We must see one point here. The point is that the Lord was able to raise up Lazarus from death. However, He could not do anything because He was continually frustrated by human opinions. He was frustrated by those opinions until the time came when they were subdued. Eventually, Martha was subdued with a certain amount of

submission. The Lord has the resurrection life, the resurrection power, but it needs our cooperation. It needs our submission. What is our submission? It is simply the giving up of our opinion. You must forsake your opinion and allow the Lord to speak. When He tells us, "Move this stone," we should simply move it. We must submit, cooperate, and coordinate with Him. We need to submit to His word, cooperate with Him, and coordinate with the resurrection power. Why did the Lord, who was able to raise the dead, not remove the stone by Himself? Because His resurrection power requires our cooperation. Once they had removed the stone, the Lord cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, Come forth!" (11:41-43), and Lazarus was raised from the dead. He heard the voice of the living Lord, was quickened, and was raised from the dead. After Lazarus came out of the tomb, there was still the need for human cooperation. Lazarus' hands and feet were bound with the burial clothes and his face was bound about with a handkerchief. Therefore Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go" (11:44). They had to remove the bandages from the resurrected Lazarus. They did it and the work of resurrection was completed.

We too must work by cooperating with the Lord to release others from the bondage of their bandages. When the Lord raises up people from their death in the church, we need to cooperate with Him in order to release them from their earthly bondage. By this kind of cooperation the church becomes the testimony of the Lord as life. The Lord could have moved the stone from the cave and He could have removed the bandages from Lazarus, but He did not do it. He would rather ask us to cooperate with Him. However, before we can cooperate with Him, we must first give up our opinions and act according to His will. In the church life, we must drop our opinions, submit to the Lord's word and work, and cooperate with His resurrection power.

This is a serious lesson that everyone in the local churches must learn. Especially the Marthas and the

Marys--the leading ones, the responsible ones--must learn to drop their opinions, submit themselves and their opinions to the Lord, and cooperate with Him and with His resurrection power. If in any local church the leaders drop their opinions, submitting them to the Lord's word, and cooperate with the Lord's resurrection power, that church will see resurrection life. This is a part of the major revelation of this chapter which is the submission of human opinions and the cooperation of the lovers of the Lord with His resurrection power. The Lord today is still waiting for an opportunity to express His resurrection power, but it is difficult for Him to obtain the submission, cooperation, and coordination. As leaders in the local churches, we may be busy praying and asking the Lord to do things according to our opinion. We have to drop our opinions, submit every opinion for His consideration, and cooperate with Him. When He asks you to remove the stone, remove it. When He tells you to do a certain thing, do it. Then you will see resurrection life. You will see resurrection power. This is a part of the revelation of John 11. Most people have only seen the story of Lazarus being raised up from the dead. They have not seen the revelation in this chapter, which is that outside of religion, in the local churches, the frustration to Christ as life comes from our human opinions.

C. The Actual Changing of Death into Life

To resurrect the dead actually is to change death into life. The significance of this case is the same as that of the sign of changing water into wine. As Mary's opinion in that sign frustrated the Lord's changing of water into wine, so Martha's opinion in this case frustrated the Lord's resurrection power. Once Mary's opinion was subdued, the Lord's changing power was manifested. When Martha's opinion was subdued, the Lord's resurrection power prevailed.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE NEED OF THE DEAD--LIFE'S RESURRECTING

(2)

By considering the signs in the Gospel of John, we can realize that the Lord firstly comes to us as life. The first category of hindrances that He met was the Judaistic religion, and the second category was that of the human opinions held by those who loved Him. The hindrances of human opinions is exactly the same today in His church. Countless opinions of those who love the Lord the most hinder the Lord from being resurrection life in the church. Outside the church, it is religion that prevents the Lord from being life. But inside the church, it is the endless opinions that hamper Him from being our life.

These nine cases are very meaningful because they show that the Lord as life starts with regeneration and ends with resurrection. All of these cases are signs signifying that the Lord comes to us as life in several different aspects. The experience of the Lord as our life begins with regeneration and reaches the climax with resurrection.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). Resurrection is superior to life. By itself, life can only have existence, but resurrection can withstand any kind of attack, even the attack of death. The Lord is not only life, but He is also resurrection. Death cannot hold Him because He can conquer death. Death cannot retain Him, because He is not only life--He is also resurrection. Life is the power to exist, but resurrection is the power to conquer everything that is against life.

Therefore, because resurrection can defeat every attack against life, it is superior to life.

According to the Scriptures, death is a great power. When death comes upon a man, he cannot escape it. Not even atomic power can overcome death. Only the Lord Himself as resurrection can defeat death. He can deliver all of the dead persons from death because He is not only life but also resurrection. Since He is the resurrection, He can break the power of death. Even hades is unable to confine our Lord to the tomb.

We must learn how to apply this resurrection life day by day. We must not only live by the Lord as life, but we must also conquer by the Lord as resurrection. Many times our circumstances affect us like death. But praise the Lord that all matters which contain the touch of death are a test because these matters prove whether or not the Lord is the resurrection. Nothing can confine us, for we have the Lord as our resurrection life. Regardless of the pressure or trouble we are bearing, we can stand it because we have resurrection life. According to 11:25, the Lord did not say that we will not die, but that we will prove to the whole universe that the Lord in whom we believe is the resurrection! Satan will try his best to put us permanently into death. One day, though we all may die, we will all be resurrected. Throughout the whole universe this will be the greatest victory, the victory that will testify that the Lord is the resurrection. However, even in our daily life we may have the foretaste of the ultimate victory of that resurrection. This is why the Apostle Paul said, "To know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10).

The human opinion is always in the way of experiencing the Lord as the resurrection life in the church. Therefore, human opinion must be given up before it is possible to have the church life. How we need to learn the lesson of being silent in the church instead of voicing our opinion! We must be even more quiet than Mary. We should not say a word. We should simply send a message

to the Lord--that is all. Then Lazarus will be saved. Whether the Lord answers or not and whether He comes or not, we are simply quiet. We just leave the matter completely in the hands of the Lord. Then we will never be wrong and He will never be late. When He comes, we must not say a word. We should just let Him speak and give Him the opportunity to do whatever He wants. We should simply be available to cooperate with Him. This is the proper way to have the church life. If we do this, we shall experience Christ as the resurrection life.

This chapter in John is very meaningful when it is related to the church life. The Lord is the One who comes to the church as the resurrection life, but there are two categories of hindrances. One is religion and the other is human opinion. Even Christianity as a religion is absolutely a hindrance to the Lord's purpose of bringing life. Today, there are many so-called free groups of Christians who have given up Christianity as a religion. They have come out of the denominations and other Christian organizations. Nevertheless, how endless are the human opinions among these free groups! Although there may be nothing like religion among them, yet how much their human opinions stand in the Lord's way! Therefore, we must learn the lesson of not only giving up the Christian religion but also of forsaking our own opinions. Then we will afford the Lord a free course to be life in our midst. Once the Lord can express Himself, then the Lord will have a living church. Let us remember that religion and opinion are the two main categories of frustration to the flow of the Lord as our life.

Before going further into this last case, we must discover a principle. In chapter two we saw that the first sign was that of changing the water into wine. The second sign, in chapter four, was that of making the dying son of the royal official live. We have mentioned several times that the intention of the Holy Spirit throughout this gospel is simply to make the Lord Jesus to be the life to meet all of our needs. These two signs in chapters two and four reveal the principle of life out of death. In all nine

cases there is the principle of life in the realm of resurrection to meet every human need. Now we can understand why the changing of water into wine was the "beginning of signs." It contains the all-important principle of bringing life out of death. This is the basic principle in all of the nine cases. In every case there is nothing but water, which signifies death. All that we are and all that we have is nothing but the water of death. In other words, we are nothing more than the water of death and we have nothing other than the water of death.

If you consider the condition of the people in each case, you will discover that in every case they had nothing but death. Look at the man named Nicodemus. He had nothing but the water of death. Look at the Samaritan woman. Her thirst meant that she was under the threatening of death. Look at the dying son of the royal official. He was under the cruelty of death. Look at the man who was sick for thirty-eight years. What did he have? Death. Look at the multitude before they were fed by the Lord. They were hungry because they had nothing other than the water of death. Look at the thirsty religionists. The vanity with which their feast ended also spoke of death. Look at the sinful woman who was brought to the Lord by the Pharisees. She also had only the water of death. Spiritually speaking, even the blind man had only death. And Lazarus reeked of death. All the people involved in these nine cases had nothing but the water of death. According to the second chapter, the six waterpots, a type of humanity, were filled to the brim with the water of death. Likewise, every person in every case was filled with death. Death is revealed in every case.

However, the Lord came into these situations of death in order to be life in the principle of resurrection. He turned the death of each situation into life and brought life out of death.

Let us apply this principle of life in resurrection to all of the cases. Firstly, the Lord spoke with Nicodemus about

regeneration. Do you know what is the principle of regeneration? Regeneration simply means that the Lord has come to be our life in resurrection. How can the Lord regenerate people or cause them to be born anew? Simply by being their life in the principle of resurrection.

In the case of the Samaritan woman, the Lord spoke with her about the satisfaction of the living water. How can a poor sinner be satisfied with the living water? Only by the principle of life in resurrection. When the Lord comes into us as life in resurrection, we shall then have the living water which satisfies us.

In principle, the healing of the dying son of the royal official also meant that life was imparted to him. For the healing of the death wound there was the need for the imparting of life in resurrection.

What happened to the impotent man who was sick for thirty-eight years? Again the principle is the same, for the Lord came to him as the enlivening life in resurrection. Because the Lord came to be his life in resurrection, the Lord became the enlivening power to make him strong.

In the case of the hungry multitude, the Lord came as their bread of life. If the Lord had not died and been resurrected, He could never be our living bread. Since He has died by being slain on the cross and has been raised in the power of resurrection life, He can feed and satisfy us with the living bread. We can be fed by and with Him. This also is the principle of life in resurrection.

In the case of the thirsty people in chapter seven, the Lord was the living water to quench their thirst. How can the Lord be our living water? John 7 clearly tells us that after the Lord was glorified the life-giving Spirit became the living water. What does it mean for the Lord to be glorified? It simply means that the Lord was to be crucified and resurrected. In His resurrection the Lord has become the living water which quenches our thirst.

In the case of the sinful woman, the Lord set her free from the bondage and slavery of sin. The Lord died to be the living, great I Am to sinners. The Lord strengthens

and energizes us with His life in resurrection, which frees us from the bondage of sin. Without His life in resurrection, we could never be freed from the slavery of sin.

The case of the man born blind also reveals the principle of life in resurrection. How was it possible for the Lord to give him sight and the light of life? Chapter ten, which continues the case in chapter nine, says that the Lord, as the good shepherd, had to die in order to give His divine life to His sheep. The Lord had to die and become the resurrection life in the Spirit. Now He comes to us on the basis of life in resurrection.

Of course, it is clearly evident that the last case, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is based upon Christ as life in the realm of resurrection. The first sign, the second sign, and now the last case reveal the intention and principle of the Gospel of John: that of life through the resurrection of the dead.

Why was it that the Lord waited for two days instead of going immediately upon receiving the news of Lazarus' sickness? Strictly speaking, the Lord waited for two days because He would not only heal people; rather, He would enliven us. The Lord never heals according to our understanding; He heals by enlivening. Can you find the term "healing" in chapter five about the impotent man who was sick for thirty-eight years? Was that man actually sick in the eyes of the Lord? No, in the eyes of the Lord that man was dead. The Lord did not heal his sickness; He enlivened that dead man. Therefore, the principle of life through resurrection is that the Lord always enlivens the dead.

Do you think that the Lord wants to heal you? The Lord wants to enliven you. According to the old concept, healing means to reform or to improve you. But the Lord never comes to improve you or to regulate your behavior. He always comes to enliven you. The Lord's only intention is to impart Himself to you as the enlivening life.

For this reason the Lord refused to go to Lazarus immediately to heal him of his sickness. He waited until Lazarus was thoroughly dead and buried. He waited until

Lazarus' human life had come to an absolute end. Lazarus was so completely dead that he was stinking in the tomb. It was at this time that the Lord came. He did not come before this time because He refused to come on the principle of healing. He came only on the principle of life in resurrection.

Consider the example of a religious brother who discovers that he has a bad temper. We may say that he is sick with a bad temper. Consider also the case of a little boy who, after he is saved, discovers that he is quite naughty. He also is a sick person; he is sick with his mischievous behavior. Another believer may discover that he jokes too much and that he is sick with his joking. All of these sick people, after discovering their sickness, send the information about their sickness to the Lord. Just like Martha who said that Lazarus was sick, they also say that they are sick of a bad temper, of bad behavior, or of joking. They want the Lord to heal them by improving their temper so that it will be a good temper, by reforming their bad behavior so that it will be a good behavior, and by adjusting their joking. The brother who wants his joking adjusted prays, "O Lord, keep my mouth!" In other words, these people are sick and are asking the Lord to heal them. But the Lord will never come to heal you. The more you pray for the healing of your temper, the worse your temper will be. The Lord will never come to heal, but He waits... waits... waits... until you are dead. He will not answer your prayer for healing, but He will wait until your sickness turns into death. He will wait until you realize that you are not only sick but that you are also dead. The Lord will wait until you tell Him that you are a hopeless case, until you give up all hope for yourself.

Do you still hope for some improvement? Are you really disappointed with yourself? I am afraid that each of you still possesses some hope for yourself. Many times you are like both Martha and Lazarus. On one hand, you are the sick Lazarus; on the other hand, you are the Martha informing the Lord. You inform the Lord about your

sickness with the hope that He will come to improve your condition. But we all can testify that the Lord will never come to answer this kind of prayer. The more you seek for improvement, the more He stays away.

One day you will finally realize that you are an absolutely hopeless case. You will discover that you are a vessel containing nothing but the water of death. Everything is full of death; nothing is living. You are just one of those six waterpots full of death water. When you realize that you are absolutely in death, having nothing except the water of death within you, then the Lord will come to enliven you. When you awake to the fact that you are dead, buried, and even stinking with bad odors, the Lord will then come to enliven you. How often we try to be better and to improve ourselves! But the Lord will just wait until you stink and even spread the bad odors to others. The Lord will wait until others smell your stinking odors. Then He will come to you in the principle of life in resurrection to enliven you.

Christianity acts contrary to this principle, for it is a religion that tries to improve people, reform them, and regulate their behavior. But Christ is life and He comes to enliven people with that life. He comes to regenerate and resurrect them with Himself as life. What does it mean to improve, reform, or to regulate one's behavior? It simply means to make the original man better by the means of the original self. But Christ comes to regenerate and remake us with Himself. The Lord would not heal the original man; He waits until the original man is dead. Therefore, when you are so full of the water of death that you stink with the odor of death, then the Lord will come to recreate you and resurrect you out of that death into Himself as life in resurrection.

The principle of the Gospel of John is Christ as life in resurrection. The intention of this gospel is not to improve or reform us by regulating our behavior. The Lord's only intention is to bring life into us. This life will enliven, regenerate, resurrect, and recreate us. If we can apprehend the principle of this gospel, our thirst will be

quenched, our hunger satisfied, our darkness enlightened, our bondage in sin broken, and our death swallowed up by resurrection--all by experiencing Christ as our resurrection life in the Spirit and through the Word. We can never experience the living Christ by anything of ourselves or by any of our doings. The living Christ is only experienced in the Spirit and through the Word. The Spirit and the Word will bring us into the principle of life in resurrection. If we take Him in the Spirit and through the Word, we shall then be satisfied, enlightened, freed, and resurrected. When we are resurrected from the dead, we are delivered from all aspects of death. Nothing can suppress us, nothing can restrict us, and nothing can imprison us because we are living in resurrection.

IV. THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGION AND THE GATHERING OF GOD'S CHILDREN

The Lord raised up the dead only among those who loved Him dearly. This is typical of His church today, for He is the resurrection life only to the group of believers who dearly love Him. However, as the information about His resurrection power is brought to the religious groups, such as Judaism, it will cause a reaction. The religious groups will simply become angry with the Lord and even make the decision to arrest Him and put Him to death. Judaism in chapter eleven implies that even the Christian religion of today is very much against the Lord's desire to bring resurrection life to others. In many cases, the Christian religion has driven out the Lord as life. In these last days, the Lord is more and more with those groups of persons who love Him dearly. As a result, He will do many things to raise people out of their death. But this information will spread to the religious groups who will be angry and will be against Christ as the resurrection life.

It is remarkable that the time of Lazarus' resurrection coincided with the time of the Passover. According to the Scriptures, we know that Christ is our Passover (1 Cor.

5:7), but those religious folks were going to have another Passover. By keeping their own Passover, the religious people killed the reality of the Passover. In other words, Christ as the real Passover is the reality of the Passover. On one hand, the religious people wanted to keep the Passover; on the other hand, they wanted to eliminate the reality of the Passover. Today this principle is exactly the same in Christianity. Although Christianity has so much to do with Christ, it puts away the reality of Christ. It preaches about Christ on the one hand, but destroys the reality of Christ on the other.

A. Religion's Conspiracy Fulfilling God's Purpose

We have seen that the death situation provided by God enabled Christ to manifest His resurrection power and that this resurrection power issues in the raising up of the dead one. But this raising of Lazarus caused some trouble. The news of it spread to the Pharisees, and the Pharisees, after hearing of it, considered the situation as very serious. Thus, they conspired to kill Jesus (11:45-57). As the Pharisees were conspiring against the Lord Jesus, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke prophetically saying, "You know nothing at all, nor do you account that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not the whole nation perish" (11:49-50). The following verse says, "Now this he did not say from himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather into one the children of God who have been scattered abroad" (11:51-52). The phrase "gather into one the children of God" mentioned here implies that not only the death but also the resurrection life of the Lord is for the building up of God's children. What does all this mean? It simply means that the resurrection life will raise up a situation through which God's scattered people may be gathered together in order to be built up for God's dwelling on earth. Religion's conspiracy helps in the fulfillment of God's purpose.

B. The Gathering of God's Children Through the Death and Resurrection Life of the Lord

I say once again that the death of Lazarus was provided by God as an opportunity for resurrection life to be manifested. Resurrection life needs death in order that resurrection life and power might be expressed. This manifestation of resurrection power caused a reaction among the opposers, who then conspired to kill the Lord Jesus. As part of their consideration, a prophecy was uttered. This indicates that the conspiracy among the opposing religion actually serves to fulfill God's purpose. It helps to gather all the scattered people of God for God's building. Therefore, never be disappointed by the situation in your local church. If there is a difficult situation in your church, praise God for it. It must be His provision. He will do something and then the opposition of religion will be stirred up. The opposers may even try to kill you. But do not be troubled. That very conspiracy will be used by God to gather His scattered people together for His building.

I want to impress you with the fact that as long as we are in the Lord's recovery and as long as we have the resurrection of Christ, regardless of the situation among us or the conspiracy in the environment against us, God's eternal purpose will eventually be fulfilled. There will be a gathering of God's scattered people for God's building. All the negative things--the death and the opposition--will be the servants of God's eternal purpose. They will further the fulfillment, the accomplishment, of God's purpose. We are on the mountaintop, and the flood waters are under our feet. Do not be troubled. As long as you are in the local church, as long as you have Christ as your resurrection power, and as long as you are in this flow and have this testimony, you may be at peace regardless of the death condition inwardly or the opposition outwardly. The opposition of religion, the conspiracy that plans to kill or terminate you, will carry out God's eternal purpose.

This is the revelation in this chapter. John 11 is not

merely a story of resurrection. It is a complete revelation that discloses that as long as we are with the Lord and with the resurrection life for God's purpose, everything that transpires is for the fulfillment of His purpose. Thus we may say, "Lord, if You want to give us a death situation, please do it. We are happy with it. Let some Lazarus brothers die. Then Your resurrection power will be manifested. You will do a work in resurrection that will arouse the opposition, and that opposition will gather together the scattered children of God for God's building." These things are happening in this country. Praise the Lord! Praise Him for His resurrecting power. Praise the Lord for His sovereign gathering. He is raising the dead and He is gathering His people together for His wonderful building!

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

LIFE'S ISSUE AND MULTIPLICATION

(1)

In this message we come to another major subsection in the Gospel of John. We have seen that this gospel is composed of two sections: the eternal Word incarnated coming to bring God into man (chapters 1-13), and Jesus crucified and Christ resurrected going to prepare the way to bring man into God, and as the Spirit coming to abide and live in the believers for the building of God's habitation (chapters 14-21). We have already covered the first three subsections of the first main section: an introduction to life and building (1:1-51); life's principle and life's purpose (2:1-22); and life meeting the need of man's every case (2:23--11:57). The principle of life is to change death into life (2:1-11), and the purpose of life is to build the house of God (2:12-22). Beginning with chapter three, we see nine cases which illustrate how Christ as life can meet mankind's every need for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This brings us to the end of chapter eleven. After this, in chapter twelve, this gospel reveals the issue of Christ being life to man: the producing of the church. The church, a house of feasting, is the place where the Lord can rest and obtain His satisfaction. The issue of Christ being life to man is the church. What then is life's multiplication? In chapter twelve we see a small church. It is small in number, in size, and in the growth of life. How can this church be multiplied? It is by the multiplication of life. The issue of life is to produce the church, and the multiplication of life is to increase the church in size, in number, and in the growth of life.

I. LIFE'S ISSUE

Chapter twelve stands alone. It is not the continuation of the nine foregoing cases; it is the conclusion of all of them. The conclusion of the nine cases is that Christ as life issues in the church. In 12:1-11 we see life's issue, which is the church.

A. A House of Feast

In chapter eleven the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. That resurrection issued into the church life. We all were dead persons. Then the Lord came in to resurrect us. After He resurrected us, we became the church. Thus, in chapter eleven, we see Lazarus resurrected and in chapter twelve we see that the resurrected person becomes the very place where the Lord can find rest and satisfaction. This is the church. Now we need to consider the church as the house of feast.

1. Outside of Religion

This house of feast is outside of religion. It was not in Jerusalem, the holy city, or in the holy temple. It was in a little house in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem and outside of religion.

The Lord being life to people to meet all of their needs brought about His rejection by the Jewish religion. Judaism could not tolerate seeing the Lord being life to so many kinds of people. So the religious ones rejected the Lord as life. This rejection began in chapter five (vv. 16, 18) and reached its climax in chapter ten (vv. 31, 39). In chapter eleven, the Jewish religionists even held a council on how to put the Lord to death because He had raised Lazarus from the dead (11:53, 57). The Jewish leaders also plotted to put Lazarus to death for the same reason (12:10). This shows how much religion is against the Lord as life. It not only persecuted the Lord, but also tried to destroy those who participated in the Lord as life. Religion always renounces and rejects the Lord as life. As we study

the Gospel of John, we must see the difference between religion and Christ as life. The Lord Jesus came to earth in His incarnation not to be a religious leader but to come into man and to be man's life. From the first case of regeneration in chapter three to the last case of resurrection in chapter eleven, all that the Lord did was to present Himself as life to people outside of the Jewish religion. If we look at religion, including Christianity, from a viewpoint other than that of life, we shall be easily cheated and misled, for religion teaches people how to know God and worship Him. It even teaches the Bible. It seems that there is nothing bad about it. However, if the Lord has mercy on us and if His Spirit opens our eyes, we shall see that what God is doing in the universe is not merely to make people worship Him or serve Him. In this age, God's desire and intention is to come into man in the Son, by His Spirit, and through His Word to be man's life that man might live by Him. This is absolutely different from religion and altogether contrary to the religious concept.

When the Lord came as life to man, He was rejected by the Jewish religion. Throughout all the succeeding centuries, He has been continually rejected by religion. Whether that religion is Catholicism or Protestantism, as long as it is a religion it will not and cannot purely take the Lord as life. In this matter of taking the Lord as life, both the religion of Catholicism and the religion of Protestantism have been great frustrations to people, just as the religion of Judaism was in the Lord's time and still is today. Therefore, we must be aware and alert concerning any kind of religion. If not, we might be led astray.

2. A Place for Feast, Rest, and Satisfaction for the Lord and His Believers

The rejection of the Lord by Judaism was a negative issue. But there was also a positive issue brought forth by the Lord's being life to people--a home for Him in His rejection, a place where He could rest, feast, dwell, and be satisfied. In chapter twelve we see that the Lord has come

out and has hid Himself from the religion that rejected Him and has come into a home of His Jewish believers in Bethany. By making Himself the resurrection life to His believers, He found a home. This home may be considered as a shadow of His church. On the one hand, He was rejected by Judaism and gave it up; on the other hand, He obtained a home where He could stay and rest. He had a place where He could feast and be satisfied. Formerly, the Lord had "nowhere that He may lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). But now, after raising Lazarus from the dead, He obtained a place for resting and feasting. After the Jewish religion had rejected Him, He was no longer willing to stay in Jerusalem. He always went away to stay in Bethany (Matt. 21:17-18). There He could not only stay and rest but also feast and be satisfied. This spiritually signifies that He was absolutely separated from the Jewish religion of the Old Testament and was and still is dwelling in the church as His home wherein He can rest, feast, and be satisfied.

Although there was nothing outwardly attractive about that little house, inwardly it was filled with feasting, resting, and satisfaction. Not only the Lord Jesus was feasting and resting, but so was everyone else who was there. It must be this way in the church life. When you look at the church life outwardly, nothing is attractive. The building, the chairs, nothing may seem to be very good. Outwardly, everything may be poor; inwardly, however, everything is precious, sweet, and dear. We have the sweet sensation that we are with the Lord and that the Lord is with us. He is feasting with us and we are feasting with Him. Both He and we are resting. Everyone is at rest and everyone is satisfied. This is the church life.

B. A Miniature of the Church Life

1. Produced by the Resurrection Life

Let us now consider several points concerning the miniature of the church life found in John 12. Firstly, it

was produced by resurrection life. Lazarus was present as a sign that the church is produced by resurrection life. The church does not come into being by man's organization, man's wisdom, man's work, or man's teaching. It comes into being by resurrection life.

Bethany was the place where the Lord accomplished His last sign--the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Therefore, Bethany is the place where the Lord raised up the dead. The believers there issued from the Lord's resurrection life. This is exactly where the church is--in the place of resurrection where the Lord as resurrection life raises people from the dead. Originally, we were dead, for we were dead in sins (Col. 2:13). But the Lord has raised us up from the dead; He has quickened and regenerated us. The issue of this is that we who have shared in His resurrection life have become the church. The church is the produce of the Lord's resurrection life. In the natural life there is no church. The church can only come into being through the Lord's resurrection life. Such a church in resurrection life is the place where the Lord can find rest and satisfaction with us and where we can feast with the Lord.

2. Composed of Cleansed sinners

The church is composed of cleansed sinners as represented by Simon the leper (Mark 14:3). When I was young, I thought that the house there in Bethany where they were feasting with the Lord was the home of Lazarus. Eventually I learned that it was not the home of Lazarus, but the house of a leper who must have been healed by the Lord. According to Mark 14:3, the feast mentioned in John 12:2 was prepared for the Lord in the house of a leper named Simon. The house of Simon, a cleansed leper, became the meeting place of the church. This is very meaningful. On the one hand, we all were dead; on the other hand, we all were lepers. Originally, the members of the church were both dead and leprous (sinful) people. In a sense we, like Lazarus, were dead and have been resurrected. In another sense, we, like Simon, were contaminated lepers and have been cleansed. Hallelujah,

the Lord has raised us from the dead and cleansed us from our leprosy, our sins! Now where we are becomes the meeting place of the church.

It is very strange that the place where the feast was prepared for the Lord was in the home of Simon the leper, yet John 12 is silent about Simon's doing anything. The feast was prepared in Simon's house, but everything was done by two sisters and one brother. In Bethany, in the house of a leper, everything was done by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Although the church is the place where the Lord quickens and regenerates the dead and cleanses the leper, the service in the church is not done by the lepers. This is the meaning behind the fact that Simon was absent from serving in John 12.

3. Outwardly Poor and Afflicted

Bethany means house of the poor or house of affliction. Outwardly, the church may be poor and afflicted. The church on earth may not be rich in material things; it should be rich with the enjoyment of the Lord in His presence. The outward people will always look down on the church, saying that it is poor and full of affliction. They do not have a spirit to realize how rich we are in the enjoyment of all that the Lord is to us.

4. Inwardly Feasting in and with the Presence of the Lord

Inwardly, the church life is a life of feasting in and with the presence of the Lord (12:2). The Lord came to that house and His presence was there. In the church life, the first thing we need is the Lord's presence. We must be a people in such a position and with such a condition that the Lord can come and be with us. His presence means very much to the church life. The church life is a life that absolutely depends upon the Lord's presence. Without the Lord's presence, the church life is empty.

Inwardly, the church life is a feast. In the church life, there should always be a feast that the Lord can enjoy by Himself and with His people. It is in the church that the Lord has rest, enjoyment, and satisfaction. Here there is always a feast prepared for the Lord and His people. Not only the Lord Himself enjoys it, but all the people who are with Him enjoy it as well. The church is a place where the Lord can enjoy Himself with His people and where His people can enjoy being with Him. The church is a place where the Lord and His people come together to feast with one another and to enjoy one another.

No outsiders can understand this. No outsiders know what we are doing in the church life. More than twenty years ago, when I was still in Taipei, a Danish lady missionary came to have a long talk with me, asking about the church. She was attracted to the church but still had some problems due to the rumors. I said to her, "Sister, even if I would talk to you for days, you still could not understand what we are doing here. The best way and the only way for you to understand what we are doing is to come here and stay for two and a half years. Within this period of time, do not visit any other place and do not do any work. Simply stay with the sisters day and night and attend every meeting. You must attend all the meetings--big meetings, small meetings, home meetings, and hall meetings. Don't miss one meeting. In addition, you must read all the books that we have put out, more than two hundred of them. If you stay two and a half years, attend all the meetings, read through all of the books, I can assure you that you will be more than clear. Dear sister, will you pay the price?" Immediately she replied, "At your word I will do it." She closed her home and moved into the sisters' house. She truly kept my word. She did not go anywhere else. She just stayed with the sisters, attended all the meetings, and read most of the books in Chinese. In a period of time that was much shorter than two and a half years--it might have been only a few months--she came to me and said, "Brother Lee, praise the Lord. Now I am clear what we are doing here." She did not say, "what *you* are doing here"; she said, "I am now clear what *we* are

doing here." She also said, "From today on, nothing can take me out of the church." She remained there a good length of time and then returned to Denmark. She has passed through many hardships there, but nothing has taken her out of the church.

When people look at the church outwardly, they see one thing. It may appear black in their eyes. However, when you get into the church inwardly, it is absolutely different. It is golden yellow.

5. Having More Sisters Than Brothers

As it was there in Bethany, it is better for a church to have more sisters than brothers (12:2-3). Whenever the number of sisters in a church is smaller than the number of brothers, that church may not be so living. A living church needs to have more sisters, the more the better. If you look into a situation where the number of sisters is greater than the number of brothers, you will find that that church is living. But when the sisters are less in number than the brothers, that church will not be so living.

6. With Different Functions

a. Serving

In the church life there are different functions. There are three kinds of functions in the service of the church represented by the three persons in the house. Firstly is the serving function represented by Martha (12:2). Throughout all the centuries, Martha has been treated unfairly. Throughout history, Christians have looked down on her. Do not condemn Martha. It is unfair to condemn her. We should not think that Martha is no good, for this chapter says that Martha served. This is very good, for, in the church service, the business affairs of the church must be taken care of. How could we have the food taken care of without Martha? We need her to prepare the

food. I appreciate Martha's service. We all must change our concept about her and not look down on her. We should encourage the sisters to be Marthas. Perhaps you sisters are still quite spiritual and religious, but I am rather practical. I do not want to be that spiritual. Suppose all the sisters are Marys sitting there quietly being spiritual. Who is going to prepare the meal? We must have some Marthas who are diligent, capable, active, living, and practical. Although we are spiritual, we must still serve practically. Martha's service was needed in that house. Likewise, in the church service, the first function needed is to serve by doing certain things, by taking care of certain practical affairs.

b. Testifying

The second kind of function in the service of the church is represented by Lazarus. It appears as if Lazarus did nothing. He just sat there at the table with the Lord, enjoying the feast with Him. But we must remember that Lazarus was the living testimony of the resurrection life. He did not testify by doing but by living in the resurrection life. His testimony was not in labor or in works; it was in the enjoyment of the resurrection life. He was a witness to the power of the Lord's resurrection life. Wherever he was, the testimony of resurrection life was there.

Martha's service was good, but it did not attract people. It was the testimony of Lazarus that attracted them. This does not mean that Martha's service was not good and was not needed, for certain things had to be taken care of. Even Lazarus had to be served by Martha. Therefore, we must realize that even when we have a good testimony of life, we still need the service of Martha. Otherwise, we will have nothing to eat.

The second kind of function in the church is the testimony of life. It is not by doing but by living. It is not a kind of work; it is a kind of life. It is not by laboring; it is by enjoying the Lord. It gives people the feeling of resurrection power, the manifestation of resurrection life, and the enjoyment of the Lord as life. This is a strong testimony that the Lord can make a dead person so living

and enable them to feast with Him. In the church there must be such a living testimony, such a function of life. There must not only be the service of practical affairs but also the ministry of life. Martha's service is necessary, but Lazarus' ministry is even more necessary.

c. Loving

Mary represents the third kind of function (12:2-3). She represents the dear ones who love the Lord very much and who pour out what they hold most precious upon the Lord. They love the Lord so much that they give the best to the Lord. This is what Mary did. She poured the costly ointment upon the feet of the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. In her heart, nothing was so dear, so precious, and so costly as the Lord. She, along with many others like her, loved the Lord with the best she had. Her estimate of the Lord was that He was more valuable and lovable than anything else. For her, the Lord is the most precious and the most costly One.

Mary's pouring the precious ointment upon the Lord Jesus is a sign of the proper church life. Although you may realize that Mary anointed the Lord Jesus with the best ointment, perhaps you have not seen that this is a sign of the church life. The main characteristic of the church life is anointing the Lord with our best love. The main expression, aspect, and characteristic of the church life is that we pour out our ointment upon Him. The church here is likened to a house that is filled with the preciousness, the sweetness, and the pleasantness of the aroma of the ointment poured out upon the Lord Jesus. This ought to be the main expression of a local church. When you come into a local church, the first thing that you should smell is the loving ointment poured out upon the Lord Jesus. It is not simply that Mary loved the Lord, but that she poured out her best upon the Lord, and this becomes a sign of the proper church life. In the proper church life we all must love the Lord to such an extent.

Therefore, we have three kinds of functions: serving, testifying, and loving. We have the service, the testimony, and the love poured out upon the Lord. These three items must be found in the church life. Whenever people come to us, they must realize that among us is the service for the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, and the love poured out upon the Lord. These three items are a must. We must have the service, serving all the time. Even more, we must have the testimony, testifying that the Lord is the resurrection life to us. There is no need for us to labor in this aspect of the testimony. We simply need resurrection life. After we have been resurrected with Him, it is unnecessary for us to labor. We simply sit with Him, go along with Him, and enjoy the feast with Him. This is the real, living testimony that the church must have, and this is the very expression of the Lord. Moreover, we must also have the absolute love shown to the Lord. When people come into our midst, they should say, "Oh, these people love the Lord at any cost. They will pay any price in loving the Lord. In their hearts nothing is so costly, so valuable, so lovable, and so precious as the Lord Himself." We must give people this kind of impression.

We all must be a triangular member of the church. We must have three corners. In the past I heard some sisters say to me, "Brother, I am not a Martha. By the Lord's mercy, I am just a little Mary." Once a brother who was very living said to me, "Brother, in the church some are Marthas and only a very few are a Lazarus. By the Lord's mercy, I am just a Lazarus. I can do nothing. I just sit here testifying of the Lord Jesus." I doubt that he was a real Lazarus. We all must be Martha, Lazarus, and Mary. When someone asks you your name, you should reply, "My name is Martha-Lazarus-Mary." This is the proper name for us all to have.

Again I say that in the church life must be at least three items: the diligent service for the Lord, the living testimony of resurrection life of the Lord, and the absolute love poured out upon the Lord. If we are truly practicing

the church life, we must have the service, the testimony, and the love toward the Lord. We all must be Martha, Lazarus, and Mary. Such a church is the result and issue of the Lord being life to us. Chapter twelve is the issue of chapter eleven. This kind of service, testimony, and love comes out of the Lord being resurrection life to us. With these functions, there is the genuine church life. In the real church life, the service to the Lord is rendered, the testimony of the Lord is seen, and the love toward the Lord is poured out. Here we can enjoy the Lord with other saints, and the Lord Himself can dwell, rest, and feast in satisfaction. This is the real expression of the Body of the Lord, which is a vessel to contain the Lord and to express Him.

7. Spotted by the False One

However, in the picture of the church life portrayed here, there is something negative--the black spot of Judas (12:4). Even among the twelve apostles chosen by the Lord Jesus, there was Judas, who was a black spot. Throughout all the centuries, there has always been a black spot in the churches. The glorious church life is always spotted by some false one. Nevertheless, it is quite comforting that even in the little church established directly by the Lord Jesus Himself, there was such a black spot.

Judas cared for money; he loved money much more than he loved the Lord. Therefore, he did not appreciate what Mary did to the Lord. He thought that it was a waste. Judas pretended that he cared for the poor. Actually that was not true. He only cared for money. In the church life there is almost always such a black spot. Mammon, the embodiment of the evil one, is the real rival of the Lord. The failure to overcome mammon is so often seen in the church life. Judas' love of mammon gave Satan the ground to enter into him and take him over (13:2). Instead of loving the Lord, he betrayed Him! It is a shame that this is often repeated in the church life.

8. Persecuted by Religion

The church life is persecuted by religion. The Jewish priests took counsel that they might kill Lazarus (12:10) who testified to the resurrection power of the Lord. He was an evident and strong testimony of the Lord's resurrection power. This stirred up the religious people's hatred and persecution. It is the same today. The stronger we are in bearing testimony of the Lord as life to us, the more the religious people will be provoked to anger with us.

9. Being a Test and Exposing People

The church life is a test. It exposes people (12:6, 10). It exposes where a person's heart is and what his attitude is toward the Lord. Without the church, the people's heart and attitude toward the Lord could never be exposed. As long as there is a church, everything comes to the surface. If there were no church in your locality, the hearts and the attitudes of men toward the Lord would be hidden and concealed. However, in the church life, every man's heart is exposed. The church exposes the hidden thoughts of man's heart concerning the Lord.

10. Bringing in Many Believers

In verse 11 we see that many believed because of the testimony of Lazarus. The living testimony of the church always causes people to believe in the Lord and brings people into the church life. The increase of the church must depend upon the church's living testimony, not only upon the preaching of the gospel. The best preaching of the gospel that makes the church to increase is our living testimony of experiencing the Lord as our life.

When we consider all of these aspects of the church life, it is not too much to say that the house at Bethany was an early figure of the church. We do see the church life there.

C. The Lord Being a Test to People

Not only is the church a test and an exposure of people, but the Lord Himself is a test to all the people around

Him. The chief priests and the Pharisees conspired to kill Him (11:47, 53, 57). We see a different attitude in Simon the leper, for he prepared the house for Him (Matt. 26:6). Martha served Him, Lazarus testified of Him, Mary loved Him, and Judas was about to betray Him. Many others believed in Him. All of these varying attitudes were shown toward the same Jesus. Where are you? (Are you trying to kill Him, or are you serving Him, testifying of Him, loving Him, or being seduced to betray Him?) You can never be neutral. You must do something. The very Lord in His church is a test to everyone around Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

LIFE'S ISSUE AND MULTIPLICATION

(2)

II. LIFE'S MULTIPLICATION THROUGH DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In this message we come to the second part of John chapter twelve. In the first part of this chapter we see, in a shadow, that the church has come into existence through the Lord as resurrection life. We have the church by His resurrection life. But how can the Lord increase the church? This is shown in the second part of this chapter (vv. 12-36a). The first part shows how the church is there, but the second part shows how the Lord can increase the church through His death and resurrection.

A. The Golden Time for Jesus

At this point, according to the worldly view, Jesus was in His golden time. The raising up of Lazarus from the dead was such a miracle that it shook all the people. It was a real miracle for a dead person, buried for four days and even stinking, to be raised up. Because the Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead, a great crowd of the Jews highly esteemed Him and warmly welcomed Him (vv. 12-19). They welcomed Him by shouting, "Hosanna, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" Humanly speaking, this very hour was the most glorious time for the Lord while He was on earth. All the people praised Him, welcomed Him, honored Him, and respected Him. Even the Greeks came to seek Him (vv. 20-22). The Jewish people welcomed Him, and the Gentiles, the Greeks, sought to follow Him. Could the Lord have

produced and increased the church by accepting this kind of welcome and honor? No, this is not the way to produce or increase the church. This is not the way to bring the church into existence and increase it in life.

B. As a Grain of Wheat to Fall into the Ground

At that very moment, when the Lord was welcomed and honored by both Jews and Greeks, what did He say? If we had been there, or if such a welcome were extended to us, we would have said, "Praise the Lord. Now is the time for us to do something to glorify God." The Lord Jesus, however, was not excited. The greater the welcome, the more calm He became. The more He was sought after, the colder He was to those who sought for Him. He told the seekers that He was a grain of wheat. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (v. 24). This was the Lord's attitude toward such a human welcome. This was His reaction toward the glory of human honor. What is the way for a grain of wheat to multiply? It is not by being welcomed or honored, but by falling into the ground to die. This is absolutely contrary to the human concept. Nevertheless, we must remember that this is the only way to bring the church into being and to increase it in life. Whenever a human welcome comes to you, you must say, "I must die." Whenever human honor comes to you, you must reply, "I must be buried." Do not say, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" This is not the best time for you to do something, even if your intention is to glorify God. The proper way to glorify God is for you to die and be buried.

The Lord Jesus did not seize the golden opportunity as the means to have His increase. If He had, He would have made a great mistake. The golden opportunity is never for the increase. If you read church history, you will see that whenever the church had an increase it was not the result of a golden opportunity but of persecution. The time for

the church to increase is during persecution, not during a warm welcome. When the enemy puts the church into death, that is the time for the church to be increased. The more persecution and opposition there are, the more increase the church will have. The persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire did not frustrate the growth of the church during the first two centuries, but rather helped it to grow. What then did damage the church? The welcome of the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire turned its persecution into welcome, the church life was ruined. Do not be excited by man's welcome. Man's welcome will always ruin and corrupt us. Praise the Lord that man's persecution and opposition are the golden opportunity for the increase of Christ. He is a grain of wheat, and there is no other way for that grain of wheat to increase except for it to fall into the ground and die. This is the way to have the multiplication of life.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will simply remain one grain and will never produce anything. But, praise the Lord, after it dies and grows up, the one grain becomes the many grains or the much fruit. These many grains or much fruit are the church. This is the way for the church to come into being. This is also the way for the Lord to increase the church. This has to be the way for us to bring the church into existence and to increase it. We must face human welcome by death, by taking the cross. The way for the church to come into being and to increase is not by human glory; it is by the death of the cross.

Although many good missionaries were sent to China by the leading missions, such as the one formed by Brother Hudson Taylor, history proves that there was not much result for the proper church life. Among the many missionaries who went to China was a sister named Margaret E. Barber who was sent there by a British mission. She was accused falsely, called back to England, and later vindicated by the Lord. Then the Lord burdened her to return to China. She was not sent by any mission

but went there by faith, settling in a little town named Pagoda, very close to Brother Watchman Nee's hometown. She stayed there purposely, not visiting other places. In a sense, the Lord sowed her there as a grain of wheat. She remained there for years, dying there in 1929.

Brother Nee told me personally the complete story regarding his contact with Sister Barber. Along with other young people, Brother Nee went to her to receive help. She was deep in the Lord and was very strict. She often rebuked the young ones. Brother Nee told me that most of them could not stand her rebukes. Eventually he was nearly the only one who kept going to her, presenting himself to her as an offering for her rebukes. He did this purposely. After a certain period of time had passed, he would feel the need for further rebuking and would go to her for another rebuke, and she did it. In 1929 she went to the Lord. She did not have much that anyone could inherit except a Bible containing many notes, which she willed to Brother Nee. Sister Barber was a seed that was sown, and Brother Nee was a grain that grew out of that seed. Brother Nee, as a seed that grew out of her, became a great vessel for the recovery of the proper church life. This is the way to produce and increase the church in life. It is absolutely not a matter of a golden opportunity.

In 1940, during the Sino-Japanese War, Brother Nee conducted a training in Shanghai. I attended that training. In China during that time, there were some prevailing Chinese preachers. They always had the greatest following, and large crowds attended their preaching. Brother Nee, on the contrary, used to tell us that the work is not a matter of the endeavor of outward activity, but of the outflow of the inner life. The work that the Lord needs is the overflow of the inner life. In Brother Nee's training in 1940 there were not more than eighty trainees. But Brother Nee was satisfied with such a small number. Whenever he held a conference, there were, at the most, not more than three hundred fifty people. He always stressed that the work is the overflow of inner life, not the endeavor of outward activity. Today we see the

issue of Brother Nee's ministry: many churches produced in the Lord's recovery throughout the world.

Do not be troubled by the temporary success of others' outward activities. Let the Lord have some time and He will vindicate His way in life. Although Brother Nee has gone to be with the Lord, his ministry is still prevailing and his work continues to go on. Such a work is not a matter of activity, but of life. This is the work of life to produce and increase the church.

We may use the illustration of making artificial flowers. If you were to hire people to make artificial flowers, a great number could be produced within a short time. However, if you are going to grow flowers, it will take a longer time. You must first sow the seed. The seed will grow and multiply. Then more seed will fall into the ground and grow and multiply again and again. This kind of multiplication will last for a long time. What kind of increase do you expect to have--artificial flowers produced by outward labor or genuine flowers produced by life?

1. To Produce Many Grains-- To Draw All Men

The Lord Jesus fell into the ground and died that His divine element, His divine life, might be released from within the shell of His humanity to produce many believers in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), just as a grain of wheat has its life element released by falling into the ground and growing up out of the ground to bear much fruit, that is, to bring forth many grains. Instead of receiving a warm welcome, the Lord preferred to fall into the ground and die as a grain of wheat that He might produce many grains for the church. The Lord, as a grain of wheat falling into the ground, lost His soulish life through death that He might release His eternal life in resurrection to the "many grains. "

In one aspect, the Lord's death was a falling into the

ground as revealed in verse 24; in another aspect, it was a lifting up on the tree (v. 32; 1 Pet. 2:24). To "fall into the ground" as a grain of wheat was to produce the many grains; to be "lifted up" on the tree as the Son of Man was to draw all men to Himself. The many grains produced by His falling into the ground are the "all men" drawn by His being lifted up on the tree.

In chapter twelve of John the Lord's death is not revealed as the redeeming death (as referred to in 1:29), but as the producing, generating death. According to this chapter, by His death the Lord had His incarnation shell broken that He might accomplish three purposes: to produce the many grains, draw all men to Himself (vv. 24, 32); to release the divine element, the eternal life (vv. 23, 28); and to judge the world and cast out its ruler (v. 31).

2. To Release the Divine Life, the Divine Element--to Be Glorified and to Glorify the Father

It was by His death that the Lord was glorified and glorified God the Father. In verse 23 the Lord said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," and in verse 28 He prayed, "Father, glorify Your name." How was the Lord glorified? He was glorified through death and resurrection because it was through death and resurrection that His divine element was released and manifested. How was God the Father glorified? It was by the Son's being glorified. When the Son's divine element was released and manifested through His death and resurrection, the Father's divine life was released and manifested. Thus, the Father was glorified in the Son's glorification through His death and resurrection. The death and resurrection of the Lord glorified God the Father because His death and resurrection released God's divine element from within Him. God's divine element was confined in His flesh, just as the life element of a grain of wheat is confined within its shell. How is the life element of a grain glorified? The grain has to die so that the life element within it can be manifested and glorified. It is the same with God's divine element.

To glorify the name of the Father was to cause the Father's divine element to be manifested. The Father's divine element, which is the eternal life, was in the incarnated Son. The shell of the Son's incarnation, that is, His flesh, had to be broken through death that the Father's divine element, the eternal life, might be released and manifested in resurrection, just as the life element of a grain of wheat is released by its shell being broken and manifested by its blossom. This was the glorification of God the Father in the Son's glorification.

Suppose we have a flower seed. Although much beauty is in the life of that seed, how can that beauty be manifested? The seed has to die. If the seed falls into the earth, dies, and grows up, the full beauty within it will be manifested. That is the glory, the life in the seed glorified. Likewise, at one time God was confined within the flesh of the Lord. The Lord had to die that God within Him might be released, manifested, and glorified in resurrection.

Glorified simply means manifested. Many times I have used the electricity in a lamp as an illustration. When is the electricity glorified in the lamp? When the electricity is manifested, it is glorified. The electricity manifested is the electricity glorified. Likewise, the God who was confined in the flesh of Jesus was manifested when He was resurrected. So, when God was manifested from within Jesus, God was glorified.

3. To Judge the World and to Cast Out Its Ruler, Satan

In verse 31 the Lord declared, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." By His death on the cross the Lord judged the world and cast out its ruler, Satan. The world is an evil system, arranged systematically by Satan. Satan has systematized

all the things on earth, especially those related to mankind, and the things in the air into his kingdom of darkness to occupy and frustrate people from the purpose of God and to distract them from the enjoyment of God. This evil system, the kingdom of darkness, was judged when its ruler, Satan, was cast out by the Lord's crucifixion in the flesh. On the cross, the Lord as the Son of Man (v. 23) was lifted up in the form of the serpent (3:14), that is, "in the likeness of the flesh of sin" (Rom. 8:3). Satan, the ruler of this world, as "the old serpent" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), has injected himself into man's flesh. Through His death on the cross "in the likeness of the flesh of sin," the Lord has destroyed Satan who is in man's flesh (Heb. 2:14). By judging Satan (16:11) in this way, the world which was hanging on Satan was also judged. Hence, the Lord's being lifted up judged the world and cast out its ruler, Satan. When the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man was lifted up in the form of a serpent, He not only removed our sins and dealt with our serpentine nature, but also destroyed Satan and the satanic world system that hung upon him. Now, by His death, we are redeemed, delivered, have the divine life, and are overcoming the world.

The Gospel of John is a book of pictures or signs, showing many things related to the Lord as life. If we do not know this gospel, we may know the Lord as life, but we simply will not know the Lord as life in all its detailed aspects. If we want to know the Lord as life in detail, we must understand the Gospel of John, which unveils life in one picture after another. For example, even the palm branches in this chapter symbolize life overcoming death, portraying a life that is victorious over death. Most palm trees grow in the desert, which signifies death. So life (palm trees) grows out of death (desert). This pictures the victory of life over death, which is the spiritual significance of the palm tree. Therefore, if we wish to understand life in detail, we must understand the Gospel of John as a book of figures.

In his gospel, John uses different figures to portray

various aspects of the Lord's death. Verse 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" In 3:14 the Lord Jesus said that He had to be lifted up on the cross as the brass serpent was lifted up on a pole by Moses. Now, in chapter twelve, the Lord says that He is a grain of wheat. Here we see three figures: the Lamb of God, the serpent, and the grain of wheat. The Lord's death has three aspects. In the first aspect, He was the Lamb of God taking away our sins by shedding His blood. In the second aspect, He was the brass serpent that destroyed the old serpent as well as the serpentine nature within us. In the third aspect, He was a grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to produce many grains. The one death of the Lord Jesus had these three aspects: the redeeming aspect, the Satan-destroying aspect, and the life-releasing aspect. When He was nailed to the cross, He was the Lamb of God bearing our sins and shedding His blood for our redemption. This is the first aspect, and every genuine Christian is familiar with it. However, not many Christians are familiar with the second aspect of the Lord's death, which is that on the cross the Lord Jesus was crucified in the form of a serpent in order to destroy the old serpent and the serpentine nature within our being. This is the Satan-destroying aspect. The third aspect of the Lord's death is the life-releasing aspect. The divine life was in that little man Jesus just as life is confined in a grain of wheat. Since the life is concealed in the grain, the shell must be broken that the inward life might be released. Thus, when Christ was on the cross, He was the Lamb, He was in the form of the serpent, and He was also a grain of wheat. By one death He accomplished the threefold purpose of taking away our sins, destroying Satan, and releasing the divine life from within Him to produce many grains. Hallelujah! By His death our sins have been removed. By His death our serpentine nature has been dealt with. By His death the divine life has been released to us. No longer are we sinning and no longer are we serpentine. The divine life has been imparted into us, and we are now the many grains that have been produced

out of that one grain. These many grains are good for making one loaf, which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17), the church. Formerly, we were sinners with the serpentine nature, having nothing to do with the divine life. But by the Lord's all-inclusive death our sins have been removed, our serpentine nature has been dealt with, and the divine life has been imparted into our being. Now we have become living grains who, composed together, become one loaf, the church. Praise Him!

Based upon this principle, if we want the church to be brought into existence, we have to die. If we want to glorify God, to have God manifested through us and glorified among us, we have to die. If we want to deal with Satan and his world, we have to die. It is by the cross that the church comes into existence, it is by the cross that God is glorified, and it is by the cross that Satan and his world are dealt with. The Lord clearly said that when He died, He would produce much fruit, that when He died the Father would be glorified, and that when He was lifted up, He would judge the world and cast out Satan, the ruler of this world. This is so brief and simple, yet it is so profound and meaningful. These three items include everything--the church produced, the Father glorified, and Satan expelled. There is nothing else left. If we want to bring the church into existence, to glorify God, and to deal with Satan, there is no other way than the death of the cross. We always talk about the way of the church: the way of the church is the way of the cross. We always talk about how to glorify God: the way to glorify God is the way of the cross. And the way to deal with Satan, the enemy of God, is also the way of the cross. There is only one way--the cross. We must experience the cross. No matter how much people welcome us or how they welcome us, we must realize that the more they welcome us, the more we must die.

How do we die? In verse 25 the Lord tells us to lose our soul. "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life." The first

two occurrences of the word life in this verse in the Greek language mean soul or soulish life. The same word is found in 10:11, 15, 17. This is also proved by the gospels of Matthew and Mark (Matt. 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35). What does it mean to die and experience the cross? It simply means to deny and reject your soul, your natural life. You must lose your soul, your natural life, your self. Then the church will come into being, then God will be glorified, and then Satan will be dealt with and cast out, for he will be expelled by the church.

The Lord as a grain of wheat falling into the ground lost His soulish life through death that He might release His eternal life to the "many grains" in resurrection. We as the many grains must lose our soulish life through death that we may enjoy the eternal life in resurrection. This is to follow Him that we might serve Him, as mentioned in verse 26. Furthermore, the many grains need to be crushed and ground into flour, into powder, that they may be blended together and become the bread.

III. RELIGION'S UNBELIEF AND BLINDNESS

A. Prophesied by Isaiah

Verses 36b through 43 speak of the unbelief of religion and God's judgment upon that unbelief. Regardless of how much the Lord as life worked in wonders, miracles, and signs, the religious people would not go along with Him. No matter how much the Lord did, the religious people would not respond. They simply did not receive Him, but, on the contrary, they rejected Him. Isaiah had prophesied this already. He said, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isa. 53:1). The arm of the Lord is the Lord Jesus Himself. The Lord is the arm of God to do things and to deliver, but no one in the religious world could recognize this arm. No one would respond to, receive, or accept this arm. They simply rejected it. Although this arm is salvation, even the Savior and the Deliverer Himself, the religious people rejected Him.

B. Judged by God

As a result, blindness and hardness of heart have come upon them (v. 40; Isa. 6:10). This is God's judgment exercised over their unbelieving rejection of the Lord. Blindness and the hardening of the heart are a punishment to the unbelieving ones. Thus, religion has no belief; it only has blindness.

C. The Glory of the Lord Seen, But Not Loved

Verse 41 says that Isaiah saw His glory and spoke concerning Him. The words "His glory" confirm that the Lord Jesus is the very God, Jehovah of hosts, whose glory Isaiah saw (Isa. 6:1, 3). This glory was seen and appreciated by Isaiah, but it was not loved by the Lord's weaker believers (vv. 42-43). They loved the glory of man more than the glory of God, which was the living Jesus before them. If they had appreciated and loved the Lord Jesus as the glory of God, they would not have cared for the glory of man or feared being cast out of the synagogue.

IV. LIFE'S DECLARATION TO THE UNBELIEVING RELIGION

In verses 44 through 50 we see life's declaration to the unbelieving religion. Here the Lord makes a final declaration to the religious people. After this declaration, for the remainder of the Gospel of John, the Lord has nothing to do with the religious people.

A. Being God Manifested to Man

Firstly, He declared that He is the manifestation of the living God (vv. 44-45). He is the Son of God, which means that He is the manifestation of God. Whoever sees Him sees God, and whoever receives Him receives God because He is the manifestation of God to man.

B. Coming as Light into the World

Secondly, He declared that He came to this world as the shining light that man might not remain in darkness (vv. 46, 36). If people will receive this light, they will have God. He is the manifestation of God as light, and if you receive Him as light, you will have God. If a man believes in Him, he will not remain in darkness. However, if you refuse to receive Him as light, you simply reject God and will be overtaken with darkness. He comes as light. If you receive Him you will have God and will become one of the sons of light.

C. Coming to Man with Living Words

Thirdly, He declared that He came to man with living words and that whoever receives His words will have eternal life now and forever and that whoever rejects His words will be judged by them in the last day (vv. 47-50).

What is the meaning of this declaration? It is simply that the Lord told the Jewish people that He is the manifestation of God coming to them as light. If they receive Him, they will have God and become the children of God. But if they reject Him, they will be overtaken by darkness. Moreover, the commandment that God gave to Him to speak is to them eternal life if they receive it. Otherwise, that very word will become a sentence of judgment upon them in the last day. This is the final declaration the Lord made to the religious people. At this juncture, the Lord is finished with the religious people. Beginning with chapter thirteen, the Lord is continually with His disciples, no longer having anything to do with the Jewish people.

There are, therefore, four points to this chapter. The first point shows what is the real church life. The second reveals how the Lord produces and increases the church. The third discloses that the religious people will not go along with the Lord no matter how much He does for them

as life in the signs. Finally, the last point indicates how the Lord was forced to make a declaration to the religious crowd that He is the manifestation of God coming to them as light; that if they receive Him they will become the sons of light and that if they do not receive Him they will be overtaken by darkness; that He comes to them with the commandment of God to speak living words to them; that if they receive His words, those words will become eternal life to them, but if they reject them, those very words will judge them in the last day.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

LIFE'S WASHING IN LOVE TO MAINTAIN FELLOWSHIP

(1)

In this message we come to John 13, a very interesting and meaningful chapter. Probably all Christians know that such a chapter about the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet exists in the gospels. It seems easy for anyone to understand this chapter, but actually it is not at all easy to realize its true meaning. Usually, Christians merely believe that to wash the feet of others is to show love to them. Some believers even insist on the washing of feet every time they come to the Lord's table. At the Lord's table, they wash one another's feet to express their love for one another. This is not wrong unless it is made legalistic. If it is not made legalistic, then these occasions of showing love to one another by washing one another's feet are all right. Several times in the past I have washed the feet of others, and others have washed my feet. At times, we must allow the Lord to lead and guide us to do this to one another. But this matter of foot washing signifies something more important. As we have seen, everything mentioned in this gospel is a sign that indicates something deeper and spiritual. Therefore, foot washing is also a sign signifying something deeper and spiritual. But it is rather difficult to discover the spiritual significance of this sign. What is its deeper, spiritual significance?

Before answering this question, we must first realize the position of this chapter in the Gospel of John as a whole. It is positioned as a turning point in the gospel. The Gospel of John is mainly divided into two sections.

The first section, composed of chapters one through thirteen, tells how the Lord as the eternal Word, which is God Himself, and as the Son of God came through His incarnation to bring God into man to be man's life to produce the church. The second section, composed of chapters fourteen through twenty-one, unveils how the Lord as the Son of Man went through His death and resurrection to bring man into God, that man and God, God and man, may be built together as a mutual abode. Chapter thirteen, at the end of the first section, is a dividing line and a turning point. It turns the record from one direction to another.

What is the central thought of the first part of the Gospel of John? It is the Lord as the eternal Word, who is the expression of God, coming to be our life, meeting all of our needs, and making us the members of His Body. Chapter one reveals the Lord as the eternal Word, that is, as the expression of God. Then we see the Lord coming to be our life, coming that we might take Him in as our life to meet all our needs. The nine cases selected show that the Lord as life can meet all of our needs. Then chapter twelve reveals that the Lord, as a grain of wheat, has to pass through death and resurrection to produce us, the many grains. who are being blended together as one loaf, which is His Body, the church.

The central point of the second part is that the Lord who was incarnated, crucified, and resurrected was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. He was transfigured from the expression of God in the flesh into the Spirit so that He could come into us as life. Please notice that I use the word "transfigured." The Lord was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit so that He might be able to come into our spirit, to be our life in our spirit, and to be one with us in our spirit. As the Spirit, He is in us and we are in Him. Now He and we, we and He, can be mingled together as one.

In the first part of John's gospel the Lord comes to bring God into us, and in the last part the Lord goes to

bring us into God. In the first twelve chapters the Lord comes by incarnation to bring God into man; in the last eight chapters the Lord goes by death and resurrection to bring man into God. The first section shows how He comes, and the last section shows how He goes. He comes by incarnation for Him to bring God into us. He goes by death and resurrection for Him to bring us into God.

Between these two sections chapter thirteen stands as the turning point. Verse 3 says, "Jesus, knowing...that He had come forth from God, and was going to God." He had come from God and was going to God. For this reason, I say that chapter thirteen is the turning point in the gospel.

For quite a long time I was deeply bothered by this chapter. I wondered why foot washing was not recorded before chapter eleven or after chapter fourteen. I wondered why it was there in chapter thirteen. I was troubled by the position of this chapter because I had come to realize that from chapter one through twelve the Lord as the Word had come to impart Himself as life to many people and that eventually the church came out. The church is there in chapter twelve. The Lord was the Lamb of God taking away sin, He was lifted up in the form of a serpent to deal with the serpentine nature, and He was also the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died to bring forth many grains. In a sense, by the time of chapter twelve everything is completed. It seemed to me that there was no need for chapter thirteen. So, I was troubled, thinking that chapter fourteen should immediately follow chapter twelve and that there was no need for chapter thirteen at all. I spent much time with the Lord to find out why chapter thirteen was necessary. Eventually, the Lord told me why we need to have chapter thirteen after chapter twelve. It is very significant that foot washing is found in chapter thirteen. In chapter thirteen, the very turning point of the Gospel of John, the Lord washed His disciples' feet. The significance of this is deeply meaningful.

I. WASHING BY THE LORD HIMSELF

A. Loving to the Uttermost

Verse 1 says that the Lord "loved His own who were in the world" and that "He loved them to the uttermost." Because of this love, the Lord washed the disciples' feet. Hence, the foot washing is a matter of love, a love to the uttermost. Without this, the Lord's love toward us would not have been to the uttermost but would have fallen short of our need. This shows the importance of foot washing. This is our uttermost need. In the nine foregoing cases, the Lord has met all our needs. After all this, we still have the need of foot washing. Therefore, the Lord has to take care of this by showing us His love to the uttermost.

B. Knowing All Had Been Given to Him

Verse 3 indicates the reason why the Lord washed the disciples' feet. It was because He knew "that the Father had given all into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going to God" (v. 3). At that time He realized three things: (1) that the Father had given all into His hands; (2) that He had come forth from God; and (3) that He was going to God. Because of these three things He washed the feet of His disciples. The "all" that the Father had given Him was mainly the disciples, His coming forth from God had brought God into His disciples, and in His going to God He was to leave these disciples. The Father had given the disciples, and the Lord had brought God into them, but now He was going to leave them. By His coming forth from God and His bringing God into them, a relationship between the disciples and God in Him came into existence. Now He was going to leave them. After He had left them, how could this relationship between the disciples and God be maintained? It is to be maintained by the foot washing. Foot washing is to wash away from the feet all the dirt that frustrates the fellowship of the relationship between God and man. In doing it, the Lord showed His disciples the way for them to maintain their relationship with God in Him.

This kind of understanding can be confirmed in a negative sense by verse 2, which says that at that time the devil had "already put into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, that he should betray Him." The aim of the devil's evil doing is to keep people away from the relationship with God. But what the Lord did in washing the disciples' feet was to keep His disciples in the relationship with God in Him. While the devil was working to keep people away from this relationship with God, the Lord did the work of foot washing as a way to keep His disciples in the relationship with God in Him.

C. Laying Aside His Garments

When the Lord Jesus was about to wash His disciples' feet, He laid aside His garments (v. 4). Garments here, in figure, signify the Lord's virtues and attributes in His expression. Hence, to lay aside His garments signifies the putting off of what He is in His expression. If the Lord had remained in all that He was in His virtues and attributes, He would have been unable to wash His disciples' feet.

D. Girding Himself

When the Lord had laid aside His garments, He girded Himself with a towel (v. 4). Figuratively speaking, for the Lord to gird Himself meant that He was bound and restricted with humility (cf. 1 Peter 5:5). In humility He gave up His liberty so that He might minister to His disciples.

E. Washing the Disciples' Feet with Water

1. Water Signifying the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the Life

The Lord washed the disciples' feet with water (v. 5). Here water signifies the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), the Word (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3), and the life (John 19:34). As we shall see, the Lord washes us spiritually by the working of

the Holy Spirit, by the enlightening of the Word, and by the operating of the inner law of life. In the Scriptures, each of these three items is symbolized by water.

2. Washing Away the Dirt of the Earthly Touch

The Lord has come through incarnation to bring God into us and He is going through death and resurrection to bring us into God. Both transpire in our spirit. As far as our spirit is concerned, God has been brought into us by the Lord's coming, and we have been brought into God by the Lord's going. Yet, as far as our physical body is concerned, we are still here on this earth. In our spirit we have been joined to something heavenly, spiritual, and eternal, but in our body we are still on the earth. In our spirit the Lord has brought God into us and us into God, in our spirit we are one with God, and in our spirit we are in the heavenlies because we are in God. But in our body we are still on earth. As far as our regenerated spirit is concerned, we are no longer the old creation; we are the new creation. However, as far as our body is concerned, we are still in the old creation and on the earth. On one hand, we are the new creation, we are in God, and we are in the heavenlies. This is true and this is a reality. On the other hand, we are still in the old creation, still on this earth.

Although we have the divine life and have become the church, we are still living in this fallen flesh on the earth. Through the earthly touch we are often dirty. This is inevitable, for we cannot avoid the earthly touch. Our feet are the members of our body that touch the earth. Day by day we are touching the earth with our feet. In the ancient days of Judea, the people mostly went everywhere by walking, by contacting the earth with their feet. Whenever they contacted the earth their feet certainly became dirty. Consequently, foot washing was a necessity for them. Spiritually speaking, it is the same for us.

Dirtiness is different from sinfulness. To be sinful is one thing and to be dirty is another. You may be absolutely sinless and yet be very dirty. Perhaps nothing

is wrong, but you are dirty simply because of the earthly touch. Do you realize that we are still in the body and are still walking on this earth? We constantly touch the earth, and this makes us dirty. As a result, much of the time we are not clean. Therefore, we need foot washing

3. To Maintain Fellowship with the Lord and with One Another

Do you know the time when the Jews washed their feet? They especially washed their feet when they came to a feast. A feast is a center for fellowship. At that time the Jews wore sandals, and since their roads were dusty, their feet easily became dirty. If, when they came to a feast, they sat at the table with dirty, outstretched feet, the dirt and smell would have frustrated the fellowship. Therefore, for a pleasant feast, they needed foot washing. When the guests were invited to a feast where they fellowshipped with one another, they had to wash their feet before the fellowship. Without the washing, the fellowship would have been hindered. Before they could come together to feast and fellowship at the table, they had to be washed. Otherwise, they simply could not have had pleasant fellowship. Furthermore, they did not sit at the table like we do; rather, they reclined on the floor with their legs outstretched without any chairs or benches. If their feet were dirty, the bad odor would have been awful. Sometimes they journeyed a long distance on a muddy road. As a result, their feet became very dirty and the smell was offensive. If they had come together and stretched out their feet, their fellowship would not have been very pleasant.

Since the Gospel of John is a book of signs, what is recorded here concerning foot washing must also be considered as a sign having a spiritual significance. We should not take foot washing merely in a physical sense, but rather in a spiritual sense. Since this is a sign, the significance of washing feet is that it is for fellowship with the Lord and with one another. If you just come and stretch out your feet without washing. the fellowship between you and others will be hindered. While we are in

this world, we touch the earth day by day. This earth we touch makes us dirty and hinders the fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Therefore, foot washing means that while we are still on this earth, the Lord as the life-giving Spirit washes our feet, that is, the Lord always keeps our walk clean from every kind of dirt due to the earthly touch. Today we must realize that the Lord is eager to wash and keep us clean from the dirt that we gather from our contact with the earth.

In chapter thirteen the Lord established an example by washing the disciples' feet that they might have a pleasant time of fellowship, enjoying the Lord and one another. We need such foot washing today. Foot washing should not be merely a matter in the physical way. It should be more in the spiritual way which means a great deal to our spiritual life. Today the world is dirty, and we, the saints, are easily contaminated. For us to maintain pleasant fellowship with the Lord and with one another we need spiritual foot washing.

4. Different from the Washing Away of Sin by the Blood

As we have already pointed out, to be dirty does not mean that we are sinful. Many times you are not sinful, but you are dirty. Dust is everywhere. How easy it is to get dirty. While you are living on earth, even if you sit there without moving, you will become dirty. This earth is full of dirt. Thus, in doing anything, you will get dirty. Even as you are driving along the street on the way to the meeting, your eyes may accidentally see something that causes you to become dirty. Before you got into the car your spirit was living and uplifted, but after driving for ten minutes, although you had no intention of seeing anything, simply by seeing certain things on the way to the meeting place, you were dirtied and your spirit went down. Sometimes, even in our fellowship we can become dirty.

For things that are sinful we need the cleansing of the blood, but for things that are dirty and not sinful we need

the spiritual washing. We need a washing by the Holy Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life.

Because being dirty is very close to being sinful, it is difficult to make a distinction between them. It is not easy to give a clear illustration. Perhaps one day you are unhappy with your wife. It is not sinful for a husband to be unhappy with his wife. He did not hate her or say anything bad about her or to her. He was not angry with her. He was simply somewhat unhappy with her. Many times the wives love their husbands excessively. Husbands need the love of their wives, but sometimes a wife's love is excessive. Sometimes the wives love the husbands with a kind of love when there is no need of that kind of love. When love is needed, it is sweet, but when love is given overabundantly, it is excessive. Such overabounding love can become a disturbance. Suppose a wife, out of concern for her husband's health, wants him to wear a topcoat when he does not really need one. She fears that he will catch cold and wants him to wear extra clothing. Such a concern is a bother to the husband and it causes him to be unhappy. Such unhappiness is not sinful. The husband does not say a word; he does not express anything. He is just a little unhappy with his wife. That little unhappiness will frustrate the pleasant fellowship between them.

What should we do in such a case? Perhaps you will apply the blood, saying, "Lord, I was unhappy with my wife for loving me too much. I apply Your blood to this situation." But that does not work. You need another kind of washing, not the washing by the blood, but the washing by the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. Who can afford you this kind of washing? Firstly, the Lord Jesus Himself and, secondly, a saint or saints who have much life. You need to spend time in the Lord's presence. Remain in the Lord's presence and the Lord will come to you and wash you, not with the blood, but with the Spirit the living Word, and the inner life. It is difficult to say just when He completes this washing. Sometimes it only takes a few minutes to wash the dirt away; at other times it may

take half a day. Whenever you are in need of such a washing, just open yourself up to the Lord as you spend time in His presence and allow the inner life to flow within you. Spontaneously, something living will flow, water, and wash you, and you will become clean again. Your spirit will be uplifted and your whole being will be so pleasant in the Lord's presence. This is the washing with the living water in the presence of the Lord.

It is very easy for brothers and sisters who live and serve together to offend each other unconsciously. They may not fight with one another, for fighting is sinful. They simply offend one another unconsciously. Perhaps you offend me without being conscious of it. However, I am full of the consciousness of the offense. As a result, we both have become somewhat dirty. Thusly, it will be difficult for us to maintain a pleasant fellowship with one another. Even if we say nothing and try to learn the lesson of the cross, we still find that our fellowship becomes dead. We need to be washed.

Perhaps the brothers who live together in the brothers' house come together to pray. Some of them are quite living and others are not at all living because they have become dirtied and their spirits are down. Sometimes all of the brothers may be numb and down in their spirit. It is not because they all have become sinful. They do not criticize one another or fight with one another. Nevertheless, all the brothers have become dirty simply because they have lived together for a length of time without having the proper foot washing. They also need to have their feet washed.

To be dirty is very close to being sinful. If you go just a half step beyond being dirty, you will be sinful. This kind of dirt frustrates our fellowship. The more I look at you, the less my spirit is able to rise up. The more you look at me, the more your spirit goes down. Even if we speak to each other, we cannot speak pleasantly. We can never pretend to be what we are not. If our spirit is pleasant, then our words will also be pleasant. However, if we do not have a pleasant spirit yet we pretend to be pleasant in our words, the situation will become worse. Do you know why

so many times the brothers and sisters cannot pray when they come together? It is because they all have become dirtied. They all need the foot washing for one another.

The Lord washes our feet by the working of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightening of the Word, and by the operating of the inner law of life. Today, the Lord always exercises the washing by the Holy Spirit within us, by the Word of God in the Scriptures enlightening us, and by the inner life operating within us. The Lord may wash us many times a day. I can testify that the Lord washes me several times within one day by the Spirit, the Word, and the inner life. I must walk on the earth because I live on the earth. I cannot avoid the earthly touch. I have to deal with my relatives and with the dear brothers and sisters. Sometimes a friend comes to visit me. I cannot avoid meeting with him. But after his visit, I feel dirty. This is the earthly touch. Moreover, I must deal with the stores whenever I go shopping. After I have been to a department store, I have the feeling that I have been to Hades. When I come out of that store, I need to be washed immediately. Every time I go shopping, my feet touch the earth and become very dirty. But the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the inner life are working and operating to wash me continually. Otherwise, I could not maintain my fellowship with the Lord.

After one week's accumulation of the earthly touch, do you feel the need of the washing when you come to the Lord's table on the Lord's day? Indeed, you do feel the need for the washing of feet to cleanse you from the dirt that you have accumulated from the earthly touch during the week. We need the washing, not only the washing of the blood, which is for sins, but the washing by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightenment of the Word, and by the operation of the inner life to cleanse away the dirt that comes from the earthly touch.

5. Not Merely Physically, but Rather Spiritually

Now we know the real meaning of foot washing. It is a matter for maintaining fellowship in life. It is not merely a

physical matter; rather it has to be a spiritual practice. We must allegorize this sign and not merely understand it in a physical way. According to the spiritual meaning of this sign, we need to allow the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life to wash away all the dirt that we have accumulated while living in the flesh and walking on this dusty earth.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

LIFE'S WASHING IN LOVE TO MAINTAIN FELLOWSHIP

(2)

II. WASHING BY ONE ANOTHER AMONG THE BELIEVERS

We have seen the foot washing by the Lord Himself. Now I want to share something about the foot washing by the believers among one another (vv. 12-17). We not only need the foot washing that is exercised directly by the Lord Himself, but also the mutual foot washing of one another. The Lord told us to wash one another's feet. As I have mentioned already, sometimes we must keep the Lord's word literally, but to an even greater degree we must keep His word spiritually. We must wash one anothers' feet by ministering the work of the Holy Spirit, by ministering the enlightenment of the Word, and by ministering the operation of the inner life. In this way, I help you, you help me, and we help one another to be washed in the work of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the Word, or in the operation of the inner life. Whenever we brothers come together for fellowship and prayer, we need to minister the spiritual foot washing to one another. It is the spiritual foot washing ministered to one another that keeps us clean from the earthly touch. Dear brothers, have you considered how much you need this kind of mutual foot washing? While you are walking and working on this earth, you not only need the Lord's foot washing ministered directly within your spirit but also the foot washing from the brothers and sisters.

A. Following the Example of the Lord

When the Lord washed the disciples' feet, He laid aside His garments. We have seen that, in figure, garments signify the Lord's virtues and attributes in His expression and that to lay aside His garments signifies the putting off of what He is in His expression. If the Lord had maintained the expression of His virtues and attributes, He would have been unable to wash the feet of the disciples. Likewise, whenever you are about to wash others' feet, you need to lay aside your attainments, virtues, and attributes. This is real humility, the genuine humbling of yourself. We need to humble ourselves to such a degree that we can wash others' feet.

In the Scriptures, a garment signifies what we do and how we act. Whatever we do and however we act becomes our garment. If you have good behavior, you have an excellent garment, something that is beautiful and glorious. However, if you want to minister spiritual foot washing to others, you must lay aside what you have attained, what you have been doing, and how you have been behaving. Every time you come together with the brothers to minister some spiritual foot washing to them, you must lay aside the way you have conducted yourself. This means that you must humble yourself. Do not think that your conduct is good enough. Your deeds and behavior might have been very beautiful and glorious, so you become proud. You are proud of your garments, proud of what you have been doing. On the other hand, I may think in my heart that I am so humble and that you are too proud. With this kind of attitude and motive, we can never minister any foot washing to others. I need to lay aside all of my good deeds and forget all of my virtues. This laying aside of the garments is very practical. Whenever you are proud, you can never minister spiritual foot washing to anyone. You must be humble and lay aside your garments. To lay aside your garments means to humble yourself, to empty yourself, to take something off of you and to strip something from you.

Allow me to speak very frankly. During my Christian life, I have met a good number of brothers and sisters in my travels to various places. Many are so spiritual, but they are also proud. They are proud of their spirituality. They wear a garment of spirituality. When they come together, they look down on others, thinking that the others have never seen a heavenly vision or known anything spiritual. What is this? This is their pride. They are proud of being spiritual. If we take this attitude, it will be impossible for us to minister foot washing to others. Whenever we come together with the saints, on the contrary, we must take off our garments and forget our attainments. We must be carefully aware of this matter. We all have been guilty of this attitude. How often we have had the thought: "Oh, they do not know the church life; they do not know how to walk in the spirit; they have never learned the lessons of the inner life." This is pride. If we take this proud attitude, we can never help others. We must lay aside our garments, our attainments, our spirituality. We must lay aside all degrees of spirituality and become simple and general, saying to ourselves, "I am nothing, and nothing within me is special. I have only a towel, a piece of cloth, to gird me." We should not come to each other in the uniform of a policeman, otherwise, we shall be fearful and scared of one another. Sometimes people come threateningly with the attitude of a policeman wearing a uniform. Some come wearing a uniform of spirituality, while others wear the uniform of the deeper life, and still others are clad with the uniform of the so-called gifts. They all must lay aside their uniforms before they can minister any kind of foot washing to others. We should not say this to others; we must say it to ourselves.

It is not an easy thing to lay aside our garments and humble ourselves in order to wash others' feet. Suppose a certain brother offends me unconsciously. Although he is unaware that he has offended me, I am conscious of the offense. What should I do? I must look to the Lord for His grace not to condemn my brother, but to wash his feet. If I

try to wash him without the grace, the result will be a big blow up. Why? Because he offended me it will be so easy for me to rebuke him, even without having the intention of doing so. I need to lay aside my garments and come down to his level. Whenever we have the sensation that someone has offended us, we always consider ourselves higher than that person, thinking that he is lower, that he owes us something, and that we have a claim upon him. Herein lies the difficulty. You need to put aside your garments, lower your standard, and come down from your throne. In a sense, laying aside your garments means to dethrone yourself. Do not sit on the throne judging your brother saying, "You offended me, you offended me." As long as you have this attitude, the tail of the fox will come out. Eventually, you will rebuke the offending brother, and the result will be a quarrel, for he will deny that he did anything to offend you. Immediately, the entire situation becomes a sinful one.

Not only do we need to lay aside the garments of our attainments, but we also need to be girded with a towel. This means that we must be bound, that we must lose our liberty. The feet were washed with water and also wiped with the towel with which the Lord was girded. In other words, the more we are willing to be bound for the sake of others, the more we shall be able to minister to others and wipe their feet. Otherwise, the more we are free, the more we shall damage others. Brothers, when we come together, we must not only lay aside our attainments, but we must also be bound and be willing to lose our liberty. We simply give up our liberty for the purpose of ministering something to our dear brothers and sisters. We must be willing to be girded and bound in order to minister something that wipes the brothers and sisters.

As the brothers need the foot washing, so do the sisters. Sorry to say, the sisters are easily offended. Nevertheless, in the church life we cannot stay away from one another. In the family life, the person who works the most gets the most dirty. The same is true in the church

life. The more responsibility you bear, the more dirt you collect, for the more people you must contact. The more you contact people, the more you will become dirty. The best way to keep yourself clean is never to contact anyone, just as the best way to keep your hands clean is not to touch anything with them. Some of you perhaps are expecting to become leaders in the church life. Humanly speaking, if you are wise, you will never be involved with the leadership, for that is a very difficult job and causes you to become dirty easily. As a leading one, an elder in the church life, you cannot avoid touching certain situations and speaking to certain people. People will come to you continually. Be assured that no one who comes to you is clean, for the clean ones will never come, because they do not have problems. Whoever comes to you is a person with a problem. Sometimes a sister will not leave you until she has caused you to be angry with her. Some sisters with problems will come to you again and again, not leaving you until they have caused you to be angry with them. Once they have left you, you find that you are completely dirty. Between you and her there is the need of a big foot washing. Without such a foot washing the pleasant fellowship between you could never be restored.

This is the reason why a local church may be very happy at the beginning, but after a period of time some in it may become dirtied. Although they still come to the meetings, they do not come pleasantly, with a pleasant spirit. Perhaps they will recall how certain brothers or sisters have offended them. They may attempt to smile and pretend to like others, but what kind of fellowship could they have? They need the foot washing. They need the ministry of life.

In washing one another's feet, we do not need to say, "Brother, I love you. I am going to wash your feet." Foot washing needs a great deal of life. We need life in order to wash others' feet. Foot washing requires much life to be ministered to others. This is quite difficult. Remember, foot washing is by water, not by blood. We need much

water. Water is the Spirit, the living Word, and the inner life. We need to be full of the life water. If we are full of the life water, we shall wash one another's feet simply by being with them without having any intention of washing their feet. When we are with others, the water just flows. It even flows unconsciously. As we are with another saint, the water will flow over him again and again, and his feet will be washed. The dirt and the unpleasant smell between us will be gone. We shall be brought into pleasant fellowship. How we need this!

I say again that whenever we come together we need to lay aside our garments. Do not keep your standard, your position. Do not consider yourself as being on a higher level than others. This consideration must be laid aside. Exercise the living water and cause it to flow and others' feet will be washed.

We have seen that the Gospel of John is altogether a book of life and that everything in it is related to life. Foot washing is a matter of life. It is not merely a physical practice that is carried out, as it is in some Christian groups, at every Holy Communion service. However, if the Lord so leads we may occasionally wash one another's feet physically. In 1952, in Taipei, the four elders one night washed the feet of at least five hundred brothers. That really touched their heart and their spirit. It was a real help. Nevertheless, we need not do this in a legal, formal way.

Everything in this gospel is a matter of life, and we must practice life to such an extent that among us we have an abundance of the water of life to wash one another's feet. Some saints are full of the living water. When you come and sit with them for half an hour, your feet are washed. They may not talk to you about your dirty feet or even touch the matter of foot washing, but if you stay in their presence for half an hour, your feet are washed. After that half hour you will be so close to the Lord. Your fellowship with Him will be intimate and pleasant. Also your fellowship with others will be sweet.

Among us we need many that are full of the water of life who can wash the feet of others.

B. By Loving One Another

Each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot washing to them. Sometimes when I come to visit you, you can minister some sort of foot washing to me by showing your love toward me, and I have to show the same love toward you so that some foot washing will be ministered to you to cleanse you from the earthly touch. We must do this, otherwise, the fellowship between us could not be maintained. Fellowship can only be maintained between one another when love ministers such a foot washing. Many times I have enjoyed the spiritual foot washing from quite a number of brothers and sisters. It is impossible to tell you how many times I have experienced this kind of foot washing. More than twenty-five years ago, when I was working with the leading co-workers such as Brother Watchman Nee and others, I received much help by this kind of foot washing from them. Every time I contacted them, I sensed some sort of foot washing to keep me clean from the earthly touch. They loved me and showed their love to me by ministering the spiritual foot washing to cleanse me from the earthly touch.

By putting these principles into practice, we shall see how real they are. You can simply apply them in your home life and in your church life from this very hour. Immediately, you will then minister some sort of foot washing and wiping to your brothers and sisters. This is what we need. This is the real love that maintains the fellowship among us. It is by this kind of foot washing and wiping that the spiritual fellowship can maintain the church life. Without it, the church life cannot be maintained because the fellowship will have been damaged by the earthly touch. We need the spiritual foot washing to cleanse us from the earthly touch and to keep our spiritual fellowship in a good condition. Then it is possible to realize the church life. If the church life is to be

kept fresh, new, pleasant, and living, we continually need this foot washing. Every local church needs this. In the churches on the West Coast, the Lord has been very gracious to us. Although we have not used the term foot washing, the Lord has continually kept the church life here fresh and new by the foot washing with the living water of life. We do not talk about it and we do not use this term, but there has been the reality of foot washing in the water of life constantly. So, we can boast of His grace that the churches here are ever new, ever fresh, and ever living. In the matter of fellowship, there is no frustration among the saints. Every church needs to pray for this. Then the church will be preserved in newness and freshness.

The Lord came to bring God into us and He went to bring us into God. Now there is the real mingling of the divine Spirit with our human spirit. Humanity is mingled with divinity, and divinity is mingled with humanity. This is the church, the Body of Christ. In their spirit, the Christians are heavenly, eternal, and spiritual, but in their physical body they are still on this earth and in the old creation. Hence, there is the need for them to be kept clean from all the earthly touch in order that the fellowship of the Body and the fellowship with the Lord might be maintained. This fellowship is maintained by foot washing. This is very, very important because the fellowship with the Lord and with one another can never be maintained without it. Without it, the church life cannot be realized. In fact, the reality of the church life would be gone. Therefore, the daily foot washing definitely needs to be exercised by the Lord Himself on the one hand and by all the saints on the other. Then we shall be able to maintain an excellent fellowship with which we shall have the real church life.

III. WASHED BUT NOT IN THE FELLOWSHIP

Though the foot washing is for fellowship in life, it was not so with Judas. He was washed, but he was never in

the fellowship because he was a false one (vv. 18-31a). Before the Lord washed the disciples' feet, the devil had already put into Judas' heart that he should betray the Lord (v. 2). After the Lord's washing, Satan even entered into him (v. 27). After that, Judas left, and it was night (v. 30). He surely had entered into the dark night for his eternity. From the very beginning, he was not in the fellowship with the Lord and he could never have been in it regardless of how much he was washed (vv. 10-11). This warns us that the real foot washing is only for the people who are genuinely in the fellowship with the Lord.

IV. WASHED, WILLING TO REMAIN IN THE FELLOWSHIP, BUT FAILING

A. The Son of Man Being Glorified

After the foot washing, the Lord was about to die. So He said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified" (v. 31). For Him to be glorified was to have His divine element released from within His humanity through death and resurrection. His death broke the shell of His humanity and released His divine life. This is what it meant for Him to be glorified.

B. God Being Glorified in the Son

Here the Lord also said, "God is glorified in Him" (v. 31). This means that God the Father was to be glorified in the Son's glorification, that is, He had His divine element released in the Son. What the Lord released in His death and resurrection was the divine life element of God the Father. God the Father was to be glorified in the Son in this way, and He would also glorify the Son in Himself and He would do it immediately (v. 32).

C. Peter Being Unable to Follow the Lord in His Suffering at that Time

At that time, the Lord was ready to suffer the death of the cross, but His disciples were not yet equipped to follow Him in His suffering. So the Lord told Peter that he could

not follow Him then (vv. 36-37) because Peter had not yet received Him as the resurrection life. But Peter would follow Him (v. 36; 21:18-19) after He imparted Himself into him as resurrection life through His resurrection.

D. Peter Being About to Fail

Peter was in the genuine fellowship with the Lord, and the Lord's washing did keep him in this fellowship. He was willing to remain in this fellowship with the Lord, but he failed by denying the Lord three times when the Lord was being tried. Peter had the desire to remain in the fellowship, but he did not have the strength to do it, because, before the Lord's resurrection, His resurrection life had not been imparted into him. To remain in the fellowship of the Lord maintained by the foot washing requires the strength of resurrection life. We can never do it by our natural man.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE DISPENSING OF THE TRIUNE GOD FOR THE PRODUCING OF HIS ABODE

(1)

In this message we come to the very heart, the center, of the Gospel of John. Chapter fourteen is the first part of the message that the Lord gave to His disciples before His death. In order to understand this message, we must remember that this Gospel reveals two main points: one, that the Lord comes to be our life; two, that the Lord will build us together in oneness with Himself and with God. As we have already mentioned, the two most important words in this Gospel are life and building. The word building is clearly referred to in chapter two, for there we are told that the Lord will build up the temple, the house of God, in three days (v. 19). Then in chapter seventeen the Lord prayed that those who take the Lord as life may be one in the Triune God (vv. 21-23). This oneness in the Triune God is the spiritual building. When we take the Lord as life, the Lord as the Spirit will build us together as one in the Triune God. Life and building, the central thought of this Gospel, are two items which must definitely be remembered. As we have pointed out, this Gospel is divided into two main parts. The first part shows the Lord's coming, and the second part shows the Lord's going. The Lord's coming brings God to us by incarnation, and the Lord's going brings us into God through His death and resurrection. By the Lord's coming we take Him as life, and by His going He builds us into God. Unless this matter is clear to us, the real meaning and central thought of this Gospel can never be realized.

The first section of the Gospel of John, composed of chapters one through thirteen, shows how Christ as the eternal Word came through incarnation to bring God into man to be the life and the life supply to man. Chapter fourteen begins the second major section of this book. We need to be clear that as far as the Lord's coming to be our life to produce the church is concerned, everything has been completed at the end of chapter thirteen. If you study this Gospel carefully, you will see that the revelation regarding Christ as life for the producing of the church is fully completed in these thirteen chapters. Do not think that chapters fourteen through twenty-one contain a further revelation. No, this portion is a repetition, a development, of what is revealed in the previous thirteen chapters. In the first thirteen chapters we see that the Lord, as the Word of God and the Son of God, came to be life to His disciples that they all might have eternal life and become parts of the church. Although this matter is clear, we are not told the way in which the Lord imparts Himself into us as life. During the three and a half years that the Lord spent with His disciples, He told them that His coming to mankind was for the purpose of being life to people that they might be regenerated with the divine life and become the house of God. Nevertheless, by the end of chapter thirteen this was still simply a revelation. How can this be carried out? How can the Lord come into His disciples and be their life? Although He spoke about being in them as life, as yet He was only with and among them; He was not yet able to get into them. If we were there, we probably would have asked Him, "Lord, please tell us how You can be our life. How can we have the divine life? Since the divine life is in God, how can God's life get into us? Lord, You say that You are the life and that You have come that we might have life and might have it abundantly. But how can we have it? Lord, You have said that we all shall be Your increase, but how can we become Your increase? It seems that You are You and we are we. You are among us, no longer just in the heavens, but still You are You and we are we. How could we be a part of

You, and You be one with us? If you are a thoughtful person, you will undoubtedly raise such a question. The answer to this question is found in the second section of this Gospel, for the second section is a full development of the revelation found in the first section. Do not think of it as another revelation.

Let us now consider the content of this second section. This section, composed of chapters fourteen through twenty-one, shows us Jesus crucified and Christ resurrected going to prepare the way to bring man into God, and as the Spirit coming to abide and live in the believers as their life for the building of God's habitation. Here we shall see Christ's going and coming. In His crucifixion and resurrection, He went to prepare the way that man might be brought into God. Then, as the Spirit He comes to abide and live in the believers as their life for the building of God's habitation. We need to spend a great deal of time to get into this matter thoroughly.

Chapters fourteen through sixteen reveal life's indwelling for the building of God's habitation. Regardless of how much time you have spent reading or studying these chapters, I doubt that you have ever seen what is revealed there. Have you ever seen in these chapters the matter of the building of God's habitation? In a very detailed way, these three chapters unfold that Christ, as the indwelling life, is for the building of God's habitation.

Now we come to chapter fourteen. This chapter covers a very significant matter: the dispensing of the Triune God for the producing of His abode. Here we see two points: the dispensation of the Triune God and the producing of His abode. Tell me honestly, before reading this message did you ever realize that John 14 speaks of the dispensing of the Triune God for the producing of His abode? All three of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are clearly mentioned in this chapter. Although many Christians talk about the Triune God, not many realize that the full revelation of the Triune God is here in this chapter. Chapter fourteen is not only a revelation of

the Triune God, but a revelation of the dispensing of the Triune God into the believers for the building of His abode. In this message we shall only cover the first few verses of this chapter.

I. JESUS GOING THROUGH DEATH AND CHRIST COMING IN RESURRECTION INTO BRING THE BELIEVERS INTO THE FATHER

In 14:1-6 we see Jesus going through death and Christ coming in resurrection to bring us, the believers, into the Father. This matter is crucial. Please notice that it is not Christ going and Jesus coming, but Jesus going and Christ coming. This does not refer to Jesus' going to heaven and coming back at the time of the second advent. No, it refers to Jesus' going through death and Christ coming in resurrection to bring the believers into the Father. This crucial matter is covered in the first six verses of this chapter.

In both 13:3 and 14:2-3 we are told of the Lord's going. At that time the Lord told His disciples that He was going. According to the natural concept, the Lord's going meant that He was leaving the disciples in order to go some place else. The disciples did not understand what the Lord meant. In fact, for almost two thousand years the saints have misunderstood this chapter. Even today it is not easy to understand what the Lord meant when He said that He was going. Now, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we have found the correct meaning: the Lord was going by death and resurrection. When He said that He was going, He meant that He was going to die and be resurrected.

Where was the Lord Jesus going? The disciples were not clear about this. If you read chapters twelve through sixteen, you will find that, seemingly, the Lord did not tell the disciples clearly and definitely where He was going. I have spent much time to find out in this portion of the Word where the Lord Jesus was going. I can still remember sitting under a great Brethren teacher more than forty years ago. One night he gave an entire message on the matter of where the Lord Jesus was going. He

talked a great deal, but he never told us where the Lord was going. Seemingly, the Lord did not say where He was going; actually, He made it very clear. Why then, is it not clear to us? Because it is clear in the Lord's own word, but not according to our natural concept.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that He was going to the Father (vv. 12, 28). No one understood what He was talking about. According to the human concept, His going to the Father meant that He was going back to heaven. But the Lord Jesus never said that He was going to heaven. In verse 4 He said something very mysterious: "And you know where I go, and you know the way." Immediately after the Lord said this, Thomas replied, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" (v. 5). It seems that there was an argument, with the Lord saying that His disciples knew the way and with Thomas saying that they did not know it. Then the Lord said to Thomas, "I am the way" (v. 6). If I had been Thomas, I would have said, "Lord, what are You talking about? What does it mean that You are the way?" The Lord not only said that He was the way. He said, "I am the way, the reality, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." If I had been Thomas, I would have said, "Lord Jesus, the more You talk, the more You bring us into the forest. We are not clear about the way and now You are talking about the reality and the life. What is reality? What is life? What do You mean when You say that You are the way, the reality, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through You? Are You going to the Father or to the heavens?" The Lord did not say, "No one comes to heaven except through Me." If He had said that, everyone would have been clear. The disciples would have said, "Now we know what He is talking about. He is going to heaven." But the Lord did not say that He was going to heaven but that He was going to the Father. If I had been there, I would have said, "Lord Jesus, where is the Father?" In verse 10 the Lord said,

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me?" The Father was in Him. The Lord said that He was going to the Father, yet He was in the Father already and the Father was in Him. How perplexing this is! No one can understand it.

In answer to the question, "Where is the Father?" the Christian theologians have given a good answer. They say that the Father is in the heavens and that when the Lord said that He was going to the Father, it meant that He was going to the heavens. If the matter were as simple as this, it would never have bothered anyone. But it is not that simple. That was the reason why none of the disciples at the time knew where the Lord was going, and it is also the reason why so many of us have been unable to understand this whenever we read it.

What, then, was the aim or goal of the Lord's going? As we have seen, most Christians think that the aim of His going was heaven. However, after a careful reading of this chapter, you will discover that the object of the Lord's going was not heaven. The Lord had no intention of bringing His believers from one place to another. It is not a matter of a place; it is a matter of a living Person, the Father Himself. The Lord was going to the Father, and His intention was to bring His disciples into the divine Person of the Father. Chapter thirteen tells us that the Lord came from the Father (v. 3). Here, in chapter fourteen, we see that He was going to the Father. The Lord came from the Father by incarnation to bring God into man. Now the Lord was going to the Father in order to bring man into God. The thought of this chapter is not that the Lord was going to heaven, but that He was going to the Father in order to bring all those who believe, those who receive Him as life, into God. The way of His going was by death and resurrection, and the purpose of His going was to bring man into God. In verse 3 the Lord said, "I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am you also may be." Where is He? He tells us the answer to this question clearly in verse 20: "I am in My

Father." Therefore, by His going we shall also be in the Father because He brings us into the Father. So where He is, there we shall be also. The purpose of His going to the Father was to bring us into the Father, just like the purpose of His coming was to bring God into man.

A. The Son Being the Same as God, Omnipresent, Without the Limitation of Time and Space

In verse 1 the Lord said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." This verse reveals two very important points. The first is that the Lord is the same as God. If one believes in God, he must also believe in the Lord, for the Lord is the same as God Himself. In fact, the Lord is God Himself. Even up to that time, the disciples did not adequately realize that the Lord was God Himself.

God is omnipresent: He is not limited by time and space. On the one hand, the Lord was in the flesh, and with the flesh there are the elements of time and space. On the other hand, the Lord is not the flesh but the very God, and with God there are not the elements of time and space. In this book we are told both that He was limited in time and in space and that He was not so limited. In 7:6 He said, "My time has not yet come," indicating, that although He is the eternal, infinite, unlimited God, He lived on earth as a man, limited in the matter of time. In 3:13 He said, "No one has ascended into heaven, but He Who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man Who is in heaven." This verse indicates that while the Lord was on earth, He was still in heaven. This means that He, as the very God, is omnipresent. With Him there is not the limitation of time and space.

Why did the Lord mention to His disciples that He was the same as God? Because He told the disciples that He was going and they had the human thought that His going meant that He was leaving them. Since the disciples knew that God is omnipresent, the Lord told them that He was the same as God. Just as God is omnipresent, so He

likewise is omnipresent. Just as God is without the elements of time and space, so He is also without these elements. Whether He went or stayed it was the same, for He, as God, is omnipresent. Since His going was actually His coming, their hearts did not need to be troubled by His going. He is the same as the God in whom they believed. If they believed in God, they also had to believe in Him because He is the same as the God who is always present. The Lord seemed to be telling His disciples, "Do not be troubled by My going. Do not let your hearts be perplexed. If you believe in God, you must also believe in Me. God is omnipresent. With Him, there is no time or space limitation. It is the same with Me. I shall go, but I shall still remain with you. And while I remain with you, I shall go. I am omnipresent. If you believe in God, you must also believe in Me, for I am the same as God."

The second important point in verse 1 is that to believe God is different from believing into God. You may say that you believe God, but do you believe into God? In Greek, the preposition in means into, that is, to believe into God. In other words, this is not an objective believing; it is a subjective believing. The basic thought of this chapter is that the Lord intends to help or instruct the disciples to be in God. We must remember that to believe God is objective but to believe into God is subjective. It is this kind of subjective believing that brings us into God. In effect, the Lord was saying, "If you believe into God, you must also believe into Me." The preposition into is very important. It is regrettable that many have the wrong concept, thinking that to believe in God means to believe God. We must not miss the preposition. It is not a matter of believing the fact objectively; it is a matter of the subjective believing that brings us into God. The central thought of this chapter is that we must believe into God.

B. "My Father's House" Being the Body of Christ, the Church as the House of God

According to the natural concept, most Christians think that the Father's house mentioned in verse 2 must

refer to the third heaven where God the Father dwells. But we must not interpret the Bible according to our natural concepts. Rather, we must interpret the Scripture with the Scripture. We must understand the Bible according to and with the Bible. The phrase "My Father's house" is used twice in the Gospel of John. It is used the first time in 2:16, where it clearly refers to the temple, the dwelling place of God on earth. The temple is a type, a figure, of the body of Jesus (2:21), which, as we have seen, has in resurrection been enlarged into the Body of Christ. We must pay our full attention to this point. In 2:16, "My Father's house" is the temple on earth. It does not denote a place in the heavens but God's temple on earth. Since the temple is the type of the body of Jesus, the body of Jesus is the tabernacle (1:14), the temple, for God's dwelling place on earth. This interpretation of the phrase "My Father's house" is clearly shown in chapter two. We must apply this definition to 14:2, where we have the same phrase. We should not take this phrase in 14:2 to have a different meaning from the same phrase found in 2:16, for that would be illogical. The second time that this phrase is used in the same Gospel it must have the same definition as the first time it is used. Thus, the Father's house in chapter fourteen must also mean God's dwelling place on earth. It cannot mean the third heaven. In chapter two the Father's house is eventually the Body of Christ and in chapter fourteen it must also be the Body of Christ. No one can deny this. Now we have the proper interpretation of the phrase, "My Father's house": it is the Body of Christ, that is, the church. We need to adjust ourselves from the wrong teaching which says that the Father's house here is heaven.

In the Epistles, the revelation that the Body of Christ is the church and that the church is the house of God is fully developed. First Timothy 3:15 discloses that the church is the house of the living God. Hence, the Father's house must mean the house of the living God on earth and not heaven. First Corinthians 3:16 tells us that the believers, as a whole entity, are the temple of God. First

Peter 2:5 says that we, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house. This spiritual house certainly must be the Father's house, the house of God. Furthermore, Hebrews 3:6 says that we are the house of God, and Ephesians 2:21-22 says that the believers are being built together as God's habitation, not in the heavens but in the spirit. Thus, the whole New Testament supports the interpretation that the Father's house is eventually the Body of Christ as found in the Gospel of John itself. The Father's house in the Gospel of John and in the whole New Testament is not heaven but the Body of Christ, which is the church as the habitation of God on earth.

Do you believe that in this universe God has two buildings--a mansion in heaven and a church on earth? God has just one building. It is illogical to say that He has two. Although you may love heaven, God is not satisfied with it. If you read Isaiah 66, you will find that God desires to have a dwelling place in man. He does not love heaven so much as man to be His habitation. God wants to dwell in man. While so many Christians desire to go to heaven, God desires to come down from heaven and dwell with man on the earth. Many Christian teachers have told us that when the Lord said that He was going to prepare a place for us, He meant that He was going to prepare a heavenly mansion. But they all agree that the heaven about which they speak will be the city with foundations prepared by God as mentioned in Hebrews 11:10, the city which will be the New Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 21. But the New Jerusalem is not going to remain in heaven; it is going to come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2). You may desire to go up to heaven, but God desires to come down out of heaven.

God has only one building in the entire universe. In Old Testament times, God's building was with the children of Israel and was typified by the tabernacle and the temple. Both the tabernacle and the temple were symbols of God's people being His dwelling place on the earth. In the New Testament time the church is built. In a spiritual sense, the church is the continuation of the tabernacle and the temple. In the Old Testament we have the tabernacle and

the temple, and in the New Testament we have the church as God's temple. Today, we are God's temple. Eventually, the building with the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints will ultimately consummate in the New Jerusalem which will be the eternal tabernacle, God's habitation among men for eternity. This is God's building. If you read Revelation 21 and 22 carefully, you will discover that the New Jerusalem is not a physical city. It is a living city composed of living persons. We know this because the name of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb will be there (Rev. 21:12,14). We also shall be there as the jasper stone that is built into the wall (Rev. 21:11, 18). The New Jerusalem is a living composition of living persons built up together to be God's habitation forever.

Do you believe that now, in the church age, God does not have a habitation among men on the earth? He certainly has! This habitation is the church. Where is the church? It is on earth. God's habitation today is a living composition of living believers on the earth. Wherever we, the living believers, are built together, God has a habitation on earth. This is God's building on the earth today. By being redeemed, washed in the blood, and regenerated by the divine life, we have been made a living part of this living building which is the place that the Lord was going to prepare for us as He said in John 14:2.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE DISPENSING OF THE TRIUNE GOD FOR THE PRODUCING OF HIS ABODE

(2)

C. Many Abodes Being Many Members of the Body of Christ, Which is the Church

In the Father's house are many abodes (14:2). The Greek word for abodes in verse 2 is the plural form of the same word that is translated as abode in verse 23. What does "abode" mean? The many abodes are the many members of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5), which is God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The Lord's Body has many members, and each member is an abode. That the many abodes are the many members of the Body is adequately proved by verse 23, which says that the Lord with the Father will make an abode with the one who loves Him. Every lover of Jesus is an abode. We all are the abodes of God's building. This building is the Body of Christ, and all the abodes are the members of the Body of Christ.

D. Going through Death and Resurrection to Bring Man into God for the Building of God's Habitation

The words "I go" in verse 2 mean that the Lord was going through death and resurrection to bring man into God for the building of God's habitation. This is the building of the church mentioned in Matthew 16:18, where the Lord said, "I will build my church." Here, in verse 2, the Lord says, "I go to prepare a place for you." Are these two separate things? It is impossible. The Lord has only

one work. He is not going to prepare a place for us in heaven and, at the same time, build a church on earth. This is not logical. If we put these two portions of the Word together, we shall see that the preparing a place is just the building of the church. In order for the Lord to build the church, He had to go to prepare a place. The consummate result of this will be the building of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). The Lord is now building the church. This building of the church is equal to the building of the New Jerusalem. As we have seen, in all the universe God has only one building--the building of His living habitation with His redeemed people.

E. "To Prepare a Place"--to Open up the Way for Man to Get into God

"I go to prepare a place for you," means that the Lord will prepare a place, accomplish redemption, open up the way, and make a standing for man to get into God. It means that the Lord will pave the way for us to be in God. This is the central thought of this chapter. If we are going to allow God to dwell in us, we must firstly get into Him. If we do not get into Him, He will not get into us. Once we dwell in God, then He will dwell in us.

But how can sinful people like us get into God? How can we get into the righteous and holy God? It is impossible. We are a people separated from God. Do you know how far we are from God? It must be a long, long distance. Have you ever measured the distance between you and God? Have you ever counted how many obstacles there are between you and Him? The first obstacle is sin, the second is our many sins, the third is the world, the fourth is the Devil, the ruler or prince of the world, and the fifth is death. In addition, the flesh, the self, and the old man also increase the separation between us and God. We are far, far away from God. How can we be brought into Him? How can sinners get into God? All of the separating elements, the obstacles of sin, sins, the world, the Devil, death, flesh, and self, must be abolished. Then

we shall be brought near to God, and not only to God but into God.

For this, some work, some preparation, was needed. The Lord had to do a work of preparation. He had to go, not to the heavens, but to the cross to remove all of the obstacles. All of the obstacles have been removed by the Lord's all-inclusive death. On the cross the Lord abolished all the barriers between us and God. He dealt with sin, sins, the world, the prince of this world, the flesh, the self, the old man, and even death. By death and resurrection the Lord paved the way and prepared the place that we might be brought into God. I believe that this is the correct meaning of "I go to prepare a place for you."

In the United States there are many freeways and highways. The Lord's death and resurrection have prepared a highway that brings us into God. Before He was crucified, there were many obstacles, many frustrations, that hindered our going into the Father. There was no way to get into Him. But by His death and resurrection, the Lord cut and prepared the way and paved the highway that can bring any person into God immediately. The Lord removed all the mountains, filled all the gaps, paved the highway, and paid all the tolls. There is no charge for us to pay. We may come directly into God.

By His death and resurrection, the Lord has not only opened the way into God, but also prepared a standing for us before and in God. Listen to the good tidings: a place before and in God has been prepared for us. As long as we believe in the name of the Lord Jesus, we have a standing before God and in God. We all must shout, "Hallelujah! I have a standing before God. I even have a standing within God. Even God Himself cannot reject me. Oh, because of the preparing work of Christ, the righteous God can never cast me out. I have such a firm standing in God." I can testify to you that I am so secure about the fact that I am in God. Without the crucified and resurrected Christ, we could never have this assurance. But since the Lord has gone through the cross and has been raised from the dead,

we know that we have a position before God and a standing in God.

Do not think that the Lord is going to heaven to prepare a mansion there in heaven so that some day we may go to heaven and live in that mansion. This thought is too low. It is similar to Buddhism. This thought is held by the teachings of Catholicism and even, to an immense extent, by the teachings of Protestantism also. We all must rid ourselves of this kind of thought, which is similar to that of Buddhism. The Chinese version of the Bible even adopted the phrase "the heavenly mansion" for "heaven" in its translation of Hebrews 9:24 and 1 Peter 3:22. All the Chinese know that the term "the heavenly mansion" is a Buddhist term. It is a term invented by Buddhism. I am very sorrowful that Christianity has adopted this thought. Catholicism adopted many things from heathenism. This is the leaven spoken of in Matthew 13:33, where the Lord told us of the woman putting leaven in the fine flour. The fine flour of this parable denotes the Son of God as the living bread to be our nourishment, and the woman represents the Roman Catholic Church. The leaven that she took is symbolic of the sinful, unclean things, such as paganism and heathenism. The Catholic Church brought paganism into the doctrines and teachings concerning Christ. This thought of going to live in a heavenly mansion is a kind of leaven in the fine flour.

The Lord's redemption is not to prepare a place for us in heaven. The Lord's redemption is to prepare a place for us in God. How divine is this thought! This thought is on the highest plane. The Lord redeemed us to bring us into God, to prepare a place for us in God. After reading your whole New Testament, where does it say that we are? After we have been redeemed, after we have been saved, after we have been regenerated, please tell me where we are. We are in Christ and in God. Even John's first Epistle reveals that we abide in God and that God abides in us (4:13). Throughout the whole New Testament, the central

thought is that, after we have been saved and regenerated, we are in God and in Christ. God and Christ are our dwelling place. Furthermore, we have become the dwelling place for God. Thus, God and we, we and God, are a mutual abode. The Lord says clearly that He was preparing a place for us in God, not in heaven. He was preparing a place that we might get into God, that the Lord might bring us into God by His redemption. By His death and resurrection, He has brought us into God. Praise the Lord that each one of us has a place in God! Do you prefer a place in heaven or a place in God?

The Lord's going was to bring man into God for the building of His habitation. He went to the cross to accomplish redemption, removing all the obstacles between man and God, that He might open the way and make a standing for man to get into God. The standing in God, being enlarged, becomes the standing in the Body of Christ. Anyone who does not have the standing, a place in God, does not have a place in the Body of Christ, which is God's habitation. Hence, the Lord's going to accomplish redemption was to prepare a place in His Body for the disciples.

F. The Lord's Going Being His Coming

In verse 3 the Lord said, "If I go...I am coming." I like this sentence very much. This word proves that the Lord's going (through His death and resurrection) is His coming (to His disciples--vv. 18, 28). The tense here is very strange to the English language. It means that His going was His coming, that He was coming by going. The Lord's going was not His departure but actually another step of His coming. The Lord's death and resurrection was a further step of His coming. His going to die was His coming into us. The Lord's intention was to get into His disciples. He came in the flesh (1:14) and was among His disciples, but while He was in the flesh He could not get into them. He had to take the further step of passing

through death and resurrection that He might be transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit, that He might come into them and dwell in them, as is revealed in verses 17 through 20. After His resurrection, He came to breathe Himself as the Holy Spirit into the disciples (20:19-22). Therefore, His going was just His coming.

Let me use as an illustration a story of something that happened in Taiwan many years ago. One day I bought a huge watermelon. When I brought it home and put it on the dining table, all my children were excited. Then we took this watermelon into the kitchen. One of the children cried out, "Don't take the watermelon away!" I told them to be quiet, for the taking away of the watermelon was that they might eat it, that the big melon might get into them. The melon had to be processed, to be cut and sliced. After a few minutes, the big melon came back to the children in slices. Every child was happy. In less than an hour the entire watermelon was gone. Where did it go? It went into the children. Eventually, all the children became watermelon children. The taking away of the watermelon was not its going away. Its taking away was a further coming of the watermelon into the children. Jesus was like that watermelon. How could the disciples swallow Him? It was impossible. He had to be processed, to be cut in pieces. He went to the cross and there He was cut and processed, not only into slices, but into watermelon juice good for drinking. Now Jesus is no longer just the watermelon but also the juice. Whoever drinks Jesus gets Jesus into him. Jesus went through death that He might come back as Christ in His resurrection.

G. "Receive You to Myself"

The Lord said, "I am coming again and will receive you to Myself" (v. 3). This does not mean that the Lord receives us into a place but that He receives us into Himself. For the Lord to receive His disciples to Himself is to put them into Himself, as is mentioned by the words "you in Me" in verse 20.

H. "Where I Am You Also May Be"

In verse 3 the Lord said that He would receive us to Himself that "where I am you also may be." Where is the Lord? Is He in heaven? No, He is in the Father. The Lord wants His disciples also to be in the Father (vv. 17, 21). Since the Lord is in the Father, He will also bring us into the Father. By being in the Lord, we, the disciples, are also in the Father. The Lord was in the Father. Through His death and resurrection the Lord has brought us into Himself. By being in Him we are also in the Father because He is in the Father. Where He is, there we are also. This was made possible through the Lord's death and resurrection. Before His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus was in the Father, but the disciples were not. After His death and resurrection all the disciples got into the Father, just as the Lord was and is in the Father. At that time the Lord could say, "Where I am you also may be."

I. "The Way" Being the Son Himself

The way for us to get into God is the Lord Himself. Since the way is a living Person, so the place to which the Lord brings us must also be a living Person, God the Father Himself. The Lord Himself is the living way to bring man into God the Father, the living place. Like us, the disciples thought that both the place and the way were places, not persons. Notwithstanding, the Lord said to them, "I am the way."

J. "The Reality" Becoming the Way

In verse 6 the Lord Jesus also said that He was the reality. The way needs the reality. Unless the Lord is your reality, He can never be your way. Reality becomes the way.

K. "The Life" Bringing the Reality

The reality needs the life. The Lord Himself is the life to us. This life brings us the reality, and the reality becomes the way for us to enter into the Father. Firstly, Christ is our life. Then this life brings us all the reality of the Godhead. Eventually, this reality of the Godhead is the

way for us to get into the Father. When the Lord is life to us, then we have reality. When the Lord is our reality, then we have the way for us to get into the Father.

For many years I did not understand why the Lord put the way first, the truth or reality second, and the life last. Finally I understood the meaning of the order. If the Lord is going to be our way, He must be our reality, and if He is going to be our reality, He must be our life. By having Him as life, we have Him as our reality, and by having Him as our reality, we have Him as our way into the Father. The Lord Himself is the way, this way is the reality, and the reality is in the life.

In verse 6 the Lord did not say, "No one comes to heaven but by Me." No, He said, "No one comes to the Father but by Me." The Lord's intention is not to bring us into heaven but into God, into the Father. The Lord is not the way to bring the believers into heaven but to bring them into the Father.

L. "To the Father"

The Father, the living Person, is the destination, and the Son, the living Person, is the way. Neither the way nor the destination is a place. The way is the Son and the destination is the Father. Through the Son we get into the Father. Both the way and the destination are living Persons. Through the Son's death and resurrection we have all come into the Father. Now the Son is in the Father, and we also are in the Father because we are in the Son.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

THE DISPENSING OF THE TRIUNE GOD FOR THE PRODUCING OF HIS ABODE

(3)

In the first six verses of John 14 the Lord revealed that He was going in death and coming back in resurrection in order to bring the disciples into the Father, that He will be the way and the Father the destination, and that where He is the disciples also will be. In the following fourteen verses the Lord goes further to reveal the details regarding how He can get into the disciples and bring them to the Father.

II. THE TRIUNE GOD DISPENSING HIMSELF INTO THE BELIEVERS

John 14 unveils the Triune God for the dispensing of Himself into the believers. He is the only one God, yet He is three--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Son is the embodiment and expression of the Father (vv. 7-14), and the Spirit is the reality and realization of the Son (vv. 16-20). In the Son the Father is expressed and seen, and as the Spirit the Son is revealed and realized. The Father in the Son is expressed among the believers, and the Son as the Spirit is realized in the believers. God the Father is hidden, God the Son is manifested among man, and God the Spirit, entering into man to be his life, his life supply, and his everything, is realized within man. The Father in the Son and the Son as the Spirit are man's portion that man may enjoy God.

A. The Father Embodied in the Son Seen Among the Believers

1. The Son Being the Embodiment and Expression of the Father

When the Lord said that He was the way and that He was going to bring the believers into the Father, Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father and it suffices us" (v. 8). The Lord replied, "Am I so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How is it that you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?" (vv. 9-10). The Lord seemed to be saying, "I have been with you for three and a half years and all this time you have been seeing Me, and still you have not known the Father? Don't you know that if you see Me, you see the Father, that if you know Me, you know the Father? I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." Even up until this very moment, the Lord's word here remains a mystery. What does it mean? On the one hand, it means that the Father and the Son are just one and, on the other hand, that They are still two. If you were to ask me how this could be, I would say, "I don't know. I only know that on the one hand the Father and the Son are one, that if you see the one then you see the other because the two are one. The Father is in the Son. If you see the Son, then surely you see the Father. But, on the other hand, they are still two." This is the mystery of the Triune God.

Here I must issue a warning: never consider that the Father and the Son are two separate gods. That is heresy. We do not have three gods. We have one unique Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. At this point I am even careful not to use the word person. Although sometimes, for our speaking and understanding, we use the word person, we should not press this term too far into tritheism. We cannot explain the Triune God adequately, but it is a fact that God is triune. If you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father because the Father is embodied in the Son to be seen among the believers. The Son is the embodiment and the expression of the Father.

2. The Son Being in the Father and the Father Being in the Son

The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son (vv. 10-11). What a mystery this is! The Lord says that the Son is in the Father and that the Father is in the Son! Since the Father is in the Son, when the Son speaks, the Father, who abides in the Son, does His work. The Father does His work in the Son's speaking because They are in one another.

3. The Son and the Father Being One

In 10:30 the Lord tells us clearly that He and the Father are one. Again I say, we cannot explain this matter adequately because it is very difficult for our limited mentality to understand how They two could be one. In our limited understanding, the Son is the Son, the Father is the Father, and the two are distinctly separate one from the other. But the Lord tells us clearly that the Son and the Father are one. Here I strongly say that the Lord never says that He and the Father are two. We have to take the mystery of the Trinity according to the Lord's definite and clear word, not according to our suppositions.

4. The Son Even Being Called the Father

Isaiah 9:6 reveals that the Son is even called the Father. This verse says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be called...The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father." A Son is given, yet His name is called the everlasting Father, just as a child is born, yet He is called the Mighty God. Is He the Son or the Father? We must say that He is both, just as He is both the child and the Mighty God. How can the Son be the Father? I do not know. I only know that the Bible tells me so. Praise the Lord that the Bible tells us that the Son is called the Father, just as the Bible tells us that the child

is called the Mighty God. Therefore, according to the clear word of the Bible, the Son is the Father. None of us should be a Philip. But at that time even Philip was made clear.

5. The Son Being Able to Be Among the Believers, But Unable to Be in Them

When the Son was there with the disciples to express the Father, He was only able to be *among* them, but He was unable to be *in* them. Since He is the embodiment of the Father in the flesh, He is among the disciples to express the Father and to be seen by them. But while He was in the flesh He had no way to enter into the disciples. So there is the need of the following section of this chapter, verses 16 through 20.

B. The Son Realized as the Spirit Abiding in the Believers

We have seen that the Father is embodied and expressed in the Son among the disciples. Now we must see that the Son is realized as the Spirit entering into and abiding in the believers. Notice that we do not say in the Spirit but as the Spirit. In order to abide in us the Lord had to be transfigured, transformed, from the flesh into the Spirit. He came in the flesh to be among us, but He had to be transfigured into the Spirit before He could come into us. After coming in the flesh to be among us, His next aim was to be in us. How was the Lord transfigured? He was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit by His death and resurrection. His going was not His leaving; it was another step of His coming. He was coming in another form, in the form of the Spirit. The first step of His coming was in the flesh; the second step of His coming was as the Spirit. This chapter has the Lord's going and it also has His coming. His going was by death and resurrection, and His coming was as "another Comforter." The other Comforter is His other form, His other figure. By His coming as the Spirit, He enters into us and makes us to live just as He does. The life He lives is the resurrection life. After His resurrection, He comes to enter into us as the Spirit. So He lives and we live by Him also. He lives by

the resurrection life, and we live by Him, sharing Him as the resurrection life.

1. Another Comforter

In verse 16 the Lord said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever." Firstly, the Spirit is "another Comforter." The Greek word for Comforter, paracletos, anglicized paraclete, means one alongside who takes care of our case, our affairs, and all of our needs. Comforter in Greek is the same word as Advocate in 1 John 2:1. Today we have the Lord Jesus both in the heavens as well as the Spirit within us as our Paraclete taking care of our case. The Holy Spirit, the reality of Jesus and the realization of the Lord, is such a One that is alongside of us, ministering to us and taking care of all of our needs.

2. The Spirit of Reality

This Spirit, this Comforter, is the Spirit of reality (v. 17). Why is He the Spirit of reality? Because whatever the Father in the Son is and whatever the Son is, is realized in the Spirit. The Spirit is the realization of what God the Father and God the Son are. God the Father is light and God the Son is life. The reality of this life and light is just the Spirit. If you do not have the Spirit, you cannot have the light of God the Father. If you do not have the Spirit, you cannot have God the Son as your life. The reality of all the divine attributes of both God the Father and God the Son is the Spirit.

3. The Spirit of the Glorified Jesus

The Spirit of reality is the Spirit referred to in 7:39 as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus. At that time, this Spirit was "not yet" because Jesus had not yet been crucified and resurrected. Even while the Lord was speaking here in this chapter, this Spirit was still "not yet." It was not until the Lord passed through death and was glorified in resurrection that this Spirit was brought to the disciples.

4. The Spirit of Life as the Breath

The Spirit promised here and referred to in 7:39 is "the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2) as the breath. This promise of the Lord was fulfilled on the day of the Lord's resurrection when the Spirit was breathed into the disciples by the Lord as the breath of life (20:22). This Spirit of life as the breath is the Spirit of the glorified Jesus.

5. The Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Christ

This Spirit of life as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Christ (Phil. 1:19; Rom. 8:9). After the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ. The Spirit of God is now the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Jesus Christ implies Jesus in His suffering and Christ in His resurrection, whereas the Spirit of Christ only emphasizes Christ in His resurrection. The Spirit of God had only divinity, but now the Spirit of Jesus Christ has both divinity and humanity as well as crucifixion and resurrection. All of these elements are included in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He is the all-inclusive Spirit with the bountiful supply to meet our every need.

6. The Last Adam Being Made the Life-giving Spirit

In this section, 14:16-20, the Lord firstly refers to the Spirit of reality as "He" in verse 17. Immediately after this, He refers to Himself in verse 18. The very "He" who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the very "I" who is the Lord Himself in verse 18. This means that after His resurrection the Lord became the Spirit of reality. First Corinthians 15:45 confirms this. In dealing with the matter of resurrection it says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." The Comforter, the Spirit of reality, the Spirit of life as the breath, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and the life-giving Spirit all refer to the same Spirit. Today,

the Spirit of God is the Comforter, the Comforter is the Spirit of reality, the Spirit of reality is the Spirit of life as the breath, the Spirit of life as the breath is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the life-giving Spirit.

7. The Lord Being the Spirit

Eventually, the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Today, some Christians accuse us of being heretical because we believe and teach that the Lord Jesus is the Spirit. But this is not our concept; it is a clear revelation in the clear word of 2 Corinthians 3:17. Our accusers only take care of their traditional concept of the Trinity, but they neglect and even would not care for the clear word in 2 Corinthians 3:17, which says, "And the Lord is the Spirit." By the mercy and the grace of the Lord, we do not care for any traditional concepts but only for the pure word of the Bible. We believe and say strongly that according to the Bible the Lord Jesus today is the Spirit.

8. The Spirit Abiding with and in the Believers

Verse 17 of John 14 also reveals that the Spirit abides with and in the believers. Not only does He abide with the believers but also in them. As we have seen, when the Lord was in the flesh, He was only able to be among the disciples, to be with them. But after becoming the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of reality in His resurrection, He is able now to abide not only with us but also in us. It is by being the Spirit that the Lord enters into us and abides in us.

9. The Son in the Father, the Believers in the Son, and the Son in the Believers

In verse 20 the Lord said, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The day mentioned in this verse is the day of resurrection. On the day of resurrection the disciples were to know that the Lord was in the Father, that the disciples were in Him, and that He was in them. We need to see that verse 17 says that the Spirit will be in us and that verse 20 says

that the Son will be in us. Since both the Spirit and the Son are in us, tell me, how many are in us--one or two? The answer is one. We do not have two in us. We do not have the Spirit plus the Son, nor the Son plus the Spirit. We have just one, the wonderful One who is both the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, as we have seen, Paul says, "Now the Lord is that Spirit." As long as the Spirit is in us, the Son is in us, and as long as the Son is in us, the Spirit is in us. Now we can see that He has brought Himself into us. Before these verses, in the first part of this chapter, the Lord still was not in the disciples. But by the time of verse 20, He is in the disciples and the disciples are in Him. As He is in the Father, so the disciples are in the Father. Now where He is, there the disciples are also. He died to prepare the way, the standing, that we might get into God and that God might get into us. Then by being in us and by bringing us into the Father, the Lord can build us together in the Triune God as one to be His eternal abode.

10. The Dispensing of the Triune God into the Believers

By these two sections of John 14 we can see that the Trinity of the Godhead is for dispensing the Triune God into us. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit comes and enters into us to be our life and whatever we need. It is by this process that the Triune God is dispensed into us as our eternal portion.

11. The Indwelling of the Spirit Fully Developed in the Epistles

In verse 17 of John 14 we find the first mention of the Spirit's indwelling. This matter of the Spirit's indwelling is fulfilled and developed in the Epistles (1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:9, 11). The central and main concept of the Epistles is that Christ today as the life-giving Spirit indwells our spirit as our life and everything necessary for the building up of His Body.

12. The Lord's Promise of the Spirit of Life Being Different from the Father's Promise of the Spirit of Power

The Lord's promise of the Spirit here in John 14 is different from the Father's promise of the Spirit in Luke 24:49. The Lord's promise is of the Spirit of life, whereas the Father's promise is of the Spirit of power. The Lord's promise of the Spirit of life was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection when He breathed the Spirit of life into the disciples in John 20:22. This is not the Spirit of power as the promise of the Father which was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came as a mighty wind blowing upon the disciples in Acts 2:1-4. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was the Spirit of power, but here, in the book of John, the Spirit is the Spirit of life. In Acts, the symbol of the Spirit of power was the blowing wind. Wind mainly signifies power. But the Spirit of life in the Gospel of John is symbolized by the breath, for breath is for life. Since the Gospel of John is a book on life, it covers the Spirit of life, not the Spirit of power. Since the Acts is a book on the work of preaching and since this preaching needs power, in Acts we have the Spirit of power as the blowing wind. In John 14:16 we see the Lord's promise, for He said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." In Luke 24:49 we see the Father's promise, for there the Lord said, "Behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." On the day of the Lord's resurrection, the disciples received the Spirit of life promised by the Lord in John 14, but they had to wait for the Father's promise until they received the Spirit of power on the day of Pentecost. The Lord's promise of the Spirit of life in John 14 is not fulfilled in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, but in John 20 on the day of the Lord's resurrection. Forty days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Father's promise of the Spirit of power in Luke 24 was fulfilled.

I hope that by now we all are clear concerning the revelation of this chapter. We should not consider that this

chapter speaks about the Lord going to heaven to build a heavenly mansion and of His returning to take us up to that mansion. This is altogether an understanding according to the natural human concept. We must drop this concept. God does not have two buildings, a mansion in heaven and a church on earth. No, He has only one building--His building among and with His redeemed ones, that is, His living dwelling place. In the past, God's building was with Israel, today it is with the church, and ultimately it will consummate in the New Jerusalem. This is God's building. The way for God to accomplish this building is to dispense Himself into us all, and the way for God to dispense Himself into us is by His being the Father, Son, and Spirit. God the Father is the source, origin, substance, and element. God the Son is the expression, manifestation, and way for God to touch man and for man to touch God. Finally, God the Spirit is the reality of all that God the Father and God the Son are. Whatever God the Father and God the Son are, is fully realized in God the Spirit. The Father in the Son and the Son as the Spirit reach our spirit, firstly coming into our spirit as our life, secondly as our life supply, and finally as our everything. This Triune God firstly dispenses Himself into our spirit. Then He is continually spreading Himself from within our spirit to our whole being. He wants to spread from our spirit throughout our entire being. He wants to spread from our spirit to our soul and even into our body (Rom. 8:11), until our whole being is fully saturated and possessed by Him. This saturation is the actual building of His eternal habitation. The more we allow Him to saturate and possess us, the more He will accomplish His building in, through, and among us. Eventually, in this age He will have local churches in different localities as the expression of this building. Ultimately, when we all are in the new heaven and the new earth, God will have the New Jerusalem as His eternal dwelling place to express His glory forever.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE DISPENSING OF THE TRIUNE GOD FOR THE PRODUCING OF HIS ABODE

(4)

John 14 reveals mainly how the Triune God is dispensing Himself into us in order that He and we, we and He, might be built together in the mingling of divinity with humanity. This chapter unfolds that the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, is dispensing Himself into the believers in Jesus Christ; that this very God and the believers are being built together, a building of divinity with humanity; that eventually this building becomes a mutual abode; and that God dwells in man and man in God. This is the basis for the Lord's word in 15:4, "Abide in Me and I in you." This is a mutual abiding, for we abide in Him and He abides in us. For the sake of this mutual abiding there is a mutual abode. How could we have the abiding without the abode? Although the mutual abiding is clearly revealed in chapter fifteen, where is the mutual abode? It is in chapter fourteen.

In chapter fifteen we have the word abide and in chapter fourteen we have the word abode. I like these two words. In Greek, as in English, the verb abide is the verbal form of the noun abode. In Greek, we have the noun abode in chapter fourteen and the verb abide in chapter fifteen. The same Greek word for abode is found in both the singular and plural forms in chapter fourteen. The singular form is in verse 23, where we are told that the Father and the Son will come and make an abode with the one who loves the Lord Jesus. The plural form is found in verse 2, where the Lord tells us that in His Father's

house are many abodes. The King James Version translated the Greek word in verse 2 as mansions instead of abodes. This translation has caused a great deal of trouble. Please be impressed that the abode is found in chapter fourteen and that the abiding is found in chapter fifteen. Firstly, we need an abode. Then we can have the abiding.

Nearly all Christians talk about the abiding in John 15 without realizing where the abode is, where it comes from, or how it is formed. Although there is the clear word in 15:4 which says, "Abide in Me and I in you," where is the abode and how was it formed? The abode is found in the foregoing chapter, chapter fourteen, and it is formed by the Triune God dispensing Himself into the believers. In this way He and the believers, divinity and humanity, are built together into one.

As we have seen, 14:1-6 tells us that the Lord Jesus was going to prepare a place for us. Now we understand that He was not going to prepare a mansion in heaven. No, He was going to cut the way and prepare the standing for us to get into God. We must be very clear about this. In verse 6 the Lord Jesus said that He was the way and that the Father was the destination. He was saying that He was the way for us to come to the Father. So the way is a living Person, and the destination must also be a living Person. The Son is the way to bring us to the Father as the destination.

Beginning with 14:7, the Lord Jesus goes on to tell us how we can get into the Father. In order to get into the Father, we need to get into the Son because He is in the Father. Once we get into Him, spontaneously we are in the Father. The Lord said that He was going to prepare a place for us so that where He is there we may be also. Where is He? He is in the Father. But when He spoke these words, we were not in the Father. Therefore, He was going to do all that was necessary to bring us to the very place where He is. That place is not a physical place; it is a Person, the Father. He was in the Father and He was going to bring us into Himself. Since He is in the Father, once we get into Him, we also shall be in the Father. So,

eventually, where He is, there we may be also. Now we are able to understand 14:20 which says, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." This is the mingling of divinity with humanity. This mingling of divinity with humanity is the mutual abode. God dwells in man and man dwells in God. God abides in man and man abides in God. This is the mutual abode, the mutual abiding. This is the central thought of John 14.

As we have seen, in John 14 the Father is the source, origin, essence, and element. The Son is the expression, manifestation, and embodiment of all that the Father is. Without the Son, the Father cannot be seen, but with the Son, the Father is embodied, manifested, expressed, and seen among men. Men can see the Son. As long as they see the Son, they see the Father, for the Father is embodied in the Son. But, before His death and resurrection, the Son still could not get into man. He could be among men and be seen by them, but He could not enter into them. Therefore, the Son had to go to the cross and pass through the process of death and resurrection. By being processed through death and resurrection, the Son has had His form transfigured. He has been transfigured from the form of the flesh into the form of the Spirit.

This resembles the transfiguration of a large watermelon into juice through the process of cutting and pressing. As a result of this process, the juice can easily enter into anyone. Before the Lord was processed in this way, the Spirit was "not yet" (7:39), but after this process, the Spirit of life is here. In like manner, before the watermelon was processed, the juice was "not yet." There was only a large melon. But after the process, we have watermelon juice for drinking.

What is the Spirit? It is the reality, the realization, of all that God the Father and God the Son are. Whatever the Father and the Son are is realized in the Spirit. This Spirit reaches us, enters into us, and abides in us. In this way the Triune God is dispensed into us. By this dispensing we all can know that the Son is in the Father,

that we are in the Son, and that the Son is in us. He and we, we and He, become a mingled entity. This mingled entity is the mutual abode of divinity and humanity. With this abode there is the mutual abiding. We abide in Him and He abides in us. This is God's dispensation.

III. THE TRIUNE GOD MAKING HIS ABODE WITH THE BELIEVERS

Now we need to consider the Triune God making His abode with the believers. This is covered in verses 21 through 24. However, before coming to this, we need to see a few other points.

A. The Son Having Come and Lived by the Father and Having Done Things in the Father's Name

The Son has come and lived by the Father (5:43; 6:57), and has done many things in the Father's name (10:25). The Father has worked in Him (14:10) to have the Father glorified in the Son (14:13). When the Son speaks, the Father works. I mention this to show you that the Father is the source and that the Son is the expression. The Son came in the Father's name and the Father worked through the Son. The Son is the expression of the Father who is the source.

B. The Believers Living by the Son and Doing Greater Things in the Name of the Son

Now the believers need to live by the Son (6:57). In 6:57 the Lord Jesus said, "He who eats Me shall also live because of Me." We need to eat Jesus. The Greek word for eat here means to masticate. We must not eat Jesus in an ordinary way; we must eat Him in a specific way by chewing and masticating Him. Do not eat Jesus in a rough way--chew Him slowly.

In 14:12 the Lord said that those who believe in Him will do greater works than He did. In verses 13 and 14 He said that if we ask anything in His name He will do it. To be in the Lord's name means to be one with the Lord, to live by the Lord, and to let the Lord live in us. The Lord came and did things in the Father's name, meaning that He was one with the Father (10:30), lived by the Father, and that the Father worked in Him. In the Gospels, the Lord as the expression of the Father did things in the Father's name. In the Acts, the disciples as the expression of the Lord did even greater things in His name. They needed to have the Son living in them (14:19) in order that the Son might be expressed as the Spirit.

C. The Son Living and Speaking in the Believer

The Son lives and speaks in the believer. This is a crucial point. The living Christ within us speaks constantly. He will never stop speaking. Due to the fact that we are still in a situation with so many negative things, most of the time this living Christ speaks just one word--no. From morning until evening and from evening until morning, nearly the only thing that He says to us is no. A sister may say, "I'm going to the department store to buy a pair of shoes," and the Lord says, "No." A brother may desire to talk to a certain person, and the indwelling Christ says, "No." Is this not your experience? I know that the indwelling Christ speaks this word to you much of the time.

D. The Believer Loving the Son, Keeping His Commandments, Being Loved by the Father and the Son, and Having the Son's Manifestation

If we love the Lord, we will keep His commandments (14:15, 21, 23). In 14:21 the Lord said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." If we keep

the Lord's commandments, we shall be loved by the Father and the Son, and the Son will manifest Himself to us. Tell me, according to your experience, when the Lord spoke the word "no" to you and you obeyed Him, what was the result? You found yourself immediately in the presence of the Lord. But if we do not care for that little word "no," we shall lose His presence. Whenever we listen to His speaking and keep His commandments, His presence is immediately intensified and becomes so sweet, precious, watering, strengthening, enlightening, and nourishing. This is the manifestation of the indwelling Christ.

Does it sound illogical to say that the indwelling Christ will be manifested? You may ask, "Since He indwells me, He is already here. Why do you say that He will manifest Himself?" Because the indwelling Christ quite often disappears. Although He indwells you, whether or not He appears or disappears from your inner sense depends on whether or not you listen to His words. All of the brothers and sisters, whether they are young or old, have some experience of this. Once, when I was feeling a little lonely, I said to myself, "I would like to go to see Brother John and talk to him." But the indwelling Christ said "no." Then I said, "How about if I go to see Brother Francis?" When the indwelling One again said "no," I asked, "What shall I do?" The Lord said, "Stay with Me." Who is this "Me"? He is the indwelling Christ. If I were to say, "Amen, Lord," the presence of the indwelling Lord would shine and be so sweet and strengthening. He would bring in a great deal of light. But, if when I heard Him say "no," I did not care for His word and I still went to see the brothers, His presence would disappear, the darkness within me would be prevailing, I would lose my direction, and there would be no peace.

We all must learn one thing: that obeying the Lord's commandments depends upon our love toward Him. If you love the Lord, you will say "amen" when He says no. If you mean business in saying "amen," you will have His manifestation. The Lord will manifest Himself to

whomever loves Him and keeps His commandments. This does not mean that before the Lord manifests Himself to us He is in the third heaven. No, He is within us, but, because of our disobedience, His presence disappears, light becomes darkness, strength becomes weakness, and life becomes death.

In the whole Gospel of John there are only two requirements: the first is to believe in Him and the second is to love Him. To believe in Him is to receive Him, and to love Him is to enjoy Him. We all have believed in Him. This means that we all have received Him. But the problem today is whether we love Him or not. Although you have received the Lord Jesus and He is now within you, you may not love Him. We need to be a lover of the Lord Jesus all day long. This is why the most significant aspect of the miniature of the church life in chapter twelve is the love that poured the ointment upon the Lord. We all must love Him. His presence is always related to our love toward Him. The more we love Him, the more we enjoy His presence. What is His presence? It is simply the enjoyment of Himself. As long as we have His presence, we enjoy Him. The more we love Him, the more we shall have His presence. The more we are in His presence, the more we shall enjoy all that He is to us. We only need to love Him. Knowing means nothing; only loving counts. How we all need to love Him! I have been loving Him for fifty years and today I feel that He is more lovable than ever. No one is as lovely as He is. Song of Songs says that He is altogether lovely (5:16). The Lord's recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus. If we do not love Him, we are finished with His recovery.

E. The Father and the Son as the Spirit Coming to the Believer

The Father and the Son as the Spirit come to the believer. You may ask, "Are They not here already?" Yes, They are here but They are not appearing. Their coming is

Their appearing. When the Lord says that the Father and Son will come to the believer, this does not mean that They are far away from the lover of Jesus. They are here with the lover of Jesus, but They have not appeared. Their coming is Their appearing.

F. The Triune God Making a Mutual Abode with the Believer

The Triune God makes a mutual abode with the believer. In verse 23 the Lord Jesus does not say, "The Father and I will abide with him," but He says, "We will come to him and make an abode with him." There is a difference between the two expressions "abide with" and "make an abode with." The difference is more than mere idiom in language. To say, "The Father and I will come to abide with him" is correct as far as language is concerned. But to say, "The Father and I will come to him and make an abode with him" is more meaningful. In what way is it more meaningful? In the way that the Father and the Son will take the lover of Jesus as Their abode and that the believer will be an abode to Them. The Lord seemed to be saying, "We shall make an abode with him that he and We may have an abiding place. He will be Our abode and We shall be his abode."

This verse is the basis of 15:4-5--"Abide in Me and I in you." Most Christians do not realize that the basis of 15:4-5 is 14:23, where we have the mutual abode made by the appearing of the Father and the Son as the Spirit to the believer who loves Him. In other words, this abode is prepared by the visitation of the Triune God. When the Triune God grants you a visit, His visitation makes you His abode and it makes Him your abode. Eventually, you and He, He and you, become a mutual abode. You will abide in Him, and He will abide in you. This is marvelous. He will not only be the One who abides in you, but He will also be your abode. Although it is wonderful to have Him abide in us, I would rather have Him as my abode. We can

abide in Him, and He can abide in us. In such a situation there is no place for sin, the world, Satan, the old man, or the flesh. All such things have been chased away.

I ask you to be honest and to consider your past experience. Have you not had this experience in the past? Deep within you there was a sweet appreciation toward the Lord Jesus and you said, "Lord, I love You." Then the Lord said, "Since you love Me, My commandment is that you do not do this and that." You said, "Amen, Lord Jesus." Perhaps you said amen with tears in your eyes. Immediately you had the sense of His manifestation within you. You were so much in His presence. At that time you had the sense that He was filling you up with Himself and that you were being drawn into Him. You were abiding in Him and He was abiding in you. You were His abode, and He was yours. I believe that we all have had this kind of experience, either in a deep way or in a shallow way, either for a long time or just for a few minutes. We need to have this experience all day long.

G. The Abode Being One of the Many

This mutual abode is just one of the many such abodes. The abode mentioned in verse 23 is one of the many abodes found in verse 2. Do not forget that you are one of so many abodes.

H. This Being for the Building of God's Habitation

The Triune God's making His abode with the believers is for the building of His habitation. Whenever you have had the sweet sensation that you were in the presence of the Lord and that the Lord was indwelling you to the fullest, you also had the feeling that you loved all the believers. According to your realization at the time, you had no problem with any believer and you were ready to forgive every brother's or sister's fault. What is this? This is the desire to be one with the believers for God's building. Whenever you are in such a situation with the

Lord, you are desirous of being mingled with the saints. You will not want to be alone. The building of God's habitation among men on earth today is altogether dependent upon this experience. Perhaps two brothers have a problem with each other. What can solve it? It is not easy to do. One day, they both begin to love the Lord and they have a deep and sweet appreciation of Him. The Lord gives them a commandment and they take it. Immediately, they are both in the Lord's presence and the problem is over. This is the way in which the Lord does the divine work of building among us. It is not a matter of organization, regulation, or outward teaching. It is absolutely a matter of our loving the Lord and experiencing His manifestation and His abiding with us.

IV. THE COMFORTER'S REMINDING AND LIFE'S PEACE

A. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Being Sent by the Father in the Son's Name

In verse 26 the Lord said, "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all things which I said to you." Here we see that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is sent by the Father in the Son's name. The Holy Spirit is not only sent by the Father but from with the Father (15:26). In Greek, the preposition translated "from" in 15:26 is para. This word means "by the side of" and often has the meaning of "from with." This is seen elsewhere in the Gospel of John. Take, for example, the Lord's word in 6:46: "Not that any one has seen the Father, except Him Who is from God." The word "from" in this verse is para in Greek. The sense here is "from with." The Lord is not only from God but also with God. While He is from God, He is still with God (8:16, 29; 16:27). We find another example of this meaning of para in 17:8, where the Lord says to the Father of His disciples that

they "knew truly that I came forth from You." Here, once again, the sense of this preposition is "from with." Likewise, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is sent "from with" the Father. This means that the Spirit not only comes from the Father but also with the Father. When the Father sends the Spirit, He comes with the Spirit. The Comforter comes from the Father and with the Father. The Father is the source. When the Spirit comes from the source, it does not mean He leaves the source but that He comes with the source.

The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is sent by the Father in the Son's name. So, the Holy Spirit comes in the Son's name to be the reality of His name. What is the meaning of "in My name"? The name is the Son Himself, and the Spirit is the person, the being, of the Son. When we call on the name of the Son, we get the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The Son came in the Father's name (5:43) because the Son and the Father are one (10:30). Now, the Spirit will come in the Son's name because the Spirit and the Son also are one (2 Cor. 3:17). This is the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--reaching us eventually as the Spirit.

The Spirit comes in the name of the Son. When you call on the name of Jesus, the Spirit comes. The name of the Son is Jesus, and His person is the Spirit. God the Father sends the Spirit and the Spirit comes in the name of the Son. Eventually, it is the Triune God who comes. When the Spirit comes to us, the Father also comes. The Son is also here because the Spirit comes with the Father in the name of the Son. The Father sends the Spirit from with Himself and the Spirit comes in the name of the Son. The Spirit comes as the Son. He is the Son coming, and this Son coming is from with the Father. Therefore, when one comes, all three are present.

Let me say this once again. The Father sends the Spirit with Himself. Since the Spirit comes with the Father, the Father comes together with the Spirit. The Spirit comes in the name of the Son and as the Son. When the Spirit comes, it is the Son who comes. Thus, when the Spirit comes, all three are present.

The Spirit came after the Lord's resurrection to remind the disciples of all the things that the Lord told them before His crucifixion. This is the reminding of the Spirit who was sent from with the Father and who came as the Son in the Son's name. The name is the Son Himself, and the Spirit is the being, the person, of the Son. When the disciples called on the name of the Son, they received the Spirit who reminded them of what the Son had told them before His death.

B. Life's Peace

1. Different from the World's Peace

In verse 27 the Lord said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful." Here we see life's peace. It is different from the world's peace.

2. Overcoming All Troubles and Fears

Life's peace overcomes all troubles and fears. All of the troubles and fears in this portion of the Word are caused by the persecuting religion. At that time, it was not a small thing to follow the Lord Jesus. The disciples did so at the risk of losing their lives or, at the very least, of losing the way to earn their living. Since the disciples were under the fear of the opposing and persecuting religion, the Lord told them that in Him they had peace. He left His peace with them. This peace is just the Lord Himself. Regardless of the opposition, persecution, rumors, and bad names given to us by religion, the Lord Jesus within us is our life and our peace. Now we may enjoy the Lord as our life, our abode, and our peace. Praise Him that He is everything to us. He is our life, our dwelling place, and our peace.

3. The Ruler of the World Having Nothing in the Giver of this Peace

The ruler of this world has nothing in the Giver of this peace (14:30). In this verse the Lord said, "The ruler of this

world is coming, and in Me he has nothing." The ruler of this world is Satan. The hour was coming when he was going to attack the Lord, but the Lord said that Satan had nothing in Him. In the next verse the Lord said, "that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father commanded Me, so I do." Here the Father's commandment was for Him to die for the purpose of bringing us into God. The Lord fulfilled this commandment in order to show the world that He loved the Father. The Lord did not go into death to show that Satan had failed to overcome Him or that Satan had nothing in Him. Rather, the Lord went into death because He was going to prove to the world that He loved the Father so much.

I believe that at this point we are clear about the meaning of this chapter. The Lord was going to die, to be resurrected, and to be transfigured into the Spirit as His other form, as another Comforter, so that He might come into us and bring us into God. By the resurrection life, we are joined in oneness with God. Only by the Lord's death and resurrection could we be joined with God and be brought into Him. By His death, the Lord has taken away sin, sins, the self, the old man, the flesh, the world, the prince of the world, and death. The Lord has removed all of these distances through His death. By His resurrection He is now the Spirit and as the Spirit He comes into us and brings us into union with God. Now He is in the Father, we are in Him, and He is in us. Consequently, we are in the Father also. If we love Him and cooperate with Him, He will manifest Himself to us more and more. The more we love the Lord, the more the Triune God will come into us, make His home with us, and make a mutual abode with us. This mutual abode is the mingling of God with man. The oneness of this mingling is the spiritual abode, the divine abode, the mutual abode. We are an abode to God and God is an abode to us. This is the real building. This is the proper and correct meaning of the Lord's word found in this chapter.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE ORGANISM OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE DIVINE DISPENSATION

(1)

In this message we come to John 15. We should not consider this chapter as separate from chapters fourteen and sixteen because all three chapters are one message given by the Lord Jesus before He was betrayed and arrested. There is no doubt that chapter fifteen is the continuation of chapter fourteen where we see the mutual abode, the mingling of divinity with humanity. Once we understand John 14 we are prepared to consider John 15.

Most Christians are very familiar with John 15, a wonderful chapter about the Lord as the vine and us as the branches. Apparently, it is easy for us to understand this chapter because we know what a vine is, what branches are, and what is the relationship between a vine and its branches. However, John 15 is possibly the deepest chapter in the New Testament. If we are to properly and adequately understand the deeper meaning of this chapter, we must understand the central thought of God and the intention of the Holy Spirit in writing the Gospel of John. This Gospel reveals that the Lord Jesus is the expression of God, that He is the very God expressed in the form of man. He was expressed in this way that we might take Him as our life and our everything. His intention is to work Himself into us until He becomes our life and everything. Chapters three through eleven reveal that He can meet all of our needs by becoming our life. Chapter twelve shows us the issue and multiplication of His being life to us. Chapter thirteen indicates the way to maintain our fellowship in life. Then chapter fourteen unfolds to us that He can work Himself into us by His

death and resurrection and by His being transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. By the time of chapter fourteen He has wrought Himself into us through the Spirit of reality. Now He is our life and our essence. He is living within us, waiting for us to cooperate with Him that He might reveal and manifest Himself to us more and more. The Father also comes in with Him to visit us, stay with us and make His abode with us (14:23). In other words, the Father in Him and through the Spirit will be absolutely mingled with us. The Father in the Son and through the Spirit will be our abode, and we shall be the abode of the Triune God. In this way, the Triune God and we, we and the Triune God, will be built together, that is, God and man, man and God, will be built up together as one. This wonderful oneness is the central thought of God. The ultimate intention of God in the whole universe is that the Father in the Son as the Spirit might be wrought into us and mingled with us until the Triune God and humanity become a mutual abode. We have seen this in our study of chapter fourteen. This is the background of chapter fifteen.

The revelation of God in chapter fifteen is meaningful, profound, and all-inclusive. The thought and meaning of this revelation are very deep. The first thing to be pointed out in this chapter is that the Triune God is clearly revealed. God the Father is revealed as the husbandman who is related to a husbandry, a plantation, or a harvest. A husbandman is the source, the originator, the founder, and the planter of a husbandry. He is one who engages in an enterprise. The whole universe is the enterprise of the Father. In other words, the Father has a divine plan, an eternal purpose, and He wants to accomplish the intention behind His purpose. This is what is meant by the Father's being the husbandman. He is the husbandman of the vineyard who plans to carry out a certain purpose. He is the source, the founder, and the first one to accomplish certain things according to His mind and purpose. Furthermore, as the details found in other parts of the Scriptures disclose, it is the Father's pleasure that all that He is, all the riches of His divine nature, and all the fullness of the Godhead be the riches of the vine. All that

the Father is, all that the Father has, all the riches of the Father's divine life, and all the fullness of the Godhead are in the vine. This is all for the vine which is the embodiment of it all. The vine is the embodiment of the fullness of the riches of divinity and of the Godhead. All that God the Father is and has is embodied in the vine.

This chapter not only reveals the Father but also the Son as the vine. As the vine, the Son is the center. The whole universe is pictured as a vineyard, and centered in this vineyard is the vine who is the Son. God the Son is the center. Everything is centralized in Him. He, as the vine, is the center of the vineyard. We have seen that God the Father is the source and founder, and now we see that God the Son is the center. Everything that God the Father is and has is for the center, is embodied in the center, and is expressed through the center. God the Father is expressed, manifested, and glorified through the vine. So God the Father is the source and God the Son is the center.

Finally, in the last two verses of this chapter the Spirit is revealed. Here God the Spirit is called the Spirit of reality. This means that the Spirit is the reality. Whatever God the Father is in the Son and whatever He has centralized in the Son will be realized by the Spirit. All that God the Father is in the Son is a reality in God the Spirit. Everything centralized in the Son is revealed, testified, witnessed, and realized by the Spirit of reality. Therefore, God the Father is the source, the founder; God the Son is the center, the embodiment, and the manifestation; and God the Spirit is the realization, the reality. This is exceedingly profound and deep.

Moreover, in this revelation there is not only the Triune God but also the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the church. In this revelation the church is likened to the branches of a vine. The branches of a vine are simply the body of the vine. If you take away the branches from the vine, the vine will have no body. Without the branches, the vine has nothing remaining except the root and the stem. Hence, the branches are the body of the vine.

If we look to the Lord, we shall see what a wonderful and mysterious matter this is. All that God the Father is

and has is centralized and embodied in God the Son, and all of this is realized in God the Spirit. Now all of this has been wrought into us and will be expressed and testified through us. John 15 has four very important items: God the Father as the source and founder, God the Son as the center and manifestation, God the Spirit as the reality and realization, and the branches as the Body, the corporate expression. The branches are very vital, for they express what God is in Christ as the Spirit. Without the branches there can be no full expression. The full expression depends upon the branches, the Body, for what God is in the Son and as the Spirit will be expressed by the branches, the Body. All that God the Father is and has is in the Son, all that the Son is and has is realized as the Spirit, and all that the Spirit has is in the Body, in the church, in us. In other words, God the Father as the source is embodied in God the Son as the center who is now realized as God the Spirit as the reality. All that the Spirit has is expressed in us, that is, in the branches, the church. The Triune God is expressed, manifested, and glorified in the church.

I. THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES BEING AN ORGANISM TO GLORIFY THE FATHER BY EXPRESSING THE RICHES OF THE DIVINE LIFE

In 15:1-11 we see that the vine and the branches are an organism to glorify the Father by expressing the riches of the divine life. Some readers of this message might be bothered by the word organism; it may sound quite strange to their understanding to hear of the organism of the Triune God in the divine dispensation. But we are used to saying that the church, the Body of Christ, is not an organization but an organism. What is the difference between an organization and an organism? A table, for

example, is an organization, for many pieces of wood are assembled to form one entity. Why is a table an organization and not an organism? Because in the table as a unit there is not one organ. There are no organs in a table because there is no life in a table. Apparently, our body is also an organization. However, it is much more than an organization because we have both organs and life. Since our body has both organs and life, it is an organism, not merely an organization. In like manner, the church, the Body of Christ, is an organism.

What is the Body of Christ? It is exactly what we have said in message thirty-two--the mutual abode, the mingling of divinity with humanity. As we have seen, there is such a mingling in chapter fourteen. This mingling is the mutual abode of God and man. This mutual abode, this mingling of divinity with humanity, being full of organs and life, is an organism.

In John 15 this organism is likened to a vine tree. The grape vine is used as a figure of this wonderful organism. Within this vine tree we have the tree itself and all of its branches. The Lord Jesus said that the vine tree is just Himself (v. 1). He is the tree and we are the branches of this tree. By this clear picture we can see that we are the branching out of the tree, for the branches are the branching out of the vine tree. If you were to cut off the branches, you would just have a bare tree without branches and there would be no branching out of the vine. But today this universal vine tree has many branches, and these branches are simply His branching out. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was just a small man living in a certain place. But look at His branching out today: He has parts in Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, London, Frankfurt, Tokyo, Manila, Taipei, Hong Kong, and throughout the world. Praise the Lord that throughout the whole earth we see the branching out of this vine tree! This is not an organization; it is an organism that has life with many organs, organic systems, and organic elements growing in it.

The vine and the branches are an organism to glorify the Father. What is the meaning of the word glorify here? It means to have the intent, content, the inner life, and the inner riches released from within and expressed. The vine and the branches are an organism to glorify the Father, to have the intent, the content, the inner life, and the inner riches released and expressed from within. As an organism to glorify the Father, the vine and the branches express the riches of the divine life. When the vine tree bears clusters of grapes, that is the time when the riches of the divine life are expressed. This expression is the glorification of the Father because the Father is the divine life. The Father is the source and the substance of the vine tree. Without the fruit, the essence, substance, and life of the vine tree would be concealed, hidden, and confined. However, the riches of the inner life of the vine are expressed in the clusters of fruit. I say again that to express the inner life in this way is to release the divine substance from within the vine. This is the glorification of the Father.

A. The Divine Dispensation

1. God's Economy

To have the vine and the branches as an organism to glorify the Father is the divine dispensation. Here the word dispensation does not mean an age or a period of time. It means dispensing. This word has the same meaning as the word economy. Oikonomia, the Greek word for dispensation or administration, has been anglicized as the word economy. What is this oikonomia, this economy? It is a governmental administration, that is, a divine dispensation into mankind. This divine dispensation is God's economy. According to the Greek, this word is used clearly in 1 Timothy 1:4. However, the King James Version rendered it as "godly edifying." It should be translated as God's economy or as God's dispensation.

2. The Eternal Purpose (Plan)

In Ephesians 3:10-11 we read of the eternal purpose of God. The words eternal purpose are a biblical term. According to modern English, it should be eternal plan. In eternity past, God made a plan for eternity future. Hence, this plan is an eternal plan. This plan is to have a large number of human beings regenerated with the divine life, become the Body of Christ, and express all the fullness of the Godhead embodied in Christ. This is the eternal plan, the plan that God made in eternity past for eternity future. We need to know 1 Timothy 1:4 and Ephesians 3:10-11 very well. We need to become more familiar with these verses.

3. To Express God the Father in the Son Through His Body, the Church

This organism of the vine and the branches is the expression of God the Father in the Son through His Body, the church. In this regard we need to consider Genesis 1:26. Have you ever thought that the church is found in Genesis 1:26? The church is there. The expression of the Father is also there. If you were to ask how this can be so, I would reply that the expression is the image. God created man in His own image. Eventually, man became the expression of God. Then how about the church? Please notice that the man mentioned in Genesis 1:26 is not an individual man but a corporate man. God did not create millions of men; He created a corporate man who includes millions of persons. Properly speaking, the man mentioned in Genesis 1:26 is mankind, and mankind is not individual but corporate. What is the church? The church is a selected part of mankind. We may take as an illustration of this definition of the church the example of the wood used in making furniture. Although I may collect much material for the purpose of making a table, eventually I shall only select the best part of this material

to use in making the table. After the table is made, I will cast the leftovers aside. I would only keep and treasure the table that I have made. Mankind is the material that God is using to make the church. We do not know how much of this material has been sacrificed. God has selected only a part of mankind to be regenerated and become the church.

The church is a corporate entity. This corporate entity was sown as a seed in Genesis 1:26 and will be reaped as a harvest in Revelation 21 where we see the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of the organism that expresses the divine image. In Genesis 1:26 we see a corporate man made in God's image; in Revelation 21 we see the New Jerusalem, the corporate expression of the image of God. The seed is sown in Genesis, the harvest is reaped in Revelation 21, and the crop is here on earth today.

B. The Vine, God the Son

1. The Center of God's Economy

As the vine, the Son is the center of God's economy. God the Son is the center of God's business, of God's operation, of God's enterprise. God has an operation in the universe. This operation is His divine business. The Son as the vine is the very center of this enterprise.

2. The Embodiment and the Manifestation of the Godhead

This vine is the embodiment and manifestation of the Godhead. Colossians 2:9 says that in the Son the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." In Colossians 2:9 we see the Son as the embodiment of the Godhead, and in John 1:18 we see Him as the declaration, the manifestation of God. So the very Son of God, who is God's universal vine, is God's embodiment and manifestation.

3. An Organism Full of Life, Like the Tree of Life

This vine is an organism full of life, like the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). It is not an organization without life, like the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4, 9). The tree of life is an organism, and the tower of Babel is an organization. Which do you prefer to have--the tree of life or the tower of Babel? The tower of Babel was great and high, but the tree of life was probably the same height as we are. If the tree of life had been too high, it would have been awkward for people to reach it. According to John 6, the people tried to force Christ to be a king. This means that they wanted to make Him a tower. But He preferred to be the bread of life. This means that He wanted to be the tree of life.

4. To Propagate Life and to Multiply Life

The vine is very good to propagate life and to multiply life. To propagate life means to spread life widely, and to multiply life means to reproduce life. With every kind of vegetable life we see the matters of propagation and multiplication. One grain of wheat is sown into the earth and grows into thirty, sixty, or a hundred other grains. This is both the propagation and the multiplication of life. If we consider deeply the matter of the Lord's likening Himself to a vine, we shall realize that of all the plants, flowers, grasses, and trees, only the vine is the best plant to show the propagation and multiplication of life. A vine is not noted for its blossoms or its materials; it is noted for its manifestation of the riches of life. Once a vine is full of ripened fruit, you can easily discern the riches of life. So the vine produces life. The Lord is not life for people to appreciate as blossoms; neither is He life to be used as some kind of material. Rather, the Lord is life to bring forth life and to produce life.

5. To Express Life for the Glorification of the Father

The propagation and multiplication of life are to express life for the glorification of the Father. When the

life of the vine is expressed through the branches in its propagation and multiplication, the Father is glorified, because what the Father is in the riches of His life is expressed in the propagation and multiplication of the vine.

6. Not for Blossom, Not for Materials

As we have pointed out, the vine tree is good for neither blossoms nor materials. A vine has no flowers for us to appreciate. I have heard of people going to see the beautiful cherry blossoms in Washington D.C., but I have never heard of them going to see the blossoms of a vine. A vine is not noted for its blossoms. As a child, I was raised near a vineyard. Every year I saw the grapevines there, but I could hardly see any blossoms. The blossoms of a grapevine are very tiny and not at all colorful.

Neither is the vine tree good for materials (Ezek. 15:2-3). No furniture is made of wood from a vine tree. Neither is the wood of a vine tree good for making columns, beams, posts, or mantles. You will never see a building that has been constructed with the wood from a vine tree. The vine tree is only good for bearing fruit. It is not good for blossoms or materials.

It is the same with the church. If you come to the church with the intention of seeing cherry blossoms, you will not see any. Likewise, if you come to the church to select material that is good for building furniture and worldly organizations, you will only find something that is good for bearing fruit. We were reborn to bear fruit.

We all have been ruined. We have been ruined for blossoms and we have been ruined for materials. We are good for nothing on this earth. If you are still good for something, it means that you are still worldly. We are not good for education, business, or politics. We are not even good for religion or for being a pastor. Forty-five years ago I was completely ruined. Now I am a useless person who is good for nothing. As far as human society and religious organizations are concerned, I am a waste. How about you? Praise the Lord that we are all a waste--a waste because of Jesus and a waste for Jesus. We all have been

ruined by Him. Are you still able to be a good professor? The only kind of professor you should be is a wasted professor. Can you still be a good businessman or farmer? You must be a wasted businessman or farmer. We have been ruined and are good for nothing except fruit-bearing, for expressing the Father in the Son. In the church you will not see blossoms or materials. You will only see small men who are good for nothing except for bearing fruit.

C. The Husbandman, God the Father

The husbandman is God the Father. The Father as the husbandman is the source, the author, the planner, the planter, the life, the substance, the soil, the water, the air, the sunshine, and everything to the vine. As we have already pointed out, whatever God the Father is, has, and can do has all been embodied in the vine tree. The Son as the vine is the center of God's economy and the embodiment of all the riches of the Father. The Father, by cultivating the Son, works Himself with all of His riches into this vine, and eventually the vine expresses the Father through its branches in a corporate way. This is the Father's economy in the universe.

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were a vine in the eyes of God (Psa. 80:8; cf. Isa. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10; 15:2). But Israel failed God as the vine, for they did not give God the opportunity to express Himself through them. Although God tried to express Himself through them, they failed Him. Finally, in the New Testament the real Israel came. The Lord Jesus as the true Israel is the true vine who can fully express God. This true vine is the very embodiment of God and the full manifestation of God. What God is and what God has have been embodied in this true vine and fully manifested through this true vine.

D. The Branches, the Believers in the Son

No plant other than the vine tree can illustrate adequately the living relationship between us and the

Lord. We are the branches of the vine. What kind of relationship does this suggest to you? The branches are good for nothing except to express the vine. All that the vine is and has is expressed through the branches. Individually, the branches are the regenerated ones. Corporately, they are the church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The branches, the believers in the Son, are for the expression of the Son with the Father through the fruit-bearing.

E. The Fruit-Bearing

1. The Overflow of the Riches of the Inner Life

What is fruit-bearing? It is the overflow of the riches of the inner life. Do not try to bring people to Christ by your own effort. Do not use schemes to win souls. Bearing fruit is a matter of the overflow of your inner life. We need continuously to enjoy Christ as everything to us. Then we shall have an abundance of inner life. Out of this abundance of inner life there will be a flow that will reach others, penetrating into their lives. This flow will bear much fruit. It is not just preaching or soul-winning; it must be fruit-bearing by the overflow of the riches of the inner life.

2. To Express the Father in the Son

This kind of fruit-bearing is the manifestation of the inner life. The inner life of the vine is the riches of all that the Father is and has. This is to be manifested by the fruit-bearing of the vine. Hence, the vine's fruit-bearing is to express the Father in the Son.

3. To Satisfy Man's Thirst

Fruit-bearing also satisfies man's thirst. The vine tree bears fruit--grapes. Out of these grapes either wine or grape juice is made to quench people's thirst. Today we must be so filled with the riches of Christ's life that we

may be able to bear clusters of grapes that will produce either juice or wine to quench man's thirst. We all need to pray, "Lord, may Your life flow out of me to quench others' thirst."

4. By Abiding in the Vine and Letting the Vine Abide in the Branches

The fruit-bearing comes about as the branches abide in the vine and let the vine abide in the branches. In John 15 abiding is a crucial matter. Everything in this chapter depends upon the abiding. The real abiding depends upon a clear vision, a clear seeing, that you are a branch. Once you see that you are a branch, it will be difficult for you to stay away from the vine. You will want to remain in the vine. This remaining is the abiding. Do not try to abide, for the more you try, the more you will fall away. We need to pray, "Lord, show me clearly that I am one of the branches." I believe that one day the Lord will show you. You will see that you are one of the branches and you will say, "Praise the Lord, I am one of the branches." Then you will abide in Him.

As long as you abide in Him, He will abide in you. His abiding in us depends upon our abiding in Him. Our abiding is the condition of His abiding, but His abiding in us is not a condition of our abiding in Him. Nothing is conditional with Him, but with us, because we are so fluctuating, there is the need of a condition. If we do not abide in Him, there is no way for Him to abide in us. Although He does not change, we have many changes. We may abide in Him today and run away from Him tomorrow. Therefore, His abiding in us depends upon our abiding in Him. Our abiding in Him is the condition of His abiding in us. So the Lord says, "Abide in Me and I in you." If we abide in Him, He will certainly abide in us. If we do not abide in Him, we fail to meet the condition of His abiding in us. His abiding depends upon our abiding. This mutual abiding will bring forth fruit.

5. In a Corporate Way

All the branches that bear the fruit are related one to another. By their abiding in the vine, none of them bears fruit in the way of being separate from the tree. All of them bear fruit by the same life that circulates in them. Apparently, each one of them bears fruit separately; actually, all of them bear fruit corporately in one tree and with one life. Today our fruit-bearing must be like this, in one Body and with one life.

F. The Pruning

Now we come to the pruning. In verse 2 the Lord said of the Father that "every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." Pruning is needed. The meaning of pruning is to purge away the waste. Waste mostly comes from something that is too old. When the branches become old, they cease to bear fruit. The way to cause these branches to bear fruit is to cut away the old part of the branches and let new sprouts come out. It is not the old branches that bear the fruit but the new sprouts. This is the reason why we have sufferings at times. The sufferings are the pruning which cuts off the old part that we may become new to bear fruit. Pruning takes place by cutting and breaking. This is for the bearing of much fruit.

G. The Casting Out

1. To Cut a Branch Off from the Enjoyment of the Riches of the Life of the Vine

At this point we need to say a word about the casting out. In verse 6 the Lord said, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." In John 15 there is no thought of being saved or of perishing. We need to forget this concept when we come to John 15. The concept in this chapter is whether we shall enjoy the riches of the vine tree to bear fruit or miss the riches of the tree. To be cast out is not to lose our salvation; it is to be cut off from the enjoyment of the riches of the life of the vine tree. When a branch is cut off,

it no longer participates in the riches of the life of the vine. Many Christians have lost the enjoyment of the riches of Christ as life. This means that they have been cut off.

2. To Cut Off a Branch from the Fellowship of the Branches

To be cast out also means to be cut off from the fellowship of the branches. A branch that is cut off no longer has fellowship in life with the other branches. Many Christians are like this. They have no fellowship in life with other Christians.

3. To Cut Off a Branch from the Expression of the Son with the Father

Furthermore, to be cast out means to be cut off, to be separated, from the expression of the Son with the Father. When a branch is cast out, there is no more expression of the vine. Many Christians today cannot have the expression of the Son with the Father because they are branches that have been cut off from the vine.

4. To Cut Off a Branch from the Divine Purpose

Finally, to be cast out is to be cut off from the divine purpose. The divine purpose for God the Father to cultivate the Son as the vine tree is to express the fullness of the Godhead. To be cast out as a branch from the vine tree is to be cut off from this divine purpose. Many Christians today are cut off from participation in the divine purpose. When a branch is cast out, it loses the enjoyment of the riches of Christ, misses the rich fellowship of its co-branches, is separated from the expression of God, and is cut off from the purpose of God. If you do not bear fruit, it means that you have been cut off from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. This, however, does not mean that a person will be lost. Perhaps you are wondering what it means to be cast into

the fire. It means to be dried up. Many Christians do have the sensation of being dried up. The matter of being eternally saved or lost is covered in chapter ten. Chapter fifteen is not concerned with the matter of salvation but with the matter of enjoyment of the riches of Christ, the participation in the wonderful fellowship among the co-branches, the expression of the divine image, and the fulfillment of God's purpose. This is the main concept of John 15.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE ORGANISM OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE DIVINE DISPENSATION

(2)

H. The Abiding

1. To See the Fact that We Are the Branches in the Vine

As we pointed out in the last message, if we are to abide in the vine, we must see the fact that we are the branches in the vine (v. 5). Our abiding in Christ depends upon a clear vision that we are branches in the vine. If we see that we are already in Him, then we shall be able to abide in Him. We will not want to stay away from Him.

2. To Abide, to Remain, in the Son

Once we see the fact that we are branches in the vine, we need to maintain the fellowship between us and the vine. Any insulation will separate us from the rich supply of the vine tree. A little disobedience, a sin, or even a sinful thought can be the insulation that separates us from the riches of the vine. If we do not condemn such things but hold on to them, they will insulate us from the rich supply of the vine tree. First, we must see that we are branches. Then, we need to maintain the fellowship between us and the Lord. Nothing should be between Him and us. There is a hymn in our hymnal that opens with the words, "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between." From experience we know that even a small thing can insulate us from the rich supply of the vine tree. We need to pray to the Lord, "Lord, let there be nothing between You and me separating me from Your rich supply."

3. To Let the Son Abide in Us

We need to let the Son abide in us (vv. 4-5). This is very meaningful. We abide in Him and He abides in us. But many times we do not give Him the ground, the space, to abide in us. The Lord desires to spread His abiding within us. However, we like to narrow down His abiding. We restrict Him. There is constantly a gentle struggle between the abiding Christ and us. While Christ's abiding is gradually spreading within us, there is something within that restricts this abiding Christ. The abiding Christ wants to gain more ground gradually, even inch by inch. But sometimes there is a struggle over His gaining even one inch. Christ wants to gain another inch, but we restrict Him from doing so. As a result, we bargain with Him. If you do not bargain with the Lord, you must be a Christian in the third heaven. Probably even today many of us have bargained with Him. Although we have shouted, "We have been ruined by Him," still within us we may say, "Lord Jesus, I will just give You this much. I can't afford to give You more space. Lord, have mercy on me. Be patient until I am ready to give You another half an inch. Until then, Lord, stay where You are." Although we may not say this audibly, many times we have this thought deep within us. The Lord may say, "I would like to take another five inches." Then you begin to bargain with Him once more. After this, He remains silent, turning His face aside. He refuses to talk to you anymore, and you lose His presence. Although you gained the ground, the five inches that the Lord wanted, you lost His presence. Oh, how we need to keep our fellowship with Him and be willing to allow Him to take more ground and to expand within us! May we allow the Lord to spread Himself within us, taking as much ground as He wants. If we do this, we shall have the real growth of life. We shall see the growth of life within.

Why do so many of the saints scarcely grow in life? Simply because they do not allow the Lord to spread within them. There may be no insulation, but there is too

much limitation. This matter of abiding is very delicate and tender. Please keep in mind that we must take care of two things--not to have any insulation and not to have any limitation. It is easier to eliminate the insulation than it is to remove the limitation. I am afraid that even as you read this message you may not be ready to take away every limitation. Praise the Lord that He is patient and kind. He will never leave you. He is waiting. At the most, He will turn His face aside. That is all that He will do. But He will stay here. May we look to Him for mercy and grace that we may always give Him the ground to expand within us, allowing Him to spread into every corner and avenue of our inner being. This is the way to have the growth in life.

4. Apart from the Son We Can Do Nothing

Apart from the Son we can do nothing (v. 5). A branch of a vine cannot live by itself, for it will wither and die apart from the vine. The relationship between the branches and the vine pictures the relationship between us and the Lord. We are nothing, we have nothing, and we can do nothing apart from Him. What we are, what we have, and what we do must only be in the Lord and by the Lord in us. It is very important for us to abide in the Lord and for the Lord to abide in us. Otherwise, we shall be finished and be nothing. Apart from Him, we are nothing, we have nothing, and we can do nothing. Since we are the branches to the Lord and the Lord is the vine to us, we must abide in Him and let Him abide in us.

5. To Let the Son's Instant Words Abide in Us

As we abide in the Lord, we must allow His words to abide in us (v. 7). The word translated "words" is rhema in Greek, meaning the instant and present spoken word. To let the Lord's instant words abide in us is quite demanding. The Son desires to spread His abiding in us. As He abides in us, He is always speaking. This speaking is the rhema, the instant word. He mainly speaks one word to us--no. However, at times His speaking is a requirement or a demand. How we need to love Him and keep His instant words! When He speaks the instant

rhema, we must listen to it and keep it. If we do not keep this instant word, we shall immediately be cut off from the fellowship. But if we do keep it, we shall absorb all of the riches of His fullness, of His life, and have an overflow of life for fruitbearing.

In verses 4 and 5 the Lord tells us that He abides in us, but in verse 7 He changes the wording a little to say that His words abide in us. Instead of Christ Himself abiding in us, now it is His words abiding in us. Why did the Lord change, "Abide in Me and I in you" to "Abide in Me and My words abide in you"? It is because the Lord's abiding by itself is too mysterious and too objective. Just to say that the Lord abides in us is something that is too far beyond us. For example, when the Lord told the Jewish people that He was the food and the bread of life and that people can eat and feed on Him as the living food and the living bread, the Jews were astonished and surprised, being unable to understand. They asked themselves what it meant to eat and feed on Him. Then the Lord Jesus told them that His flesh was the real meat and His blood was the real drink (6:55). The Lord simply meant that He had to die, for His blood had to be separated from His flesh. He had to die so that He could impart Himself to us through death and resurrection. The Lord said all of this in view of the background of the Jewish Passover. During the Passover the Jews always slew the lamb, sprinkled its blood on the doorpost, and fed upon its flesh. Knowing that the Jews had such a background, the Lord intended that they should understand what He said. Hence, the Lord said that His flesh is eatable and His blood drinkable. Nevertheless, they could not understand and asked one another how this man could give them His flesh to eat. Then the Lord pointed out to them that the flesh profits nothing, that it is the Spirit who gives life (6:63). The Lord even said that the words that He speaks are spirit and life.

By this we can see where the Lord is and what He is. You may say that the Lord is in the heavens and that He is the Spirit and life. You are right, but even this is too spiritual, mysterious, and objective. The problem is how to make this real to us, how to make it subjective and

available to us. It needs to be substantial instead of spiritual, available instead of mysterious, and profitable instead of doctrinal. Yes, we know that the Lord is the vine, that we are the branches, that if we abide in Him He will certainly abide in us. But the problem is where and what the Lord is today. In other words, how can He practically be available to us?

In order for the Lord to abide in us, it is necessary to let His words abide in us. The only possible way for the Lord to be practical to us is by His words. By what means did we hear the gospel and receive the Lord as our Savior? It was by His words. When we received His word, we actually received the Lord Himself because the Lord is in His word and He Himself is the Word. According to the same principle, if we want to allow the Lord to abide in us, we must let His words abide in us. Now, since we have in our hands the Scriptures which are full of the Lord's words, we should not say that the Lord is far from us, that He is still mysterious, or that He is still so spiritual instead of being substantial. Praise the Lord that we have something very substantial, available, and practical in our hands. We have the Word. We can read the Word and receive it with our heart and our spirit. We can contact the word of the Lord in our spirit day by day and even moment by moment. As long as we are contacting the Lord's word, we are contacting the Lord Himself.

As we have already pointed out, in verse 7 the term "words" in the Greek language is rhema, not logos. Logos is the written word, but rhema is the present word, the word that is spoken to you by the Lord for a particular purpose at this very moment. According to our experience, if we keep ourselves in the fellowship of the Lord, we have

rhema within from the Lord all of the time. Logos is the outward word as a message spoken or written; rhema is the present, inward word. We have logos in our hands, but we have rhema in our spirit. Logos is the written word as the expression of the living Christ; rhema is the word spoken within us by the Spirit of Christ just at the time we need it. For example, perhaps while you are fellowshipping with another brother something within tells you to stop talking. This is rhema. Perhaps you are thinking about a certain matter that you want to do today, but again something within you tells you not to do it. This also is rhema.

We should not vaguely say that we abide in Christ and that Christ abides in us. We must be more precise and realize that we must deal with two kinds of words--the outward word and the inward word, the word in the Scriptures that is outside of us and the word in the spirit that is within us. If we say that we are going to abide in Christ and let Christ abide in us, certainly we must deal with both kinds of words. If we fail to understand these two different words, it will be impossible to keep ourselves in contact with the Lord, and it will be absolutely impossible for us to abide in the Lord and for the Lord to abide in us. Therefore, we must deal with the written word without and the living word within, because by the written word without we have the explanation, definition, and expression of the mysterious Lord and by the living word within we have the experience of the abiding Christ and the presence of the practical Lord.

The Lord is very mysterious. For this reason, we can never understand Him by our imagination. Rather, we must read the sixty-six books of the Bible. We must read these sixty-six books word by word because all of the words express, explain, and define our mysterious Lord. If we want to know Him, we must know the Word and how to deal with the Word. But, on the other hand, the Spirit is within us, giving us some living words at the right time to meet our needs. At the very hour of our need, the Spirit within us gives us a timely word for our particular case. The inner rhema always corresponds with the outer logos.

The Spirit speaking the rhema within never speaks differently from the written logos. The outer logos and the inner rhema always correspond with each other, and many times the inner rhema interprets the outer logos. Perhaps you read the written logos this morning but failed to understand it or to apply it to you in a living way. While you are working, the Spirit anoints you from within with the word, giving you the right meaning and even the right emphasis. You sense the living rhema with its living emphasis by the Spirit. As a result, you not only understand it in your mind but also apprehend it in your spirit. Now the outward, written word becomes the living word within your spirit. You can experience it and apply it in your life. In this way the logos becomes the rhema; the outer word becomes the inner word. We need to attend to the living rhema within, allowing it to have its full way within us. In order to allow the living word to have its free way within us, we must go along with it. In other words, we must be very submissive and obedient to the living rhema that is speaking now within us. Concentrating on the inner rhema will make the living Lord so real to us in our spirit. It will make Christ so available and practical. We shall sense the moving and the working of the Lord who energizes us inwardly.

6. To Pray for Much Fruit-bearing that the Father May be Glorified

While the Lord is moving, acting, motivating, and energizing within us, what shall we do? Should we keep our mouths closed? No, we shall certainly feel impelled to utter something. We shall surely express what we feel within. This is spiritual prayer, prayer in the spirit. The spiritual prayer expresses the moving of Christ within us. Christ in, through, and as the Word is moving, acting, motivating, and energizing within us. When this happens, we cannot be silent. I believe that we all have experienced this. Sometimes I could not sleep at night but had to rise up because something was moving and energizing me. I had to rise up and say, "Lord, I am here. I praise You." Is this kind of prayer simply an expression of our opinion, idea, thought, feeling, or imagination? No, we are

expressing that which the Lord moves and energizes within. We become the mouthpiece for the Lord to utter what is within us at that very moment.

In verse 7 the Lord said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall come to pass to you." When we abide in the Lord and let His words abide in us, we are actually one with Him, and He is working within us. Then, whatever we ask, it is not only we who are praying but also He who is praying in our praying. This kind of prayer is related to fruit-bearing (v. 8) and surely it will be fulfilled. We cannot have this kind of prayer on our own. This prayer in the spirit comes from the indwelling Christ, through the Spirit, and by His word. If we abide in the Lord, keep ourselves always in contact and in fellowship with the Lord, and let the Lord with His word live, move, motivate, and energize within us, we would be unable to keep our mouths shut. We will have to utter something. What we speak will be a real prayer in the spirit. This is the expression of the indwelling Christ speaking as the Spirit with His words.

When the Lord's words abide in us, His communication and expression will abide in us. Therefore, we may "ask whatsoever you will." We shall express by praying what we have received of the Lord, and it shall be done to us. This prayer is not the human, natural prayer; it is the divine prayer, the expression of the divine communication. While the Lord is abiding in us, expressing His thoughts, desires, intentions, and will, we then take His word and put it into expression by means of prayer. This kind of prayer is very divine, for it is the utterance and expression of the will, desire, and mind of the One who is abiding in us and communicating Himself to us.

Verse 8 says, "In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and you shall become My disciples." The prayer in verse 7 is related to the fruit-bearing and the glorification of the Father mentioned in verse 8. We need to pray for much fruit-bearing that the Father may be glorified, that is, expressed, in the Son. In fruit-bearing

the Father's divine life is expressed and so He is glorified. Only when the Father is expressed is He glorified. Electricity illustrates what it means to be glorified. Electricity that is not expressed is electricity that is not glorified. Only when electricity is expressed is it glorified. The electricity in a lamp is glorified because it is expressed. Likewise, when the Father's divine life is expressed in the fruit-bearing of the organism of the vine and the branches, He is glorified.

Real prayers must be followed by our life and walk. Our life, walk, and activity always follow our prayers. We must act, live, and work according to the way we pray. This is very profound. While the Lord abides in us He expresses Himself, His thought, His desire, and His intention to us. When we utter this in prayer and act, live, and walk according to what we pray, God is expressed and glorified.

For the sake of the abiding, we must take care of the Lord's word in two aspects--the inward word and the outward word. We must contact the Lord through the word outwardly so that it will become the inward word to us. The outward word which we contact in written form will become the living, inward word in our spirit. Then the Lord will express Himself through this living word, and we shall know the Lord's will, intention, desire, and thought. We shall also be one with the Lord so that we shall utter the Lord's thought in our prayer. The prayers that we pray will also be the life that we live, walk, and work. These prayers will be the expression, the full manifestation, of God the Father. God the Father will be expressed and glorified through us.

Before we go on, I need to say a word about reading the Bible. We often advise new believers to read the Word as much as possible. However, it is not good for some people to read the Scriptures too much, for it is like stuffing themselves with too much food. Many Christians have stored up much of the Word but have digested very little of it. Now is the time for them to digest the Word each day a little at a time. We need to pray with and over the Word sentence by sentence, clause by clause, phrase by phrase,

and even word by word, digesting what we read. If we pray over the words that we read, the spiritual nourishment will come forth, and we shall be nourished and strengthened in the spirit.

7. To Keep the Son's Commandment by Obeying His Instant Words that We May Abide in His Love

We need to keep the Son's commandments by obeying His instant words that we may abide in His love (vv. 10-11). Firstly, we abide in Him and He abides in us. Then His word will abide in us, and we shall abide in His love. We abide in Him and then we abide in His love. On the one hand, we must abide in the Lord Himself; on the other hand, we must abide in His love. Just as we must let the word of the Lord abide in us in order for the Lord to continue His abiding in us, so, in the same principle, we must abide in the love of the Lord in order to abide in the Lord continually. If you do not sense the freshness, sweetness, and tenderness of the Lord's love, I fear that even if you tried to continue abiding in Him you would fall short. The matter of continual abiding in the Lord is a matter of love. We must feel and sense that His love is so fresh, sweet, and new. We must abide in His love so that we can maintain our abiding in Him. For example, if two brothers do not have the feeling of love toward each other, how could they maintain an intimate fellowship? Likewise, we must abide in the Lord's love and sense His love so that we can abide in fellowship with Him. As you read this perhaps you are saying, "Brother, I do not sense His love." If this is your situation, you should pray like this: "Lord, be merciful to me. Why is it that I do not sense Your love in these days? O Lord, why?" If you pray in this way, I believe that you will experience the fresh love of the Lord. His love will be so refreshing to you. Then you will abide in the love of the Lord. This will keep you abiding in the Lord Himself.

If we are to abide in the Lord's love, we must keep His commandments. When we abide in the Lord, He will speak His instant words within us. These words are His commandments to us. If we keep them, it means that we

love Him. Thus we shall abide in His love. Firstly, the Lord abides in us. Then His word abides in us. Firstly, He deals with us by Himself. Then, He deals with us by His word and by His love. This is very meaningful. Firstly, He abides in us and then His word abides in us. Firstly, we abide in Him and then we abide in His love. Take the example of two friends. In such a friendship, the one friend must care for the word of the other. It is no longer only a matter of the friend himself but also of his word. If the one friend does not care for the other's word, he will lose his friendship. But, if he cares for his friend's word, he will gradually find himself in his friend's love. This will deepen the friendship, making it more intimate and intensified. But if the one does not care for the other's word, he will not be in the other's love in such an intimate way, and eventually the friendship will be damaged.

At the beginning, we abide in the Lord and He abides in us. In His abiding, He speaks His instant word to us. We need to keep this word. When we keep His word, it means that we allow His word to abide in us. Then not only does He Himself abide in us, but His word abides in us. When we keep His word and let it abide in us, we immediately come into His love and abide in His love. We not only abide in Him but also in His love. This abiding becomes more intimate, deep, and intensified. If we do not abide in Him in such an intimate way, we may gradually slip out of the abiding altogether. The Lord is always speaking. If you will let Him abide in you, He will continually speak to you. When He speaks, you must say, "Amen Lord, I love You." When you say amen and keep His words, you get into His love, having the sweet sensation that He is so dear, precious, and lovely to you. At this point, you not only abide in Him but also in His love.

If we abide in the Lord by abiding in His love, and if the Lord abides in us by His word abiding in us, then we shall have some intimate fellowship with the Lord. Out of

this fellowship we shall have some prayer in the spirit which will be the expression of the living Lord dwelling within us. By praying in this manner we shall know that the Father will be expressed and glorified. We always talk about glorifying God, but how do we glorify God? It is by abiding in the love of the Lord and by letting the word of the Lord abide in us. Then God the Father will be expressed through us and will be glorified in the Son. Out of this intimate, intense abiding, clusters of fruit will be produced because we have been filled with all of the Lord's riches of life. The overflow of the abundance of this life will be so prevailing that it will bear fruit, and God the Father in the Son will be expressed and glorified.

8. With Full Joy

If we abide in the Lord and keep abiding in Him by abiding in His love so that we may bear much fruit to express the riches of His life for the glorification of the Father, we shall be filled with joy. Our joy always comes from our abiding in the Lord, from our abiding in His love, from our fruitbearing in His rich life, and from the expression and glorification of the Father. It is in this kind of life that we are full of joy.

We have seen the abiding in John 15. Romans 8 is a continuation of John 15. Without Romans 8, it would be difficult for us to maintain the abiding in the Lord continually. The way to maintain the abiding in the Lord constantly is to set our mind upon the spirit (Rom. 8:6). To set the mind on the spirit in Romans 8 is a development of the abiding in the Lord in John 15. If we only have John 15 without Romans 8, we still do not have the way to abide in the Lord continually. In Romans 8 we have Christ as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) and as the indwelling Spirit in our spirit with life. The way to keep abiding in the Lord is to have our mind, the main part of our soul, set on our spirit that we may experience the Lord who is the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

THE ORGANISM OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE DIVINE DISPENSATION

(3)

II. THE BRANCHES LOVING ONE ANOTHER TO EXPRESS THE DIVINE LIFE IN FRUIT-BEARING

We have covered the first part of John 15, verses 1 through 11, which shows the relationship between us and the Lord. The second part, verses 12 through 17, shows our relationship with one another. In this part of the chapter we see that the branches should love one another to express the divine life in fruit-bearing. These verses reveal that fruit-bearing has very much to do with our loving one another. We must keep a right relationship with one another in life, that is, in love by life. We must keep our relationship in love and love one another by the life that is in us. This life is the Lord Himself. Loving one another is the church life, the Body life. The Body life is a life of love and a life in love. We should not love one another with a human love but in the divine life and with the divine love.

We are not branches of many separate trees; we are all branches of the same tree. So we need to maintain a good fellowship with all the other branches as well as with the tree. This is why in this chapter the Lord also tells us to love one another (vv. 12, 17). If we do not love one another, it will be very difficult to bear fruit. If we do not love one another, it means that our fellowship with the vine tree has been cut off. Therefore, there is no way for us to bear fruit. In order to bear fruit we must love one another.

The life within all of us is one life. The life in you is

exactly the same as the life in me. This resembles the circulation of the blood in our physical body. The blood in our body circulates through every member of our body. In like manner, the inner life of all the branches is one. This life should continually circulate through all the branches. Then all the branches will be so living and filled with the riches of life in order to bear fruit.

A. The Branches Being One

Although the branches are many, they are one. They are one with the vine and with one another. All the branches together with the vine are one entity, one organism.

B. The Branches Being in an Intimate Relationship with the Vine

The branches are in an intimate relationship with the vine (vv. 13-15). The branches are not the Lord's slaves; they are His friends. Because they are the Lord's friends, the branches can know the Father's desire that He be expressed in a corporate Body.

C. The Branches Being Chosen and Appointed to Bear Remaining Fruit

The branches have been chosen and appointed to bear remaining fruit. In verse 16 the Lord said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I appointed you that you should go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you." The King James Version uses the word ordained instead of appointed. I like the term ordained. We all have been ordained. To be ordained means to be appointed. Ordained is an old-fashioned word for the modern word appointed. All of the sisters, including the younger sisters, must realize that they have been ordained. Do you know that we all have been ordained? We have been ordained to bear fruit. Do not say that you are too young for this. Regardless of how young you may be, you have been chosen and ordained to bear remaining fruit.

In this chapter there are four ways of referring to the fruit: bearing fruit (v. 2), much fruit (v. 8), more fruit (v. 2), and remaining fruit (v. 16). How long the fruit remains depends on how much life we impart into it. It all depends upon the amount of life we impart into the new converts. This determines how long they will remain. Often in bringing people to the Lord we impart into them only a small amount of life. Therefore, they scarcely remain. It is difficult for them to remain for a longer time.

1. Through Praying in the Son's Name

The branches have been chosen to bear remaining fruit through praying in the Son's name. When we pray for fruit-bearing, we must pray in the Son's name. To ask in the Lord's name requires us to abide in the Lord and to let Him and His words abide in us that we may actually be one with Him. Then our asking will be His asking. This kind of asking is related to the fruit-bearing and surely will be answered by the Father. As we pray in this way, we must claim that we are one with the Son. We should not beg but rather claim that we are one with Him. Whatever the Son is and has is ours, and we are in His name. Pray in this way.

2. By Being One with the Son, Living by Him, and Letting Him Live in Them

We should not only pray in the Son's name but also be one with the Son, live by Him, and let Him live in us. This matter is very crucial. Our prayer depends upon our living. We must be one with the Lord in our living. Then we can be one with Him in our prayer and pray in His name. It is by this kind of living and prayer that we can bear fruit that can remain.

D. The Branches Loving One Another

The branches need to love one another in the life of the Son, in the love of the Son, and in the commission of the

Son which is to bear the fruit for the glorification of the Father. We need to love one another in the Lord's life, the divine life, in the Lord's love, and in His commission of fruit-bearing. Life is the source, love is the condition, and fruit-bearing is the goal. If we all live by the source of the Lord's life, in the condition of the Lord's love, and for the goal of fruit-bearing, we shall surely love one another. Different sources of life, different conditions, or different goals will separate us from loving one another.

Christians are fond of talking about loving one another. If we love one another in our human life, that will bring in death. If we love one another in an emotional way or for our own purpose, that also will result in death. We must love one another in the life of Christ, in the love of Christ, and in the commission of Christ. We must not love one another in our natural life, with our emotions, or for our own purpose. We must love one another in the divine life, with the divine love, and for the purpose of bearing much fruit that the Father may be glorified (v. 8).

III. THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD BEING HATED AND PERSECUTED BY THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

John 15 has three sections. The first section, verses 1 through 11, is about the relationship between the vine tree and the branches; the second, verses 12 through 17, is about the relationship between the branches; and the third, verses 18 through 27, is about the separation between the branches and the world. As branches, we have been separated from the world. We have nothing to do with the world, for we have been fully attached to the vine tree.

A. The World Here Being Mainly the Religious World

In this portion of the Gospel of John, the term world mainly refers to the religious world (15:18; 16:2). In other words, the world in chapter fifteen is just religion, especially the Jewish religion. To the disciples of the Lord

Jesus at that time, the world was the Jewish religion. They had been separated from that Jewish religion unto Christ, the vine tree.

B. Religion, as a Part of Satan's Worldly System, Hating the Branches of the Divine Organism for the Expression of the Triune God

Religion, as a part of Satan's world system, hates the branches of the divine organism for the expression of the Triune God (15:18). Many religious people would not consider religion as a part of Satan's worldly system. But, in the eyes of God, religion is a department of Satan's world. When we come to chapter sixteen, we shall see that the Lord told His disciples that the religious people would consider killing the Lord's followers as a kind of service offered to God. Although the religious people served God in name, they served Satan in actuality. Hence, the so-called religion is actually a department of the satanic system, the world.

We must be separated from the world because it is against the church. The world, as a satanic system, is against the Body of Christ. The world hates the Body, it hates the branches, and it hates the church. The church is the Body, an organism of the Triune God, but the world is a system of Satan. Satan's system always opposes and persecutes the organism of the Triune God. We must realize deeply that the church, the branches, the Body, is the organism of the Triune God. The Triune God is living within and expressing Himself through this organism. Your body is an organism in which your very being lives and through which your being is expressed. Likewise, the Triune God also needs an organism such as the church, the Body of Christ. The Triune God wants to live in and manifest Himself through such an organism. But Satan, the enemy of God, has organized a system known as the cosmos. This cosmic world is an organization systematized by the enemy of God. The purpose behind the enemy's cosmic system is to oppose the church as the organism of the Triune God, the Body of Christ. Therefore, we must

have nothing to do with this world. We are out of the world, having been separated unto the organism of the Triune God.

C. The Branches Being Chosen, Not of the World, Having Nothing to Do with the Satanic System of Religion

As branches who have been chosen out of the world, we should have nothing to do with the satanic system of religion (v. 19). However, among almost all Christians there is a mixture. By the Lord's mercy, we want to stand apart from the system of any religion and stand with the church in a pure way, not having any mixture at all. The system of any religion is originated by Satan to frustrate and damage the proper church life. For the church to be the organism for the expression of the Triune God, we have to be separated from any kind of religion.

D. The Religious World, Having Persecuted the Vine, Persecuting the Branches

The Lord told His disciples that if they were willing to follow Him in the way of life, they must be ready to suffer persecution (15:20-25). If we are willing to experience the Triune God as our life, to be mingled with the Triune God, and to be the mutual abode with the Triune God, we must be prepared to suffer persecution from religion. The persecution of the disciples was not to come from the so-called secular world, but from the religions that worshipped God and seemingly loved Him. The Lord was telling His disciples that because of Him the religious people would persecute and even kill them. We have seen that the disciples, as branches of the vine, are the Body of Christ, the organism for the life and expression of the Triune God, and that the world, as a cosmic system, is the organized system of Satan. In the eyes of the Lord, the religious system, as part of Satan's system, is the world that will hate the disciples.

The religious world persecutes the people who follow the Lord in life because they, as the branches of the true vine, are one with the Lord, acting and doing things in the Lord's name. Because the religious people do not know the Father who is the source of the Lord, they hate the Lord's true followers. Because the religious people hate the Father in the Son (15:23), they also hate the Son's followers. This hating and persecuting is their sin in the eyes of God (15:22, 24). By all of this we can see how evil religion is, even the religion formed according to God's Holy Word. Here we see the subtlety of the enemy in religion.

E. The Comforter Testifying

1. Being the Spirit of Reality

Verse 26 says, "But when the Comforter comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality Who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me." Religion persecutes, but the Spirit of reality testifies. The Holy Spirit is the reality of all things, and we are to be witnesses of the Spirit of reality.

2. Sent by the Son

In this verse the Lord said that He would send to the disciples the Spirit of reality. But in 14:26 the Lord said that the Father would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, in the Son's name. John has two different ways of speaking about the same thing. First, in 14:26, he says that the Father will send the Spirit; now in 15:26, he says that the Lord Himself will send the Spirit. Then who sent the Spirit--the Father or the Son? We must say that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are one. The Father's sending is the Son's sending, and the Son's sending is the Father's sending. The two are one. Regardless of who it is who sends the Spirit, the Spirit is always sent with the Father and in the name of the Son. Once again we see the Triune

God. When the Spirit comes, He comes with the Father in the Son's name. So all three of the Godhead are here.

3. Not Only from the Father but with the Father

In verse 26 the Lord said that He would send the Comforter from the Father. As we pointed out in message thirty-two, the Greek preposition translated "from" in this verse is para. The sense of this preposition in Greek here is "from with." The Spirit of reality is sent by the Son, not only from the Father but also with the Father. The Comforter comes from the Father and with the Father. The Father is the source. When the Spirit comes from the source, it does not mean that He leaves the source but that the source comes with Him. This Spirit, sent by the Son coming with the Father, will testify concerning the Son. Therefore, His testimony concerning the Son is a matter of the Triune God.

4. Testifying

This Spirit of reality testifies concerning the Son as the vine. It testifies in front of the persecuting religion. Furthermore, the Spirit testifies to the branches and through the branches to the world. Religion may persecute, but the Spirit of reality testifies that the Son is the vine. Through the believers as the branches this testimony will go forth throughout the whole world. It is going on today.

F. Religion's Persecution Foretold

In 16:1-4, religion's persecution of the vine and the branches is foretold. Firstly, religion will excommunicate the branches of the organism (the vine) from the organization (the synagogue, v. 2). In verse 2 the Lord said, "An hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think that he is offering service to God." Religion thinks that it is offering service to God by killing the branches of God's organism. As we have seen, in this Gospel religion is revealed as the enemy of life. In the Gospels, Judaism opposed and persecuted the Lord Jesus. In the Acts,

Judaism continued its opposition and persecution toward the apostles (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18, 40; 6:11-14; 7:57-59; 26:9-12; Gal. 1:13). In subsequent history, Catholicism persecuted the Lord's followers. Any kind of organized religion persecutes those who seek and follow the Lord in life. All the religions consider this kind of persecution as a service offered to God. First religion persecutes; then it kills. Religion knows neither the Father, the source, nor the Son, the expression (v. 3). As the Lord said, "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me."

The Lord told His disciples beforehand so that they would not be offended and stumble and so that they would not be perplexed when the persecution came. In a time of persecution the disciples might easily say to themselves, "These religious people worship God. Yet, because we take this very God as our life and abode and make ourselves God's abode, these religious people threaten to kill us. They not only drive us out of the synagogues but will even kill us. Maybe it is we who are wrong." The Lord predicted the coming persecution so that the disciples might not think that they were wrong. If this persecution happens to you, do not think that you are wrong. On the contrary, that persecution proves that you are right. If the religious people do not persecute you, then you may be wrong. If the Roman Catholic Church and the denominations do not persecute you, then you must realize that you are wrong. But if you take the Lord as your life, experience Him as your abode, and make yourself His abode, then you must be prepared to meet the persecution of the religious world.

As a satanic, organized system, the world has persecuted the Body of Christ in three main phases: the phase of the Jewish religion, the phase of the Roman Empire, and the phase of Greek philosophy. These are the three phases in which the world has persecuted the church. In the Gospel of John the Lord spoke several times about the world, by which, in particular, He meant the religious world. If we are truly faithful to follow the Lord in the way of life and in the spirit, taking the Triune God as our abode and making ourselves an abode for the

Triune God, the religious world will persecute us. Tell me, who put John Huss to death by burning him at the stake? It was Roman Catholicism. Who imprisoned John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*? It was the Church of England. Who imprisoned Madame Guyon? It was the Roman Catholic Church. This word of the Lord has been fulfilled throughout the generations. Whenever a person or a group of people has followed the Lord in the way revealed in John 14 and 15, they have been persecuted by the religious world. And the religious world will continue to persecute the people who follow Christ in the way of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT UNTO THE MINGLING OF DIVINITY WITH HUMANITY

(1)

If we are clear about John 14 and 15, it will be easy to understand John 16. Basically, nothing is new in this chapter. In the previous two chapters, the Lord has already covered the main principles. By reading and comparing these three chapters, it seems as if the Lord is repeating Himself. Although the utterances are changed, the basic principles are still the same. Thus, as we come to chapter sixteen, we must remember the main principles that the Lord dealt with in the previous chapters. Before we come to chapter sixteen, let us review these principles.

The first main principle is that the Lord had to go, meaning that He had to die and be resurrected. His going did not mean that He was leaving the disciples. His going was His coming. He was coming in another step. By going to die and to be resurrected, He was taking another step in His coming. The first step of the Lord's coming was by incarnation that He might be able to be with us and among us. But at that time He was still unable to come into us. His first step of incarnation was the means by which the eternal God became a man in order to contact us. But a second step was necessary before He was able to come into us and be mingled with us. That step was His death and resurrection. It was by His death and resurrection that He was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. His flesh was the form by which He came to be with and among us, but the Spirit is His other form by which He comes into us and is mingled with us. This is the

first main point that the Lord dealt with in chapters fourteen and fifteen.

The second main principle is that the Lord went through death that He might return in resurrection as the Spirit of reality. All the Lord is can be realized by the Spirit. If we only have the teachings, doctrines, and letters about the Lord without the Spirit, we do not have the reality. Doctrinal teaching about the Lord is not reality. The reality of the Lord is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the reality of the Lord. For example, we know that the Lord is life. But if we do not have the Holy Spirit, we can never have life. Since the Holy Spirit is the reality of Christ. we can have the reality of Christ by having the Holy Spirit. Then we have life. Furthermore, we know that the Lord is light. To have the Holy Spirit is to have light. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, we do not have light. The Lord is also the way. If we have the Holy Spirit, we have the way and we know how to do everything. However, if we do not have the Holy Spirit but only have doctrinal teachings, we do not have the real way. The reality of Christ is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of reality. The coming of the Spirit of reality means the coming of the reality of Christ.

The third basic principle in John 14 and 15 is the mutual abode. By the coming of Christ as the Spirit of reality, He will abide in us and we shall abide in Him. He and we, we and He, will thus become a mutual abode. We shall be the abode to the Father in the Son as the Spirit, and the Triune God will be the abode to us. We can abide in the Triune God, and the Triune God can abide in us. In this way the Triune God mingles Himself with us. Humanity and divinity, divinity and humanity, are mingled together as one. This is the central thought of these two chapters. In fact, this is the main thought, the basic principle, of the divine intention. It is the mystery of the whole universe.

It is difficult for many brothers and sisters to see this matter of the mingling of divinity with humanity. Time after time, I have prayed and looked to the Lord that He

would reveal this to the saints. The concept of the mingling of God with man is contrary to the human concept. Some revelation and heavenly vision are needed before the eyes of our spirit, heart, and mind can be opened to see this mystery. This mystery of God's mingling Himself with humanity is more real than you are. It is the central and basic thought of John 14 through 16. In these three chapters the Lord mainly deals with this one matter: that the Father in the Son as the Spirit has come into us to mingle Himself with us and to make us an abode to Him and Him an abode to us.

When the Lord first showed this to me, I was very excited, because I realized that I had received the Triune God and that He was mingled with me. This is God's economy. It is not a religion nor a doctrinal teaching; it is the Triune God mingled with humanity. These three chapters of the Gospel of John simply reveal what God's economy really is to us: it is the Father in the Son as the Spirit coming into us and mingling Himself with us. This basic principle needs to be repeated again and again until we are deeply impressed.

I. THE SON'S GOING FOR THE SPIRIT'S COMING

In verse 7 the Lord said, "I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." The Son's going was for the Spirit's coming. He said that if He did not go, the Spirit would not come. The Lord's going mentioned in this verse was ultimately fulfilled with the ascension in 20:17.

A. The Son Going in the Flesh

When the Son spoke these words, He was still in the flesh. Then He went into death in the flesh that He might be transfigured into the Spirit in resurrection.

B. The Son Coming as the Spirit to be Another Comforter

The Son went into death in the flesh. hut He came back in resurrection as the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). He came as the

Spirit to be another Comforter. He went through death as the Redeemer to accomplish redemption for us, but He came in resurrection as the Spirit to impart Himself as life to us.

C. The Son's Sending of the Comforter Being the Son's Coming as the Comforter

The Son's sending of the Comforter was His coming as the Comforter. His sending was His coming. In other words, He sent Himself in another form to come as the other Comforter. This is excellent, marvelous, and yet mysterious. Some dear Christian friends are against this, asking how I could say that the Lord sent Himself. As my answer, I would ask you to read Zechariah 2:8-11. If you read this portion of the Word, trying your best to understand who is the Sender and who is the Sent One, you will eventually bow down and say, "Lord, You are both. You are the Sender as well as the Sent One." Altogether it is just one Lord of hosts. The one Lord of hosts is both the Sender and the Sent One.

II. THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The crucial point of John 16 is the work of the Spirit. According to this chapter, the work of the Spirit is in three categories: to convict the world; to glorify the Son by revealing Him with the fullness of the Father to the believers; and to disclose what is to come. John's writings are also of three categories: the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation. His Gospel is mainly to preach the gospel and convict the world, his Epistles are mainly to reveal the Son with the fullness of the Father, and his Revelation is the book unveiling all the things to come in the future.

A. To Convict the World

In verse 8 the Lord said of the Spirit that "He will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment." Each of these three items--sin, righteousness, and judgment--is related to a person. Besides God, the divine Person, there are in the universe three main persons: Adam, Christ, and Satan. Sin is related to Adam, righteousness to Christ, and judgment to Satan.

Sin is related to Adam, for it was through Adam that sin entered the human race (Rom. 5:12). We were born of sin in Adam. If you were born in Adam, you were born a sinner.

Righteousness is related to Christ because righteousness comes from Christ and even is the resurrected Christ Himself (v. 10; 1 Cor. 1:30). Adam is sin, and Christ is righteousness. In Adam we are sinful and condemned; in Christ we are righteous and justified. In Adam we have inherited sin; in Christ we have righteousness imparted to us. It is unnecessary to consider how we should act or behave, because as long as we are in Adam we are sinful and as long as we are in Christ we are righteous. It is not a matter of conduct or behavior; it is a matter of where we are. In Christ we are righteous and in Adam we are sinful. In Adam we are condemned, but in Christ we are justified. The only way to be freed from sin is to believe in Christ, the Son of God (v. 9). If we believe in Him, He is righteousness to us, and we are justified in Him (Rom. 3:24; 4:25).

Judgment is related to Satan. Judgment is for Satan. By believing in Christ we are translated out of Adam into Christ. However, if we do not believe in Christ but remain in Adam, we shall share the judgment upon Satan. Strictly speaking, God's judgment is for Satan. God has no intention to see you or me or any human being suffer judgment. But if you remain in Adam, you will consequently be judged together with Satan, sharing the judgment of Satan. This means that you prefer to love

Satan, staying in company with him and helping him to bear the terrible judgment. Do not sympathize with Satan nor have any pity on him. Do not remain in Adam to help Satan bear the judgment. If we do not repent of the sin in Adam and believe in Christ, the Son of God, we shall remain in sin and share the judgment of Satan for eternity (Matt. 25:41).

These are the main points of the gospel. The Spirit convicts the world with these points. We cannot stay away from the three persons of Adam, Christ, and Satan when we preach the gospel. Every time we preach the gospel we shall be in the circle of these three persons. All mankind was born in Adam, but everyone can be translated out of Adam into Christ. If you remain in Adam, however, you will share Satan's judgment.

1. Concerning Sin

Let us now look in more detail at each of these three main items, beginning with the matter of convicting the world concerning sin.

a. The Source of Sin

The source of sin is the Devil. We see this in 8:44 where the Lord says to the Pharisees, "You are of your father the devil, and it is your will to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks out of his own self; for he is a liar and the father of it." Since the Devil is the father of liars, he is the source of sin. The evil element of the Devil, working as sin by death and darkness in man, enslaves man to sin. His nature is a lie and brings in death and darkness.

b. All Born of the Devil, the Old Serpent

We all were born of the Devil, the old serpent (8:44; Rev. 12:9). The Devil is the father of sinners. Because the

Devil is the father of sinners, the children are "the children of the Devil" (1 John 3:10). The Devil is the old serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), and the sinners are also the "serpents, brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33; 3:7).

c. All Born with the Poison of the Serpent

All sinners were born as children of the Devil with the poison of the serpent (3:14). The Devil is the serpent with the serpentine poison. All the sinners were born of the Devil with his poison. In our fallen nature there is the poison of the old serpent, the Devil.

d. All Born in Sin in Adam

All sinners were born in sin in Adam (9:34). Today people usually say that they were born in a certain country, but they must also realize that they were born in sin. As we were born in sin, so we were born sinners. It is unnecessary for us to commit sin to be a sinner because we were born sinners already. In fact, we have been sinners for six thousand years. Although, as a man, you might be only twenty-two years of age, as a sinner, you are six thousand years old. We all are very old because we were born sinners in Adam. There are no young sinners. Every sinner is very old, as old as Adam.

e. All Born Condemned

Because we all were born in sin in Adam, we were all born condemned (3:18). Before we were born, we were condemned in Adam. When Adam was condemned six thousand years ago, we were condemned in him. Since we were condemned before we were born, we were born in condemnation.

f. All Born to Die in Sin

We all were born to die in sin (8:21). Human beings were not born to live; they were born to die. The longer a man lives, the sooner he will die.

g. All Being Under the Slavery of Sin

In 8:34 we see that we all are under the slavery of sin. This is not the result of our choice; it is a result of Adam's

fall. Adam's fall has brought us under the slavery of sin. As we all were born of Adam, so we all are under the slavery of sin.

h. Believing in the Son Being the Unique Way to be Freed from Sin

Since we are under the slavery of sin, what shall we do? Outside of Christ, there is no way of escape. Christ is our way, our only escape. The unique way to be freed from sin is to believe in the Son (8:24, 36; 3:15-17). This believing brings about a translation from Adam into Christ. This is wonderful. Within half a second, a sinner can be completely translated out of the sinful condition in Adam into Christ.

i. Not to Believe in the Son Being the Unique Sin for Perishing

In verse 9 the Lord said that the Spirit would convict the world concerning sin "because they do not believe in Me." Here we see that the unique sin for perishing is not to believe in the Son (3:16). The sin here is the unwillingness to be translated from Adam into Christ. If people wish to remain in Adam, it means that they want to remain in the old realm and not move into the new realm, which is Christ. There is no need for you to commit sin in order to perish. If you simply do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you are already qualified for perishing. You do not need to rob a bank, deceive your husband, or lie to your parents. You may be a gentleman, but as long as you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you are destined to perish. The unique way to escape from your sinful situation is to believe in the Lord, and the unique sin that qualifies you for perishing is not to believe in Him.

Therefore, the key today is whether we believe or not. If we believe, we shall be translated out of Adam into Christ. But if we do not believe, we shall perish.

2. Concerning Righteousness

a. The Son Having Come and Died to Fulfill God's Righteous Requirements

The Son has come and died to fulfill God's righteous requirements (3:14). He came in the flesh and even died in the form of a serpent on the cross to fulfill God's righteous requirements.

b. The Son Having Resurrected and Gone to the Father as a Proof of the Father's Satisfaction

In verse 10 the Lord said that the Spirit would convince the world "concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father." This means that the Father has been fully satisfied with the Lord's redemptive death on the cross and has accepted Him in His resurrection. The proof that the Father is satisfied with Christ's redemption is that the Father resurrected Him from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand. The resurrection and ascension of Christ are the evidences proving that His redemption has satisfied God and has met all the demands and requirements of God. Therefore, He was released from death to be exalted to the heavens at the right hand of God. Now God's righteousness is manifested in justifying those who believe in Christ (Rom. 3:26). If sinners will believe in Christ, God will justify them, for Christ Himself will become their righteousness. This is the second item concerning which the Spirit will convict the world.

Here I would ask you a question: are we justified by Christ's death or by His resurrection? We are justified by His resurrection. This is proved by Romans 4:25 and 10:9. Romans 4:25 says, "Who was delivered because of our

offenses and was raised because of our justification," and 10:9 says, "That if you confess with Your mouth, Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from among the dead, you shall be saved" (Recovery Version). Do you believe that the Lord died for you, or do you believe that God has raised Him from the dead? Of course, you believe in both, but you may be surprised to know that not one word is written in the Scriptures declaring that we ought to believe that the Lord has died for us. Rather, we must believe that God has raised Him from the dead; for we may believe that the Lord has died and yet not believe that He was raised from the dead. If you believe that the Lord has been raised from the dead, this surely implies your faith in His death. Everybody believes that the Lord died, but revelation is needed to believe that the Lord has been resurrected. In Him, the resurrected One, we are accepted before God. Furthermore, as the resurrected One, He is also in us to live for us the life which can be justified by God and which is always acceptable to God. Therefore, Romans 4:25 says that He was raised because of our justification. Justification includes the fact that God has resurrected Christ, accepted Him, and that He has been satisfied with His redemptive death.

c. The Son as Righteousness Given to the Believers

the Son as righteousness is given to the believers. The satisfying Son, the accepted Son, the Son who has satisfied the Father and has been accepted by Him, has been given to His believers as their righteousness. The Son Himself is now our righteousness. Since He Himself was to become our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), it was prophesied in Jeremiah 23:6 that He would be called "the Lord our righteousness."

d. The Believers Being Justified in the Son

The believers are justified in the Son and with the Son as their righteousness. Since the Son has been given to

the believers as their righteousness, they are justified in Him before God. It is only in the Son as our righteousness that we are justified by God.

e. The Believers Being Freed from the Source of Sin, the Devil

The believers have been freed from the source of sin, the Devil. The Devil is the source of sin, and the Son in the flesh destroyed the Devil on the cross (Heb. 2:14). By believing in the Son we are freed from the source of sin.

3. Concerning Judgment

a. The Judgment Being for the Devil, the Author of Sin, the Origin of Death, the Father of All Sinners, and the Ruler of the World

In verse 11 the Lord said that the Spirit will convince the world "concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." We have seen that judgment is related to the Devil. Satan, the Devil, is the author of sin, the origin of death, the father of all sinners, and the ruler of the world. As such, judgment has been prepared for him. We must recognize that judgment is not for man but for Satan. It is not God's intention to judge man, because His judgment is for Satan. The lake of fire has been prepared as God's judgment upon Satan; it was never intended for man. What verses prove that the lake of fire has been prepared for Satan? The book of Revelation does not clearly tell us this, but the book of Matthew does. In Matthew 25:41 the Lord said that the King will say to some people, "Go from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." Was the everlasting fire prepared for human beings? No, it has been prepared for Satan, the Devil, and his angels, his followers. But if you refuse to come out of Adam into Christ, you will share the judgment that is for Satan, because you prefer to remain as one of his followers.

b. This Ruler Being Judged in the Flesh of Christ on the Cross

Satan, the ruler of the world, has been judged in the flesh of Christ on the cross (12:31-33; 3:14). On the cross, the Lord as the Son of Man was lifted up in the form of a serpent (3:14), that is, "in the likeness of the flesh of sin"

(Rom. 8:3). Satan, the ruler of this world, as "the old serpent" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) has injected himself into man's flesh. Through His death on the cross "in the likeness of the flesh of sin," the Lord has destroyed Satan who is in the flesh (Heb. 2:14). By judging Satan (16:11) in this way, the world which hung upon Satan was also judged. Hence, the Lord's being lifted up judged the world and cast out its ruler, Satan.

c. Any Sinner Not Believing in the Son Will Remain with the Devil and Share His Judgment

We have seen that the lake of fire is not for human beings but for Satan. Any sinner who does not believe in the Son will remain with the Devil and bear his judgment. If you go along with Satan and remain one of his companions, you will be with him in the lake of fire. God loves the world and has no intention that any human being be cast into the lake of fire. That judgment is intended for the Devil. However, if anyone remains a companion of Satan, God has no choice but to allow him to suffer Satan's judgment.

The three items of sin, righteousness, and judgment are a sketch of the gospel. The gospel is that we are sinners in Adam, but that we can be righteous and justified in Christ. If we are unwilling to be translated from Adam into Christ, we must be warned that we shall share the judgment with Satan. In other words, you were born in Adam, but God's intention is to take you out of Adam and translate you into Christ. If you disagree with

God's intention, you must remain in Adam and share the judgment with Satan. Sin is of Adam, righteousness is of Christ, and judgment is for Satan. If you are willing to be translated from Adam into Christ, you will be saved, having nothing to do with the judgment. The work of the Holy Spirit involves these three items, and every time we preach the gospel we must tell people about them. This is the gospel whereby the Holy Spirit convinces sinners to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved.

In 1933, I was asked to stay in Shanghai with Brother Nee and the leading co-workers. One day, in my reading of John 16 I saw that sin, righteousness, and judgment are related to the three persons of Adam, Christ, and Satan. Some time later the church in Shanghai had a gospel preaching meeting, and I was asked to give the message. I learned later that that invitation was a little test from Brother Nee to see where I would stand in the matter of gospel preaching. During that meeting I was burdened to give a message on the three items related to these three persons. As I looked around the meeting hall, I did not see Brother Nee. Quite a while later, I learned that he stood behind the meeting hall door listening to the message. As I preached I was very excited with these points, telling the people, "As human beings you were born in Adam. Today your name is Adam. In Adam you have sinned and you have been condemned. But there is another person--Christ. There is a way for you to get out of Adam and into Christ that you may be justified by God. If you believe in Christ, you will get into Him. You will be translated from the first person into the second. But if you do not believe in Christ, you will still remain in the first person, and eventually your destiny will be the destiny of the third person, Satan. Judgment has been prepared for Satan. Are you going to help him? Are you going to have pity on him? Are you going to help him suffer judgment for eternity?" This was the message I gave shortly after I had seen the light on these matters in John 16. As I delivered that message, I myself was fully nourished. Some time

later, Brother Nee had a talk with me about that message, saying, "Witness, that message was really good." When I asked him what message, he said the message on Adam, Christ, and Satan. Then Brother Nee told me, Witness, hardly anyone has seen that in John 16:8-11 sin is related to Adam, righteousness to Christ, and judgment to Satan." This is the gospel. I hope that this will be preached wherever the churches go.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT UNTO THE MINGLING OF DIVINITY WITH HUMANITY

(2)

B. To Glorify the Son by Revealing Him with the Fullness of the Father

The first category of the Spirit's work is to convict the world in the preaching of the gospel and to translate people out of Adam into Christ. To convict people is the work of the Spirit in winning, quickening, and regenerating sinners. But the work of the Spirit involves much more than this. The second category of the Spirit's work is to glorify the Son by revealing Him with the fullness of the Father to the believers (16:12-15). We may say that the first category of the Spirit's work is to bring people in, and that the second category is to edify the believers and build them up by revealing the Son with the fullness of the Father to them. This is the building work of the Holy Spirit. The first category of the Spirit's work is to convince sinners to repent, believe, and be regenerated. The second category is the Holy Spirit's dwelling in the regenerated believers to reveal Christ, to glorify Christ, and to make Christ real in the believers.

1. The Spirit of Reality the Full Realization of the Son

The Spirit of reality is the full realization of the Son. After the Spirit has brought us to salvation, He will become in us the very reality of the Son Himself.

Whatever the Son is, has, and has accomplished, obtained, and attained will all be fully wrought into us through the Spirit. The Spirit eventually becomes the realization of the Son. He is the reality of all that the Son is and has.

2. Guiding the Believers into All the Reality of the Son

Verse 13 says, "But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality." The Spirit of reality does not guide the believers into the doctrine concerning Christ but into all the reality of Christ. This reality is nothing less than Christ Himself. Thus, the Spirit of reality will bring us into all the reality of Christ.

a. All that the Father Is and Has Being the Son's

In verse 15 the Lord said, "All that the Father has is Mine." All that the Father is and has is the Son's. The Son is the embodiment of the Father. All that the Father is and has is embodied in Him (Col. 2:9). All that the Father is, all the fullness of the Godhead, dwells in Christ. Therefore the Father's fullness is the Son's fullness, and the Father's life and nature are also the Son's life and nature.

b. All that the Son Is and Has Being Received by the Spirit

In verse 14 speaking of the Spirit of reality, the Lord said "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall disclose it to you." All that the Father is and has is the Son's and all that the Son is and has obtained has been received by the Spirit. All of the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, and the Spirit receives this from Christ.

c. The Spirit Disclosing the Son with the Father to the Believers

In verses 14 and 15 the Lord said that the Spirit of reality shall receive of Mine and shall disclose it to you.

"All that the Son is and has is revealed as reality to the believers through the Spirit. This is to glorify the Son with the Father. The Spirit discloses the Son with the Father to the believers. He makes all that Christ is and has real to us.

Let us now consider some examples of how the Spirit makes God in Christ real to us. The Bible says that God is light (1 John 1:5). The Bible also says that Christ is light (John 8:12). This means that the very light, which is God Himself, is the Son. But how can this light be realized? How can it be real to us? It is realized through the Spirit. When the Spirit moves within us, the light is shining. The light is both the Father and the Son. The Father is the source and the essence of light, and the Son is the embodiment and expression of this light. We realize this light in actuality by the Spirit. When the Spirit moves within us, He is the reality of light.

The same is true with the matter of life. God is life. The Son also is life. God the Father is the source and the essence of life, and the Son is the embodiment and expression of this life. How can this life be ours? By the Spirit. Romans 8:2 says that the Spirit is the Spirit of life. When the Spirit moves within us, He is not only the shining and enlightening light but also the very life which enlivens, nourishes, and strengthens us.

The Spirit is the reality of all that the Father and the Son are. Without the Spirit, there is the essence of what the Father and Son are, but there is no realization. Take the example of electricity. Although we may have electricity, it still needs to be applied for a specific purpose. That application of electricity is the realization of the electricity. Likewise, the Spirit is the application of all that the Father and the Son are. Without the Spirit as the realization and application, everything may be real, but it is not available or applicable. If we would apply all that God and Christ are, we need the Spirit. We must praise the Lord that today He is not only the Father and the Son but also the Spirit. He is not only the source and the course but also the application. The Spirit reaches us,

entering into us and applying all that we need of the Father and the Son. This is wonderful.

The church life is absolutely dependent upon the Spirit. Mere doctrines concerning the Father and the Son are inadequate. We need a living application of the Father in the Son by means of the Spirit. The Spirit glorifies the Son by revealing Him with all the fullness of the Father. Let us take the example of humility. No one is born humble. People wrongly say that children are humble, but every little child is proud. We are proud by birth and by nature. Moreover, we are proud in our living. What is humility? Humility is Christ. Christ is the reality of every human virtue and every divine attribute. All the human virtues and all the divine attributes are simply Christ Himself. In a good and positive sense, Christ is everything. He is humility, love, patience, and submission. Outside of Him, nothing, including us, is good. Every virtue and every attribute is Christ. How does the Spirit glorify Christ? He glorifies Christ by revealing Him item by item. For instance, in all that Christ is, there is an item called humility. One day the Spirit reveals Christ to you as your humility. This is not a doctrine of humility; it is the living Person of Christ revealed to you as humility. Spontaneously, a living humility will come out of you. That is the glorification of Christ. The Spirit glorifies Christ, the Son of God, in this way. He does not do it by teaching you about Christ as humility, but by directly revealing Christ as humility to you. This humility then comes out of your very being, and this coming out of humility is the glorification of the Son.

Eventually, every characteristic of Christ will be expressed in the church life. There will be no Jewish, Greek, American, British, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, or any other kind of expression. There will only be the expression of Christ. This is what it means to say that the Spirit glorifies the Son by revealing Him in the fullness of the Father to the believers. We all need to have much experience of this. This will enrich, strengthen, and uplift

the church life. If the church life has all of these actualities, it will surely grow.

d. The Mingling of Divinity with Humanity

The church life is a mingling of divinity with humanity. As the Spirit glorifies the Son with the Father, the Triune God is wrought into and mingled with the believers. This matter of the mingling of divinity with humanity has been very much neglected by Christians today. The one matter that is the most central has been neglected by nearly all Christians. Christians mostly care for doctrine. But in John 16, as in 1:14 and 17, the word truth in Greek means reality, not doctrine. To take the word truth in John to mean doctrine will cause great damage. In the Greek language it simply means reality or truthfulness. When the Spirit of reality comes, He will guide us into the full reality of Christ and mingle us with the Triune God. The more the Son is revealed to us with the fullness of the Father, the more experience we shall have of the Son. Then there will be more mingling of divinity with humanity in the church life. The church life is a daily mingling of divinity with humanity.

C. To Disclose What Is to Come

We have seen that the work of the Spirit in John 16 is in three categories: to convict the world, to glorify the Son by revealing Him with the fullness of the Father to the believers, and to disclose what is to come. John's writings are also of three categories--the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation. The three categories of John's writings correspond to the threefold work of the Spirit. His Gospel is mainly to convict the world, his Epistles are mainly to reveal the Son with the fullness of the Father, and Revelation is the book unveiling the things that shall occur in the future. In verse 13 the Lord said of the Spirit that "He will disclose to you what is to come." The Spirit will disclose the things to come, which are mainly revealed in Revelation (Rev. 1:1, 19). In the book of Revelation, four

main things are revealed: the church's progress (chap. 1-3); the world's destiny (chap. 4-16); Satan's ultimate consummation--the great Babylon (chap. 17-18); and God's ultimate consummation--the New Jerusalem (chap. 19-22). The book of Revelation discloses all of these things to us.

III. THE SON TO BE BORN IN RESURRECTION AS A NEWBORN CHILD

In verses 16 through 24 we see a point which is rather difficult to understand: the Son was to be born in resurrection as a newborn child. The Lord had told His disciples that He would be killed and that this would make the world happy but the disciples sorrowful (v. 20). Then the Lord told them that a woman who is about to bring forth a child has sorrow at the time of birth, but when she brings forth the child, she no longer remembers the affliction because of the joy that a man has been born into the world (v. 21). After the child has been delivered, the woman will be happy because a man is born. Who is this woman? The woman is the whole group of disciples. Who is the child the son? The child is Christ. What is the birth? It is resurrection.

A. The Disciples Being the Delivering Woman in Travail

At the time the Lord spoke this to the disciples, He was one with them like a child conceived within its mother, waiting to be delivered in birth that He might be a newborn child. In this sense, His disciples were the delivering woman in travail. In those three days, the disciples did suffer the travail of the birth of Christ in resurrection to be born as the Son of God. After the Lord's resurrection, this woman had a newborn child and she rejoiced (20:20).

B. The Son to Be Born

The man born into the world is the Son (v. 21). The Son was to be born in resurrection (Acts 13:33) as the Son of God (Heb. 1:5; Rom. 1:4). It was by resurrection that the Lord was born as the Son of God. The Lord was born as

the Son of Man in the manger, but He was born as the Son of God in resurrection. Acts 13:33 proves this: "God has fully fulfilled this promise... in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son; today I have begotten You." On what day was Christ begotten as the Son of God? On the day of resurrection. His resurrection was a birth.

But was not the Lord the Son of God before His resurrection? Yes. Why then did He have to be born as the Son of God in resurrection? What does Romans 1:4 mean when it says that He "was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead"? Psalm 2:7, which is quoted both in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5, prophesied that Christ would be begotten as the Son of God in resurrection. How can we explain this? Christ was the Son of God incarnated to be a man. Strictly speaking, His human part was not the Son of God, but within His humanity there was the Son of God. Before His death and resurrection, He was the Son of God in humanity, but His human part was not the Son of God. Therefore, He had to pass through death and resurrection in order to bring His human part into sonship. His divine part, which was the Son of God, did not need to be born as the Son of God, but His human part needed to be born and designated as the Son of God. Before the Lord's death and resurrection, He was the Son of God; yet whenever people saw Him they could still ask, "Who is this man? Is he the Son of God?" Since He was the Son of God, why did people still have questions about Him? Because of His human part. His humanity did not appear to be the Son of God. But through His death and resurrection, His human part was processed into sonship. Now, after His resurrection, no one would have any questions about His being the Son of God. Everyone would say, "This is the Son of God!" This is the reason He needed to be born in His resurrection and designated as the Son of God. In this sense, He was a child born in resurrection. Before the resurrection of the Lord, the whole universe had never seen such a person. But after His resurrection, He was the wonderful child with the divine life and the

human nature, with both divinity glorified and humanity "sonized." The mother must have been very happy at the birth of such a wonderful child.

C. Christ Coming in Resurrection to the Believers

As we have seen, the mother, the woman, in verse 21 refers to the disciples. After being born as a child in resurrection, Christ came to His believers in the evening of the day of His resurrection, and the disciples rejoiced at His presence (20:20). As a mother is happy when she sees her newborn child, so the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord on the day of resurrection. In verse 16 the Lord had said to them, "A little while and you shall behold Me no longer, and again a little while and you shall see Me." The Lord would die and be buried, and the disciples would not see Him for "a little while." But after "a little while" longer they would see Him because He would be resurrected. The world cannot see the Lord, because the world cannot see the resurrected Lord. Only the disciples can see the resurrected Lord, the wonderful One. John 20:20 is the fulfillment of the Lord's prediction in 16:22. The Lord predicted that the disciples would be happy and joyful, and 20:20 shows that the disciples indeed were glad when they saw Him on the day of resurrection.

D. The Believers Being One with the Son and Praying in His Name

In verses 23 and 24 the Lord said, "And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked nothing in My name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be made full." Here we see the believers being one with the Son and praying in His name. Through resurrection, He was born as the Son of God and became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Now we, the believers, in the spirit, by the spirit, and with the spirit, can be one with Him. To pray "in My name" simply means to pray "in Me." To be in His name means to be one with Him. When we are one with the Lord, we do not pray by ourselves but by the Lord. The

prayer that we utter in oneness with the Lord will certainly be answered. When we pray, He also prays in our praying. However, if I am not one with you, yet I do things in your name, that is not right. But if I am truly one with you, I can do and claim things in your name. Likewise, the believers can do and claim things in the name of the Son because they are one with Him.

This is confirmed by 20:22-23. "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosesoever sins you forgive, their sins have been forgiven them; and whosesoever sins you retain, they have been retained." This means that since we have received the Holy Spirit and are one with the Lord and the Lord is one with us, whosesoever sins we release, the Lord will also release, and whosesoever sins we retain, the Lord will also retain. What we loose shall be loosed by the Lord, and what we bind shall be bound by the Lord, because in the Spirit we are one with Him. But be sure that when you say, "I bind," you are in the Spirit, for if you are not in the Spirit, it will not work. We must be in the Spirit before we can be one with the Lord. Then what we bind, the Lord will bind; what we loose, the Lord will loose; and what we ask, the Father will give us in the Lord's name.

IV. PEACE IN THE SON IN SPITE OF PERSECUTIONS

A. The Son Having Come from the Father

At that time, the Lord made clear to the disciples that He had come out from God the Father, and they believed it (vv. 27, 28, 30). God the Father was His source, and He came out from that source into the world to declare and reveal God to man so that man might know the Father and get into that source.

B. The Son Going Back to the Father

After He finished His commission on earth, the Lord went back through death and resurrection to the Father, the source from which He came, that He might prepare the way and the standing for man to be brought into the Father (v 28).

C. The Son Declaring the Father to the Believers

At that time the Lord promised to declare the Father to His disciples (v. 25). This was fulfilled by His coming back to His disciples after His resurrection, at which time He declared the Father's name to His brothers (Heb. 2:12), making them know the Father's life and nature. In resurrection as the Firstborn Son of God, the Lord makes us, the many sons of God, His brothers, know the Father in the way of life in the way of partaking of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

D. The Believers Being One with the Son and Praying in His Name

Through His resurrection, the Lord has made the disciples one with Him. Since that time, they can pray in His name (v 26). As they are identified with Him, He no longer prays for them but prays with them in their praying. They no longer pray indirectly to the Father through the Son; they pray directly to the Father in the Son because they are one with Him.

E. The Believers Being Scattered During the Son's Suffering

During the Son's suffering, His disciples were scattered, leaving Him alone (v. 32). But He was not alone because the Father was with Him. Even at the time of the Son's suffering, the Father was with Him. His disciples left Him, but the Father did not.

F. The Believers Having Peace in the Overcoming Son

We have peace in the Lord (v. 33). Although the Lord died and has been resurrected, we remain in the world where there is no peace. In this world we shall only have trouble. But the Lord Himself will be our peace, and we can have peace in Him. No matter how much this world troubles and persecutes us, the Lord has overcome the world. We do not need to worry, nor fear the world. Let the world persecute and trouble us. The Lord is our peace. He has overcome the world.

We need to review what is revealed in John 14 through 16. Chapter fourteen is on the mutual abode, chapter fifteen is on the organism, and chapter sixteen is a supplement to chapters fourteen and fifteen. In this supplementary chapter we have the work of the Spirit unto the mingling of divinity with humanity. This means that the work of the Spirit results in the mingling of divinity with humanity. We saw this mingling already in chapter fourteen where that mingling eventually became the mutual abode. This mutual abode is an organism, the Body of Christ, with Christ growing in the divine life to express the Father. This is the organism revealed in chapter fifteen. Chapter sixteen tells us how the mingling of divinity with humanity can take place. It happens through the work of the Holy Spirit. Firstly, this work of the Spirit is to convict sinners that they might believe in Christ and be translated out of Adam into Christ. Secondly, it is to reveal Christ with the fullness of the Father to all of these translated believers that they might be edified, built up, with all the fullness of the Godhead in order to express the Triune God and to glorify the Son with the Father. Please remember these points: chapter fourteen is on the mutual abode, chapter fifteen on the organism, and chapter sixteen on the work of the Spirit to convict the world and to edify the saints with the fullness of the Godhead that the church might glorify the Son with the Father.

I need to add a brief word on the matter of the

organism. Not one human society is an organism. They all are organizations. Only the proper and genuine church is an organism. There is no life in any of the social organizations, for there is nothing organic in them. The church, however, contains the divine life and is organic. In chapter fifteen we saw that the vine tree is the organism of the Triune God. The Triune God has wrought Himself into this organism and is now growing within it. The life, nature, substance, essence, and all the fullness of the Triune God have been wrought into the vine tree. Hence, the vine is not a lifeless organization; it is an organism which is full of life and which grows, functions, expresses the Father, fulfills His purpose, and accomplishes His economy. Praise the Lord that there is such a living organism in the universe! The Father is the source, substance, essence, nature, and life of this organism; the Son is the embodiment and expression of this organism; and the Spirit is the reality and the realization of this organism. The church today is the Body of this organism. The Son is the Head of the Body and the root of the tree which grows with the divine life and which expresses the divine riches to fulfill God's eternal purpose. This is the organism which accomplishes the divine economy. Hallelujah for this divine mystery!

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

LIFE'S PRAYER

(1)

In this message we come to the profound prayer uttered by the Lord in John 17. This prayer is the completing prayer of the Lord's message given in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. If we read John 14 through 17 carefully, we shall realize that these four chapters have a very specific flavor in utterance and composition. This flavor is altogether different from the other chapters in the Bible. Although the whole Bible undoubtedly is God-breathed, these four chapters have a special taste, a special flavor, that no one can imitate. This flavor is not only holy but divine. No human being can utter something that is so divine. The flavor of these chapters is special, impressive, and unique because it is absolutely divine. The person who composed these chapters must have been divine. No human could have written something like this. No human being could say, "Father, glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You." Only the Son of God could utter such words. Although you may not understand these chapters, if you are in the spirit as you read them, you will sense the divine flavor. This is the divine speaking, the divine utterance, and the divine flow with the divine flavor. I am confirmed in my belief that the Bible is the Word of God. Who besides God could have composed these four chapters? Could John, a fisherman from Galilee, utter such things? It is impossible. If we gather together two hundred men with Ph.D.'s, they would not have the substance to compose a writing with such a flavor. How we must worship the Lord for these four chapters! We must worship Him for the message He gave before His

death, and we must worship Him for His concluding prayer.

In order to understand the meaning of His prayer, we must remember the central thought of the message given by the Lord in the previous three chapters. The central thought of that message is rich, deep, and profound. The first aspect of this central thought is that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, was sent by the Father to be among us. Then He was transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit that He might be able to come into us. In other words, He was transfigured into the Holy Spirit, and He comes into us as the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes into us, He comes as the Spirit of reality to make the Lord Jesus real to us in every respect. By doing this, the Lord brings us into the Father and brings the Father into us. This is the mingling of divinity with humanity. Included in this mingling is the mutual abode. We become the abode to the Triune God, and the Triune God becomes the abode to us. We can abide in the Triune God, and the Triune God can abide in us. This is the central thought of the profound and glorious message given by the Lord in these three chapters. After giving that message, the Lord offered a closing prayer.

What is the subject, the central thought, of this prayer? Although the subject of this prayer depends very much upon the central thought of the preceding message, it is still difficult to discover what this subject is. I spent much time on John 17 without having any idea about the meaning of this prayer. When I was young, I heard that the Lord's prayer in this chapter was for oneness. But oneness, or the unity among the Lord's disciples, is not the subject. Oneness is on the surface. Something deeper and more profound lies beneath the surface, and it is not easy for us to dig it out. John 17 is a deep chapter, and it is difficult to fathom it. How we thank the Lord that gradually, little by little, He has shown us the real meaning, the true significance, the central thought, of His prayer in this chapter.

I. THE SON TO BE GLORIFIED THAT THE FATHER MAY BE GLORIFIED

The basic concept of the Lord's prayer in John 17 is glorification. In verse 1 the Lord said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You." This is the subject, the central point, of this prayer. If we see the main points of the three previous chapters, we shall be able to understand what it means to have the Son glorified that the Father may be glorified. The Father is to glorify the Son so that the Son may glorify the Father. This is a mutual glorification between the Son and the Father. If the Father will glorify the Son, then the Son will glorify the Father.

As a prayer that follows a message conveys the main point of the message, so the Lord's concluding prayer covers the main point of the message He gave in the preceding three chapters. Keep this in mind, for it will help you to understand this prayer. The main point of the Lord's message in John 14 through 16 was that the Son may be glorified so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. In what way is the Father to be glorified in the Son? Through the organism of the vine tree. As we have seen, the organism of the vine tree is for the propagating and spreading of life, that is, for the multiplication and reproduction of life, and also for the expression of the Triune God. When the Triune God is propagated, multiplied, and expressed through this organism, the Son is glorified, and in the Son's glorification the Father is glorified also. Thus, the Lord prayed that He, the Son, would be glorified so that the Father also might be glorified.

God's eternal purpose, His ultimate intention, is to manifest, to express, Himself. As I have pointed out several times in the past, glorification simply means manifestation. To be glorified is to be manifested and expressed. For example, electricity that is not manifested is hidden. Before a lamp is switched on, the electricity is hidden within the lamp. But when the lamp is turned on,

the electricity is manifested and expressed. Likewise, it is God's intention to manifest and express Himself. As the electricity is glorified when it is manifested, so God is glorified when He is manifested.

In creation, God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26). Image denotes some sort of expression. Without a certain kind of image, God could never be expressed. Hence, the image is the very expression of God. God's intention in creating man in His own image was that He might be expressed. The Lord Jesus is God who became incarnated as a man for the purpose of declaring the invisible God. John 1:18 says that no one has ever seen God but that the Son has declared Him. God is unseen and invisible. No one except the Son of God has ever seen Him. Now, in His incarnation, the Son has declared Him. To declare God means to express God. The Lord Jesus is the very image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), which means that He is the very expression of the invisible God.

The best illustration of glorification is the blossoming of a flower. A carnation seed, for example, is sown into the earth. After it grows up out of the earth, it blossoms. This blossoming is the glorification of the carnation seed. The carnation seed contains the life element and the life shape of the carnation flower. The style, color, and beauty of the flower are all contained in a little carnation seed, but no one can see this style, color, and beauty until the seed grows out of the earth and blossoms. The blossom is the glory of the seed. The blossoming is the glorification of the seed, for it is by blossoming that the seed is glorified, that is, expressed.

When Jesus Christ came in the flesh, He was like that little carnation seed. In Him, that is, in His human form, His human shell, were all the beauty and shape of the divine life. All the colorful aspects of the divine life were concealed and confined in that little Nazarene. One day, He was sown into the earth. After He died, He grew up and blossomed in His resurrection. In His resurrection, the beauty, form, style, color, and riches of life were

released and expressed. That was the glorification of the Son. Since all that God the Father is has been embodied in the Son, when the Son is glorified, the Father is also glorified in the Son's glorification.

After the Lord became flesh, He expressed God to some extent, but the glory of God, the glory of all His attributes, was hidden in His flesh. The glory of all God's fullness was covered, being clothed by His flesh. Thus, the Lord told His disciples that He had to die and be resurrected. The word die is not a pleasant word to us. However, it is not bad for a seed to be put into the earth and die. It is good because the glory and beauty of the flower that are hidden in the seed are released by its death. The colorful beauty and the rich glory are released through death and resurrection. This is glorification. After the Lord told His disciples about His impending death and resurrection, He offered a prayer to the Father, praying that the Father would glorify the Son that all the glory hidden within Him might be manifested through His death and resurrection. To glorify the Son means to bring forth all the glory hidden within His flesh, to release by means of death and resurrection all the divine glory concealed within the flesh of the Son.

We have seen that the subject of the Lord's prayer in John 17 is glorification. The Lord was God incarnated in the flesh, and His flesh was a tabernacle for God's dwelling on earth (1:14). His divine element was confined in His humanity, just as God's shekinah glory was concealed within the tabernacle. Once, on the mountain of transfiguration, His divine element was released from within His flesh and expressed in glory, being seen by three of the disciples (Matt. 17:1-4; John 1:14). But it was concealed again in His flesh. Before He uttered this prayer, He had predicted that He would be glorified and that the Father would be glorified in His glorification (12:23; 13:31-32). Now He had to pass through death that the concealing shell of His humanity might be broken for His divine element, His divine life, to be released. He also had to be resurrected that He might uplift His humanity

into the divine element and that His divine element might be expressed so that His entire being, both divinity and humanity, might be glorified. In this way, the Father would be glorified in Him. In John 17 He prayed for this.

The concluding prayer of the Lord was for the glorification of the Triune God. The fulfillment, the answer, of this prayer for the glorification of the Triune God has three stages. The first stage was the Lord's resurrection. In the Lord's resurrection, all the life beauty, life essence, life color, life shape, and all the aspects of the divine life of the Triune God were released. In His resurrection, the Lord's divine life was released from within His humanity and imparted into His many believers (12:23-24), and His whole being, including His humanity, was brought into glory (Luke 24:26), and, in that, the Father's divine element was expressed. God firstly answered and fulfilled this prayer in the Lord's resurrection (Acts 3:13-15).

Secondly, this prayer has been fulfilled in the church, in that, as His resurrection life has been expressed through His many members, He has been glorified in them and the Father has also been glorified in Him through the church (Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 3:15-16). Look at the church in Acts on the day of Pentecost. There we see the beauty, shape, and riches of the divine life. The Lord's resurrection was not the complete fulfillment of His prayer; it was just the first step in the fulfillment of this prayer. The next step is the church. From the day of resurrection until the second coming of the Lord is the age of the church. In this age, the Lord has been glorifying Himself in the believers. Throughout all generations, the Son of God has been and still is being glorified. What are we doing today? If we say that we are coming together to exhibit Christ, it means that we are glorifying Christ and making Him manifested. If we say that we are testifying for the Lord, it means that we are manifesting Christ through us. The testimony of the Lord is the manifestation and glorification of the Lord through us. If we want a testimony for the Lord Jesus on our jobs, in school, and in

many other places, it means that we want the Lord Jesus to be manifested through us. This is the glorification of the Lord. When the Lord is manifested and glorified through us, the Father is also glorified in the Lord at the same time. Thus, the Lord's prayer is still being fulfilled today through the church.

In the church we can see the beauty and the riches of the divine life. But, at times, we can also see in the church the ugly human expression. One the one hand, the church is of the divine life; on the other hand, it is still in the natural human life. In the church the divine life is expressed, but sometimes the natural human life is also expressed. When the divine life is expressed, that is beauty and glory. But when the natural human life is expressed, that is a shame and a disgrace.

Do not look at the black side of the church. Do not seek for the trash can--come to the living room and see all the beauties that are there. In every home there is at least one place where the trash is kept. Likewise, in every local church there is a place where the trash is. Such a place is ugly and stinking. Do not try to find it. Rather, sit in the living room of every local church. Whenever you visit a local church, you should forget about looking for the corner where the trash is. You are not going there to be a finder of the trash. You are going there to visit the church. Therefore, you need to stay in the church's living room enjoying the beauty of the divine life expressed in that particular church. However weak a local church may be, there is at least a small amount of the beauty of the divine life in it. We need to look at the beauty of the church life, for the church life is the second stage of the glorification of the Triune God.

Some brothers and sisters do nothing except look for the trash in a local church. Some are not only the trash hunters but also the trash exposers. They would never see the beauty of the divine life in their local church. They always notice the trash. They are the trash hunters, the trash exposers, and also the trash exhibitors. They like to make a show to exhibit all the trash in their local church.

Whenever they do this, they are in darkness. Sometimes, before going to visit another local church, the young co-workers come to me for advice. I always tell them, "When you go to that church, try your best to find the good points. Forget about any bad points you might see. Don't look at them. Stay away from them. Do not be impressed with the trash in the church you are visiting." Even in your local church you should not try to find the trash. If you do this, you will be the first one to suffer. The trash will firstly damage you. I like to go to the dining table of a local church. In every home, the best things are put on the dining table. Just go, sit down at the dining table, enjoy what is there, and say, "Praise the Lord. Hallelujah!" After you have been satisfied, say good-by and leave. I do not want to know anything bad or negative. What I see is altogether glorious. We must believe that every local church, as long as it is proper, has a certain amount of the beauty of the divine life.

What is the third stage of the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer in John 17? It is the New Jerusalem. This prayer in John 17 will be ultimately fulfilled in the New Jerusalem. Through the holy city the Son will be fully expressed in glory, and God will also be glorified in Him for eternity (Rev. 21:11, 23-24). Look at the picture of the New Jerusalem: it is a vessel to express Christ, to make God expressed through Christ. The New Jerusalem is the glorification of the Son so that the Father might be glorified through the Son.

Perhaps you are not clear about the picture of the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 and 22 reveal clearly that God is the light and that Christ, the Lamb, is the lamp. The light is in the lamp, and the lamp is the center of the city, around which is a transparent wall. God is pictured as the light shining through the lamp, the Son of God. The Son of God will be glorified through the transparent wall of the city. The city, composed of all the redeemed ones, has the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve Apostles. The twelve tribes represent all the saints

of the Old Testament, and the twelve Apostles represent all the saints of the New Testament. The New Jerusalem is the composition of all the redeemed ones who are very transparent and are built together. They have Christ, the center, as the lamp in which God, the light, shines. When the lamp is manifested and glorified through the wall of the city, the light in the lamp is also glorified.

The New Jerusalem is a complete picture showing how the Son is glorified in that city and how the Father is glorified in the Son's glorification. Many times some dear saints have said to me, "Brother, you don't know how poor the church is where I am." I do not like to hear that. It is a lie. The church may he poor today, but after a period of time it will no longer be poor. Perhaps you do not have the faith to say this of your local church. You may say, "No, the church in my locality could never be better." Do not use the word never, for, at the least, your church will be good in the New Jerusalem. Every part of the city of the New Jerusalem will be radiant and glorious.

In 1941, during a prayer meeting in the church in Shanghai, a leading sister offered a long prayer. In that prayer she said, with groanings, "O Lord, have mercy on us. The church here is so weak." Immediately afterward, Brother Nee offered a prayer in which he said, "Praise the Lord that the church is not weak. The church is glorious." His prayer shocked everyone. There seemed to be a fight going on between these two prayers. Which prayer was right? Ultimately, when we come into the New Jerusalem, we shall see that Brother Nee's prayer was right. The church is altogether glorious. Do not help Satan, the liar, to spread his lies. Do not believe the lies. The church is glorious. If it does not appear so today, it may be glorious tomorrow, next year, or in the next age. In eternity, for certain, all the church will be glorious.

We have seen that this prayer has a three-fold fulfillment. The first stage of the fulfillment was the resurrection of Jesus. By His resurrection, the Lord Jesus has been manifested and glorified, and by this glorification the Father has also been glorified. The second

step of its fulfillment is in the church. From the day of Pentecost to the day of the Lord's second coming, the Holy Spirit has manifested and will continue to manifest Christ through the saints. In other words, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ through the church. When Christ is glorified, the Father also is glorified in the Son. The last stage of the fulfillment of this prayer will occur when the fullness of time comes. At that time, all the redeemed ones of both the Old and New Testament will be composed together as the complete expression of the Triune God. In this complete expression, Christ will be the lamp and God will be the light. Christ will be manifested and glorified through the New Jerusalem, and God the Father will be manifested and glorified in the Son as well as through the New Jerusalem. That will be the complete fulfillment of the Lord's word, "Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You."

A. The Son To Be Glorified

The Son is to be glorified along with the Father (vv. 1, 5). In verse 5 the Lord said, "And now, glorify Me with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." The word "with" is used three times in this verse. In the phrases "with Yourself" and "with You," the same Greek word is used for "with." The sense of this word is "along with." This means that the Son is exactly the same as the Father in glorification. The Son is glorified along with the Father and with the same glory that the Father has. This word strengthens the indication in verse 1 concerning the deity of the Lord's Person, that He had the divine glory along with the Father before the world was, that is, in eternity past, so that He should be glorified along with the Father with that glory now. The Lord participates in the divine glory, not separately by Himself, but along with the Father, for He and the Father are one (10:30). The Lord, by praying this way, indicates His Person, His deity, showing that He is the same as the Father in the divine glory.

B. That the Father May Be Glorified

1. In the Son's Glorification

The Father is glorified in the Son's glorification. The Father could never be glorified apart from the Son, because the Father has entrusted all that He is and has to the Son. The Father is embodied in the Son. Therefore, the Father cannot be glorified apart from the Son but only in the Son's glorification. We have seen that the Lord was glorified in His resurrection. As long as the Lord is expressed and glorified, the Father is also expressed and glorified. Because the Lord is one with the Father and the Father is in the Lord, the release of the glory and beauty of the Lord manifests the glory and beauty of God the Father. Because They both are one, the Father is glorified in the glorification of the Son. Since the Father is in the Son, the Lord said, "Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You."

2. Through the Son's Believers

The Father's glorification is also through the Son's believers. The Father is the source, essence, origin, and everything to the vine tree. But the vine tree can never be expressed, glorified, without the branches. The Father is glorified in the Son's glorification, and the Son's glorification is through all His branches.

C. The Son's Person

In verses 1 and 5 we see that the Son's divinity and deity are the same as the Father's. The Son is divine in exactly the same way as the Father is. The Father's deity is the Son's deity. The Son's deity is the same as the Father's. The words, "Glorify Me with Yourself," mean that the glory of the Son is the glory of the Father. For example, to serve me dinner with my friend means that dinner is served to me and to my friend. My friend has the same rank as I do. Likewise, the Son has the same rank as the Father. The Son is glorified along with the Father

with the glory that the Father gave Him before the foundation of the world. Thus, the Son has exactly the same rank as the Father. In other words, the Person of the Lord can be ranked the same as that of the Father. The glorification of the Son will rank equally with that of the Father. Therefore, His Person is equal to the Father's.

D. The Son's Work

Verse 2 says, "Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to all You have given Him." This verse indicates the Lord's work. The Son has the Father's authority over all mankind so that He may give eternal life, not to all mankind but only to those whom the Father has given Him, the Father's chosen ones. The Father has given the Son authority over all flesh, over all mankind. All mankind is under the authority of the Son because the Father has entrusted Him with this authority. The Lord has authority to rule over all humanity. Why does He have this authority? That He may give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him. By a careful reading of this verse, we can see that the Lord has authority to rule over all mankind in order to give eternal life to that part of mankind which the Father has chosen and given to the Lord. The Lord created man, exercised His authority over man, and redeemed some of them for the purpose of giving them eternal life. In other words, the Lord must first create, then rule over, redeem, and finally give life to a chosen group of people. The Lord's work, therefore, includes creating, governing, redeeming, and imparting life. The Lord has the same rank as the Father: He is the One who creates, governs, redeems, and gives eternal life. Do not think that you have received eternal life by accident. No, it was not an accident. Among the billions of human beings, God the Father loved you, selected you, and marked you out. There is a divine mark upon us.

The Father not only marked us out but also gave us to the Son. Do not just think of yourself as a poor, pitiful sinner. In a sense, you are, but, in another sense, you are

a gift to the Son. You need to say, "Praise the Triune God that I am a precious gift whom the Father gave the Son. I am dear, precious, good, high, and even lovely. I am a gift, not a trash can. The Father would never give a trash can to His Son. As one who has been given to God's dear Son, I am precious, dear, lovely, and sweet." If you have seen this, your view, attitude, and concept will all be changed, not only concerning yourself but also concerning all the saints. Do you believe that all the dear brothers and sisters are gifts to the Son? Do you believe that the one whom you do not like is such a gift? If you have seen this, you will love every saint, because every dear saint is a gift selected by the Father and given to the Son. The Father has selected us from among the billions of human beings. We are all the selected ones, the top ones, in the universal gift shop. We all have been selected and given to God's dear Son.

The Father has given the Son authority not only to overrule mankind but also to maintain mankind. God the Son exercised His authority in caring for mankind in order that we might come into being. Men like Hitler have slaughtered a great many people. But God the Son seemed to say, "Hitler, you go to hell. I must maintain mankind. So many dear gifts which My Father has given Me must come into being. I am looking for those gifts." Praise the Lord that we all are the dear gifts whom the Father has given to the Son.

E. The Eternal Life

In verse 3 the Lord said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him Whom You have sent, Jesus Christ." What is eternal life? When I was young, I was told that eternal life was just a blessing in the future. Eternal life is divine life with a special function--to know God (cf. Matt. 11:27) and Christ. Every life has its function. The function of a dog's life is barking, the function of a bird's life is flying, the function of a cat's life is catching mice, and the function of a chicken's life is laying eggs. The function of the divine life is to know God.

God and Christ are divine. To know the divine Person we need the divine life, Since the believers are born with the divine life, they know God and Christ (Heb. 8:11; Phil. 3:10). Hebrews 8:11 says that there is no need to teach any New Testament believers to know God. Why is there no need for this? Because every New Testament believers knows God. New Testament believers have the divine life, and the divine life is the life that knows God. We do not need to teach a dog to bark, because the dog's life has the barking function. Likewise, since we have the divine life, we do not need to be taught to know God, for the function of the divine life is to know God and Christ. Oh, that I may know Christ! We all may know Christ because we have the divine life, the life whose function is to know God and Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

PRAYER

(2)

In the last message we covered the subject, the central thought, of the Lord's prayer in John 17. In this message we come to the second part of this prayer. The first part, verses 1 through 5, gives us the subject of the prayer, and the second part, verses 6 through 24, deals with oneness. The purpose of oneness is for the glorification of the Son that the Son may glorify the Father. The people in this oneness include all the disciples, all those whom God has chosen and given to the Lord Jesus, all those to whom the Lord has given eternal life.

II. THE BELIEVERS TO BE BUILT UP INTO ONE

In order to have oneness, there must be the building up. Without the building up, there is no oneness. Do not think that a piling up of materials is oneness. No, that is not oneness. Consider a house. There is a genuine oneness among all the materials in the house, and that oneness is the building up. Every piece of material has been fitly framed together. This is oneness. The oneness that many Christians are talking about today is just a piling up. Sometimes, however, it is not even a piling up; it is a matter of one person who is far away from another saying, "We are one." Brother Nee describes this kind of oneness as shaking hands over the fence. But the oneness today often is not even a shaking hands over the fence, but a begging of people who are far away from one another. One on the east coast may plead with one on the west coast to be one with him, saying, "Dear brother, I am one with

you." The one on the west coast may reply, "Yes, I am one with you," yet in his heart he says, "If we don't keep a safe distance between us, we shall offend one another."

If this is real oneness, where is the Body? The situation today is that the shoulder is afraid of the neck, wanting to keep a safe distance away from it. The eye is also afraid of the nose, saying, "Brother nose, you are too strong. I dare not stay with you. I want to be polite to you and nice to you, but I must keep a safe distance from you." Most Christian workers are not willing to be one with others. Such a situation is not oneness. The genuine oneness is the building up. Look at the oneness of your physical body: that oneness is a matter of being built up. We all must see that this building is what the Lord needs today. Two thousand years ago, the Lord said, "I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20). Two thousand years have passed, and still He has not come. Why? Because it is a shame for Him to come back without having a real building. There must be a small remnant which will respond to the Lord's heart and be willing to lose their identification in order to be built up together as one. This will be a shame to the enemy. The enemy, Satan, hates this building. Thus, in John 17, the Lord prayed for it.

In verses 6 through 24 the Lord prayed for the believers to be built up into one. This oneness is in three stages: in the Father's name by the eternal life (vv. 6-13); in the Triune God through sanctification by the holy word (vv. 14-21); and in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God (vv. 22-24).

A. In the Father's Name by the Eternal Life

The real oneness, the building up of the believers, is in the Father's name by the eternal life. Eternal life is the reality of the Father's name. The Father's name is Father, and the reality of the Father is the divine life. This is even true with respect to our physical father, for our physical father's reality is his life. If our father had no life to impart into us, he could never have been our father. My

father is my father in reality because he has the life which has been imparted into me. The very life which has been imparted into me by him is the reality of his being my father. The word Father must not merely be a title; it must be a reality. The divine life, which is the eternal life, is the reality of the title Father.

1. The Father

a. The Source of Life

The Father is the source of life. This is indicated by the Lord's word in 5:26, which says, "The Father has life in Himself." In the entire Scripture, especially in the Gospel of John, the Father denotes the source of life. Even in a human family, the father is the source of the life of that family. As the father of a family is the very source and origin of life, so the name Father reveals the Father as the source of life.

b. For the Propagation and Multiplication of Life

The Father, the source of life, is for the propagation and multiplication of life. The father of a human family, who is the source of the life of that family, is for the propagation of life. Although a man may be quite young, as long as he becomes a father with a source of life, he has some propagation. Originally, a man might have been alone, but later he has four little ones. After getting married, this man's life, which is the father's life as the source of a family, begins to be propagated. As the propagation of life goes on, there is also the multiplication of life. The Father's life is for propagation and multiplication.

c. Of Whom Many Sons Are Born to Express Him

Of the Father, who is the source of life and who is for

the propagation and multiplication of life, many sons are born to express Him (1:12-13). Therefore, we have propagation, multiplication, and expression. We have seen that this concluding prayer is the confirmation and strengthening of the foregoing message in chapters fourteen through sixteen. In that message we saw the propagation of life and the multiplication of life for the expression of the Triune God. Now we have the same points in this concluding prayer: the Father is propagating, bringing forth, many sons for His expression.

d. The Name "Father" Being Related to the Divine Life

The name Father is very much related to the divine life. Without having the divine life, God could never be the Father. How is it possible for a man to be a father? Only by his life. If you do not have life, you cannot be a father. A father is a producer. A father does not produce by manufacturing but by begetting. A father has a begetting life. Without that life, a man has no reality of being a father. Remembering that the Father has the divine life for begetting, propagating, multiplying, and bringing forth many sons will help us to understand the Gospel of John much better. If a man is unable to beget children, he is not a father. The qualification of your being a father rests with your children. The more children you have, the greater you are as a father. Suppose a man could have a hundred children. He would certainly be the greatest father on earth, for he would have such a rich life in begetting. Consider how many children our Father has. He not only has hundreds of children but millions of them. What a great Father He is! What propagation of life there is with Him.

Whenever we call Him Father, we must understand that this title is realized by His divine life. Without His divine life, the name Father is merely an empty term without content or reality. Since the reality of the title Father is the divine life, to say that we are one in the name of the Father means that we are one in the divine life.

2. The Father's Name

a. The Names "God" and "Jehovah" Adequately Revealed in the Old Testament

In verse 6 the Lord said to the Father, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world." The name referred to here is the very name Father. The names God and Jehovah were adequately revealed to man in the Old Testament, but not the name Father. In Old Testament times, God's people mainly knew that God was Elohim, that is, God, and Jehovah, that is, the ever-existing One, but they did not know much about the title Father. God is His name for creation, and Jehovah is His name for the relationship between Himself and man. The first chapter of Genesis reveals the name God, but it does not disclose the name Jehovah. It was not until the second chapter of Genesis, when God was about to establish a relationship with man, that He revealed the name Jehovah.

b. The Name "Father" Slightly Mentioned in the Old Testament

While the names God and Jehovah are fully revealed in the Old Testament, the name Father is not fully revealed. It is only slightly mentioned in such places as Isaiah 9:6; 63:16; and 64:8. What is the revelation behind the name Father? Father is the name for the relationship of life. When I say, "my Father," I mean that I have His life and that I was born of Him. The Old Testament does not unfold the revelation that God is a begetting Father who will regenerate countless persons. It is in the New Testament that the Lord reveals God as the Father who regenerates many sons. He is the source of life; hence, He is the Father. It is His intention to bring forth innumerable sons by regenerating them with His life. God is the Father because He begets many people with His life, making them His children and His sons. In the book of Matthew the Lord taught His disciples to call God Father, saying, "Our Father Who is in the heavens" (Matt. 6:9).

When we call God our Father, we must realize that He is our genuine Father. He is not our father-in-law, and we are not His adopted children. Our Father is our Father in life, our genuine Father. We call Him Father because we were born of Him and have His life.

How sweet it is to call God our Father! Both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 speak of crying, "Abba, Father." Throughout the world, little children use a double title, such as Papa, or Mama, when addressing their parents. To say Pa or Ma is not very intimate. But Papa or Mama is intimate. Among every race the children call their fathers Papa, Baba, or something similar. If I were not born of my father, yet I had to call him Papa, it would be very awkward. It would even be awkward to address your father-in-law in this way. It would not be so sweet.

One day a newly-saved person came to Brother Nee and asked him why Romans 8:15 and 16 say that crying, "Abba, Father," is a witness that we are the children of God. Brother Nee immediately asked this young brother if he was married. When he replied that he was, Brother Nee said, "When you first visited your wife's parents after you were married, what did you call your father-in-law?" The young brother answered, "In a very reluctant way I called him Papa." Then Brother Nee inquired, "When you are calling your own father, do you address him in such a reluctant way?" The brother said, "Certainly not. When I call upon my father, it is so sweet." When Brother Nee asked him why he called his wife's father Papa reluctantly, he said, "Because he is not my father." Then Brother Nee said, "That's right. He's not your father. So it's really difficult to call him Papa. God is not your father-in-law; He is your Father, your Father in life." Because God is our Father in life, it is so sweet to call upon Him, saying, "Abba, Father." When you sense this sweetness, you know that you are His child and that He truly is your Father in life.

c. The Son Having Come and Worked in the Father's Name

Christ came as the Son of God in the Father's name (5:43) and worked in the Father's name (10:25). "In the Father's name" means in the reality of the Father. As the Son is one with the Father (10:30), so He came and worked in the Father's name, that is, in the Father's reality.

d. The Son Manifesting the Father to His Believers

As the Son is one with the Father, so, when He was with the believers, He manifested the Father to them in what the Father is. When they saw Him, they saw the Father (14:9). The Father is expressed in Him.

e. The Son Making the Name Father Known to the Believers

In 17:26 the Lord said, "And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known." In what way did the Son make the Father's name known to the believers? It was not by teaching but by imparting life into the disciples. The best way to make a father known to a little boy is to impart that father's life into the boy. It is much more difficult for an adopted son to know his father than it is for a son who is actually born with a certain man's life. We have the Father's life. Because we are the same in life and nature as the Father is, it is easy for us to know Him. As the Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus came to impart life into us. Since the Father's life has been imparted into us, spontaneously the Father is made known to us by life, not by teaching. In life we know the Father.

3. The Father's Word and the Father's Words

Verse 6 says, "They have kept Your word," and verse 8 says, "For the words which You gave Me I have given to them, and they received them." In these verses we see in the Greek that the Father has two kinds of words: logos, the constant word, in verse 6 and rhema, the instant words, in verse 8. Both the logos and the rhema are used by the Lord to impart eternal life to the believers. The

logos, the constant word, is always the same. The written word in the Bible is the logos. But when you read the logos. the Spirit will use a sentence, a phrase, or even a single word to inspire you, and that word will become the instant word. Take the example of John 3:16. As the written word in the Bible, John 3:16 is the logos. One day, as you read this verse, the written word becomes the instant word. Suddenly the words, "God so loved the world," stand out, and you say, "Oh, God so loved me!" By this we see how the constant word becomes the instant word, how the logos becomes the rhema.

Both the constant word and the instant word, the logos and the rhema, are for imparting eternal life into the believers who receive these words. The Father's words are not mainly for teaching or instruction; they are mainly for imparting life into the believers. When the words, "God so loved the world," stood out to you and you were inspired, saying, "Praise God, You loved me," life was immediately imparted into you. You received the Father's life. The Father's life is the Father's reality. When we have the life of the Father, we also have the Father and enjoy the Father. Where is the Father? The Father is in His life, for His divine life is the reality of the name Father.

When we received the word of God, we were regenerated by that word (1 Pet. 1:23) and became the sons of God. In this way, God became our Father and we became the sons of God. The Lord came to reveal to His disciples that God is the Father, the source of life, who intends to bring forth countless sons. Therefore, the Lord brought the word of God to His disciples, who, by receiving the word, became the reborn sons of God. They became the sons of God, and God became their Father. Consequently, they have the name of the Father. Now they can call God their Father because they have the life of God which makes them the children of God.

4. To Be Kept in the Father's Name

a. By the Father's Life

In verse 11 the Lord said, "And I am no longer in the

world, and they are in the world; and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are." To be kept in the Father's name is to be kept by His life, because only those who are born of the Father and have the Father's life can participate in the Father's name. The Son has given the Father's life to those whom the Father has given Him (v. 2). They share the Father's name by being kept in it, and they are one in it. Hence, the first aspect of oneness is the oneness in the Father's name by His divine life.

b. In the World

The Son's believers are still in the world. They need to be kept, that is, separated, from the world that they might be sanctified, made holy. In verse 11 the Son prays that the Father, who is holy, will do this.

c. By the Holy Father

In verse 11 the Lord addresses His Father as "Holy Father." The Father's life is a holy life, a life that is separated from the world. Although we have this life, if we stay far away from the Holy Father, we shall have problems. We all need to be kept in the Father's name by the life of the Holy Father.

5. One in the Father's Name

a. As the Three of the Triune God Are

All the Three of the Triune God are one. That is the real oneness and that must be the pattern of our oneness. The Three of the Triune God are one in the divine life, in the divine nature, and in the divine glory. We, the many sons of God, must also be one in the divine life, in the divine nature, and in the divine glory. We must be one in the same way as the Three of the Triune God are.

b. By the Eternal Life

The believers are one in the Father's name by the eternal life. To be one in the Father's name is not to be

kept in oneness by means of a title. Suppose there are five brothers in the flesh. They were all born of one father and have the same life. The life which they have received from their father is the reality of their father. Their father is real to them because they have his life. Perhaps these brothers are unhappy with one another and despise one another. What should they do? Should they separate and be divided? No, although they are unhappy with one another and may despise one another, deep within them is something that holds them together and causes them to say, "Brothers, we have one father and should not be divided. We must be one." In this way they are kept in oneness in the name of their father. Actually, however, they are kept by the father's life. Although they may be unhappy with one another and may desire to separate, the life of their father within them joins them together. Deep within, they love one another. Whenever one of them is attacked, the others stand as one to fight against the attacker. Likewise, the Father's name, the reality of which is the Father's life, keeps His children one.

However, if the Father's children allow their mentality to overcome and overshadow their inner life, they will be divided. The Father's life unites them and keeps them in oneness, but their mentality divides them. Christians today are divided by their big mentality. While their mentality is overdeveloped, their stature in life is that of a dwarf. The more developed you are in your mentality, the more you are a dwarf as far as life is concerned. This overdevelopment of the mentality is the cause of division. If we allow the inner life to develop, we shall all be united in the life of the Father. If we stay in the Father's life, we shall all be one.

Any person in a local church who considers himself quite smart in his mentality will be a main cause of division. Never consider yourself smart in your mentality. You must fear your smart mind just as you fear the poison of the serpent. Oh, how we need to be kept in the Father's life! Many brothers in the flesh love one another, not according to the outward condition but according to their

inward blood. I had four brothers. Although we sometimes fought with each other, whenever someone tried to injure us, we were immediately united because we were of one blood. Likewise, the life of the Father, which is the reality of genuine oneness, unites us. Do not care for your likes or dislikes. Your feelings may cause you to be unhappy with me, and my temper may cause me to be unhappy with you. But we must forget about such things and take care of the inner life. Deep within, you have the Father's life, and I have it too. We all have the Father's life, and by the eternal life of our Father we are one.

c. Enjoying the Father's Name, the Father Himself

We are one in the Father's name by enjoying the Father Himself. As the children of God, we all have the same Father. But when we are not with one another, we do not have the sense that we are enjoying the Father. The more we are one by His life, the more we have the sense that the Father is so enjoyable. When we are together calling, "O Father," it is so sweet. Suppose, however, we fight and are divided into many groups. In such a situation, when we try to call, "O Father," we lose the sense of the sweetness of the Father's name. The sweet flavor of the Father's name relies upon the oneness of His children. When we are one, we enjoy the Father.

d. The First Aspect of Oneness

The first aspect of oneness, which is the building up of the believers, is the oneness in the Father's name by His divine life. In this aspect of oneness the believers born of the Father's life enjoy the Father's name, that is, the Father Himself, as the factor of their oneness. We are one because we have one Father. We not only have one God but one Father. This sweet title, Abba Father, has been made fully known to us in an experiential way because we have His life. Now we are one in Him by His life.

The first ground and reason for our oneness is that we all are sons of God having the same divine life and that

God is the Father of us all. Because God is your Father and mine, we are of the same family, the family of God. You are an American and I am a Chinese, yet we can call one another brother. This is so dear and intimate. In fact, I do not sense such an intimacy with my own brother in the flesh. The Lord can testify this for me. Why is this true? Because we were all born of the same Father, have the same life, and are brothers in that life. We are not brothers-in-law--we are brothers in life. Praise the Lord that we are brothers in the Father's life! For this reason, we must be one. There is no reason for us not to be one, for we are one family having the same Father and the same life. Therefore, we have the real brotherhood in life. In this life we all must be and can be one.

e. Full of Joy

In verse 13 the Lord said to the Father, "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy made full in themselves." The fullness of joy is in the real oneness. When we are one in the Father's name by the Father's life, enjoying the Father together, we shall have the Lord's joy made full in us. This is the reason that when we are truly one, we are filled with praises to the Father. This praise is simply the overflow of the inner joy. We rejoice in oneness with the overflow of joy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY

LIFE'S PRAYER

(3)

B. In the Triune God through Sanctification by the Holy Word

In this message we come to the second factor of genuine oneness. The first factor is being in the Father's name by the eternal life, and the second is being in the Triune God through sanctification by the holy word (vv. 14-21). The holy word is the sanctifying word. The second stage, or the second ground, of oneness is separation from the world by the word. Although we all have been born of the same Father and into the same family, it is regrettable that many of the brothers and sisters are not home, but have been attracted to worldly things such as surfing, movies, sports, and even gambling. If we have been attracted by such worldly things, although we are all children of the Father and have the same life, it will be difficult for us to keep the genuine oneness because we are still in the world and are unsanctified. After we have been born again as the children of God, we must be separated from the world by the holy word of the Lord. The word of the Lord has the sanctifying power to separate us from the world. Once we have been separated from the world by the holy word, we shall be centralized to realize genuine oneness.

1. Two Kinds of Words Given by the Son to His Believers

In verse 14 the Lord said, "I have given them Your word." The Lord has given the believers two kinds of words: the logos, the constant word (vv. 14, 17), and the

rhema, the instant word (v. 8). Both kinds of words are holy, having the sanctifying power to separate the believers from the world. The more we take either the Lord's constant word or instant word into us, the more we are sanctified. The more we are nourished, saturated, and permeated with the Lord's constant or instant word, the holier we become. And the more holiness we partake of, the more we are in the genuine oneness.

2. The World

First John 5:19 says that the whole world lies in the evil one. The evil one is the Devil, and the world is an evil system arranged systematically and ruled by the Devil, Satan (12:31). Satan has systematized all the things on earth, especially those related to mankind, and the things in the air into his kingdom of darkness to possess people, to distract them from the enjoyment of God, and to frustrate them from fulfilling God's purpose. Every aspect of the world, regardless of what it is, belongs to this satanic system. Since the whole world lies in the evil one, the believers must be kept from the evil one (v. 15), and they need to pray to be delivered from the evil one (Matt. 6:13).

3. The Believers with the World

The believers are not of the world (vv. 14, 16) but are separated from the world (v. 19). They have not been taken out of the world (v. 15) but have been sent into the world for the Lord's commission (v. 18). Verse 18 says, "As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." The Father sent the Son into the world with Himself as life and everything to the Son. In the same way, the Son sends His believers into the world with Himself as their life and their everything. The Son sends us, the believers, in the same way as the Father sent Him. When I came to this country, I had the deep sense within that the Lord had sent me, and I could say to Him, "Lord, You sent me to this country. Since You have sent me, You

must come with me. Lord, if You won't go, I won't go either." This is the way the Lord sends us into the world for His testimony.

4. The Words Being the Truth

In verse 17 the Lord prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." The Father's word carries with it the Father's reality. When the word says, "God is light," it conveys God as light. Hence, it is the reality, the truth, unlike Satan's word, which is vanity, a lie (8:44). The word, being the truth, works as reality in the believers to sanctify them.

God's living word works in the believers to separate them from anything worldly, separating them from the world and its occupation unto God and His purpose, not only positionally (Matt. 23:17, 19) but also dispositionally (Rom. 6:19, 22). This is what it means to be sanctified by the Lord's word as the truth, the reality. This sanctification not only changes our position but also our disposition, our inward being. In the Bible, sanctification has these two aspects--the positional aspect and the dispositional aspect. In Matthew 23:17 we see that the gold is sanctified by being put into the temple. When the gold is in the market place, it is common, unholy, but when it is put into the temple, its position is changed and it is immediately sanctified, becoming the holy gold in the holy temple. But this kind of sanctification does not affect the nature or element of the gold; it merely changes the gold's position. Hence, the gold is sanctified positionally. Some Christians only see this much regarding sanctification; they do not see the matter of dispositional sanctification. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we are told that our spirit, soul, and body are to be sanctified. This does not refer to positional sanctification but to dispositional sanctification. The sanctification mentioned in John 17 implies both aspects, for in order to maintain the proper

oneness we must be sanctified both positionally and dispositionally.

5. The Son Sanctifying Himself

Verse 19 says, "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth." Although the Son is absolutely holy in Himself, He still sanctified Himself in His way of living while He was on earth in order to set an example of sanctification for His disciples. Consider the way He contacted the Samaritan woman (4:5-7). The Lord did not meet her at night in a private home but during the day in the open air. As far as the Lord Himself was concerned, He could have met with the Samaritan woman, who was an immoral person, at any place and at anytime. But as a man a little over thirty years of age, it would not have been a good example for His disciples if He had contacted her privately in her home at night. If He had done that, the disciples might have been confused. But, in order to set a good example for His disciples, He behaved in a sanctified way. This one example was a great help to His disciples in the future. It is not right for any young preacher to contact a woman privately at night because there is too much temptation there. To do such a thing is not holy; it is worldly. Look at the example of the Lord Jesus: He talked with Nicodemus, an elderly gentleman, late at night in a private home (3:1-2), but He talked with the immoral Samaritan woman during the daytime in the open air. In doing this the Lord sanctified Himself and set an example for His disciples to follow.

6. One in the Triune God

Verse 21 says, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me." The word "Us" in this verse refers to the Triune God. All the believers are one in the Triune God. In order to be one in the Triune God, we must be sanctified by the holy word. After we have been sanctified, separated from the world by the holy word, we shall enjoy the Triune God and be one in

Him. In order to be in the Triune God we must firstly be separated from the beach, the movie theater, the football stadium, the gambling house, and from all other worldly places, and be separated unto the Triune God. Many Christians have not yet been separated to God. Since they still remain in the worldly places, how can they be one? Although you are a brother in life, where are you? You must be sanctified from all worldly amusements to God. In the Triune God, that is, in the Father through the Son as the Spirit, we shall be one.

The oneness in the Triune God through sanctification by the holy word is the second aspect of the believers' oneness. In this aspect of oneness, the believers who have been separated from the world unto God enjoy the Triune God as the factor of their oneness. In order to maintain this oneness, we must firstly take care of the reality of the divine life and then of the sanctification of the holy word. The holy word separates us from the world and restores us to the Father and to the Father's home. Although many of the brothers have been distracted by the world during the past years, we thank the Lord that a good number of them have been recovered to the church life through the holy word. Both the divine life and the holy word are necessary for having the genuine oneness which results in the true building up of the church.

C. In the Divine Glory for the Expression of the Triune God

Now we come to the third factor of genuine oneness: in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God (vv. 22-24). As we have seen, the first ground of oneness is regeneration, receiving the life of the Father, and the second ground is sanctification, being separated from everything other than God. The world is simply

everything outside of God. When we have been separated from everything outside of God to God Himself, then we are on the ground of sanctification, being separated from all worldly places and worldly things unto one center. This one center is the Triune God, the Father in the Son as the Spirit. We have been sanctified unto this very center, and herein is oneness. The third ground of this oneness is even deeper and higher than this. It is the oneness in the manifestation of the divine glory. After we have been regenerated, we must be sanctified by giving up the world, and after being separated from the world, we must live, through the denying of ourselves, by Christ as our life who is the hope of glory within us (Col. 1:27).

1. The Glory

Verse 22 says, "And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." What is the glory given to the Son by the Father? It is the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (5:26) to express the Father in His fullness (1:18; 14:9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). The Lord Jesus has the life and nature of God, making Him the Son of God and the manifestation of God. Hence, the glory which God gave to the Son is the life and nature of God which make the Son the expression and manifestation of God. The Father's life and nature were given to the Son that the Son might express the Father in His fullness. Suppose the President of the United States appoints his son to visit us as his representative. When the President's son arrives, he will have with him a certain amount of glory, the glory of representing his father, the President of the United States.

The Son has given to His believers the very glory which the Father has given to Him, that they also might have the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (John 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:4) to express the Father in the Son in His fullness (John 1:16). The glory which was first given to the Son has now been conferred upon the corporate

sonship. As the many sons, we have the divine sonship with the divine life and nature to express the Father in the Son with all of His fullness. What glory this is!

Many Christians have a vain, fanciful concept of glory, thinking that it is merely an objective shining or radiance in the air into which we shall enter some day. According to this concept, when we are brought into that radiant shining, we are brought into glory. This is just a dream. What is glory? Glory is the sonship with the divine life and nature to express the Father in all His fullness. Often when we are in a good meeting we have the sense that we are in this glory.

If we would be one in the divine glory, we must forsake and forget ourselves. It must be no longer I, but Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2:20). The "I" has been crucified, and the self must be denied that Christ may live in us. We must not only renounce the world but also ourselves. On the one hand, we have been sanctified from so many worldly places and worldly things and have come home to the Father's house. On the other hand, each of us has his opinions, thoughts, or ideas. If this is the situation, how can we be one? Once we were separated into various worldly places, but now, having come home, we may still have trouble with the self. For this reason, we must not live by our own life but by the life of glory, the divine life. After we have been regenerated, we must be sanctified, and after we have been sanctified, we must be glorified. In other words, after we have the life of God, we must give up the world, and after we give up the world, we must forsake ourselves and live by the divine life. Then, in the glory of this life, we shall be one. Hence, there are three grounds or steps of the oneness of the believers: regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Having God as our Father by regeneration is the first step; coming to the Triune God by separation from the world through the holy word is the second step; and living by the divine life of glory through denying ourselves is the third step. It is in the very application and realization of the divine life of glory that we shall all be one.

2. Three Things Given by the Son to His Believers

In order that the believers might participate in this oneness, the Son has given them three things: the eternal life for the first aspect of oneness (v. 2), the holy word for the second aspect of oneness (vv. 8, 14), and the divine glory for the third aspect of oneness (v. 22). We may have the divine life and be separated from the world through the holy word and still not be shining with God's glory. When we realize that we have the divine life and the divine nature with the sonship to express God the Father in His fullness, we shall shine with glory. At such a time, our oneness will not only be in the eternal life and by the holy word but also with the divine glory for the expression of God. Now we see that our oneness has a goal--to express God the Father in His fullness, even during this dark age on this corrupted earth. Sometimes in the local churches we have experienced this glorification. We have been in His holy glory, in His divine glory, expressing the Father in all His fullness. As we read the Lord's prayer in John 17, we need to see that genuine oneness is by His life, by His word, and in the divine glory for the expression of God.

3. Perfected into One

In verse 23 the Lord says, "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me." How can we be perfected into one? Only in the glory of the divine life. We must live by this glorious divine life so that we may be absolutely perfected in the very glory of the divine life. By denying ourselves we can experience the divine life to such a degree that we are perfected into one. If the brothers in the church life argue and debate with one another one day and then confess and apologize to one another the next day, it means that they have not yet been perfected into one. On the day they realize in full the matter of crucifixion, that

the "I" has been crucified on the cross and that they are living by the life of the divine glory, that will be the day when they all will be perfected into one. On that day we shall no longer debate or quarrel because there will not be the self and the opinions. Then we shall be perfected into one.

If we have not come to the point of being in the divine glory, we have not yet been fully perfected into one. But when we reach this point, we shall be on the highest level of oneness, having been perfected into one by the divine glory given to the believers to express the Triune God in a corporate way. When we reach this point, we are willing to forsake everything. We shall not only forego all the worldly attractions but also all the doctrines and concepts. We shall abandon everything and be for just one thing--the glorious expression of the Triune God. This expression is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there will be no worldly attractions, doctrines, teachings, concepts, or opinions. There will only be the glorious expression of the Divine Being. We all shall be in that glory to express Him in an adequate way forever. In the past, we did reach this stage in some of the local churches. By His grace, we can also reach such a stage today. Such oneness is the real enjoyment of the divine glory in the corporate expression of the Triune God. When we enter into such a glorious oneness, we are willing to lose everything, even our lives. When we are in this oneness, nothing else means anything. This third aspect of genuine oneness is oneness with a commission, with a goal--to express the Triune God in a corporate way.

The third aspect of the believers' oneness is the oneness in the divine glory for the corporate expression of the Triune God. In this aspect of oneness, the believers, having their self fully denied, enjoy the glory of the Father as the factor of their perfected oneness to express God in a corporate, built-up way. This is the oneness of the divine commission which fulfills the Son's prayer that He be fully expressed, that is, glorified, in the building up of the believers, and that the Father also be fully expressed,

glorified, in the Son's glorification. Hence, the ultimate oneness of the believers is in the eternal life (in the Father's name), by the holy word, and in the divine glory to express the Triune God for eternity.

4. Six Things Given by the Father to the Son for Accomplishing the Oneness, the Building up of the Believers

In order that the Son might accomplish this oneness, the Father has given Him six things: the authority (v. 2), the believers (vv. 2, 6, 7, 24), the work (v. 4), the words (v. 8), the Father's name (vv. 11, 12), and the Father's glory (v. 24). The Father has given all these things to the Son that He might perfect such a oneness.

5. The Father's Love

The latter part of verse 23 says, "That the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me." Here we see the Father's love shown toward the Son as well as toward the Son's believers. The Father has loved the Son in that He has given the Son His life, His nature, His fullness, and His glory to express Him. What love this is! In the same way, the Father has also loved the Son's believers by giving them His life, His nature, His fullness, and His glory that they might express Him in the Son. This is a story of love as well as of glory. Not many of us appreciate this love, the love in giving us the Father's life, nature, fullness, and glory to express Him. This is real love. It is much better and much higher than anything else.

6. The Believers to Be with the Son where He Is

Verse 24 says, "Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me may also be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world." The Son is in the divine glory for the Father's expression.

Therefore, if the Son's believers are to be with Him where He is, they must be with Him in the divine glory to express the Father. The fulfillment of this began with the Son's resurrection, when He brought His believers into participation in His resurrected life, and it will consummate in the New Jerusalem, when His believers will be fully brought into the divine glory for the ultimate corporate expression of the Triune God for eternity.

We are where the Son is. The Son is in the Father, and we also are in the Father. The Son is in the Father's glory, and we also are in the Father's glory. The Son went through death and resurrection that we might share the Father's life, nature, fullness, and glory, expressing the Father with Him in the very place where He is. This is marvelous! The Son is in glory for the Father's expression, and the believers will also be in glory for the corporate expression of the Triune God for eternity. To me, this is vastly greater than going to heaven. Eventually, the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven (Rev. 21:2). I do not want to be in an empty heaven: I want to he in the New Jerusalem, in the glorious corporate expression of the Triune God.

III. THE FATHER BEING RIGHTEOUS IN LOVING THE SON AND HIS BELIEVERS

In verses 25 and 26 the Lord prayed, "Righteous Father, indeed the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You have sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them and will make it known, that the love with which you have loved Me may be in them, and I in them." The world neither knows the Father nor wants to know Him, but the Son and the Son's believers do. The Father is righteous in loving the Son and His believers, giving His glory both to the Son and to His believers. In sanctifying the Son's believers, the Father is holy (v. 11), and in loving the Son and His believers and giving the Son and His believers His glory, the Father is righteous. The Father will reveal nothing regarding life to

the worldly people because they do not know the Father. However, the Father has revealed everything concerning life to the Lord Jesus and to His believers because the Lord and His believers know the Father. Hence, the Father is righteous in His discernment, for by His righteous judgment He reveals to us the matters of life. God is righteous in this matter.

The love mentioned in verse 26 is the love of the Father in giving His life and glory to the Son and to the Son's believers so that the Son and the believers might express Him. The Son prays that, along with the Son's abiding in His believers, this love may also abide in them, and that they may always have the sense of this love by knowing the name Father, by realizing the Father's love toward the Son, and by abiding with the Son.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

LIFE'S PRAYER

(4)

Although much has been said about John 17, still more is necessary. We must never forget this chapter, for in it the Lord prayed that God would glorify Him so that God might be glorified in and through Him. The words, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (17:1), are the subject of this prayer. How was the Son of God glorified so that God the Father might be glorified in and through the Son? It was by the resurrection which follows death. After His death, the Lord was resurrected, meaning that He was manifested and glorified. The Lord was released and manifested by resurrection; hence, He was glorified. When the Lord was thus glorified, the Father was glorified in and through the Son.

We have seen how the Son was glorified in His resurrection. Now in what way will the Son be glorified today so that the Father might be glorified in and through the Son? It is by the church. When the church has been regenerated, sanctified, crucified, and united with Christ in glory, then the Son of God will be expressed and manifested. The Son of God will be glorified in the oneness of the church. The Son of God being thus glorified, the Father at that time will also be glorified in and through the Son. Therefore, the prayer, "Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, includes and depends upon the matter of the church being regenerated, sanctified, crucified, and united in oneness with the Son of God.

ONENESS IN THE DIVINE LIFE

As we have seen, the Lord's prayer in John 17 unfolds three stages of oneness. In this message, let us pay careful attention to the verses in John 17 that are concerned with oneness. Verse 11 says, "Holy Father, keep them in Your name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are." We see here that oneness is a matter of being kept in the Father's name. As we have already pointed out, the reality of the Father's name is the Father's divine life. Hence, the first factor of genuine oneness is the Father's name with the Father's divine life. This is the life mentioned in 17:2, where the Lord said to the Father that He had given the Son "authority over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to all whom You have given Him." We must take care of these two verses in order to see the first main factor of genuine oneness.

ONENESS IN THE HOLY WORD

John 17:21 is a wonderful, deep, and profound verse. "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me." The oneness in this verse is the oneness in the Triune God. When we all are in the Triune God, we have oneness. How can we be in the Triune God? Only through Christ's death and resurrection. This is the reason why the Lord told us in chapter fourteen that He had to go in death and come in resurrection. It was through death and resurrection that His disciples were brought into the Triune God. In the Triune God is the real, genuine oneness. We must take verses 17 and 18 along with verse 21. "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." In verse 17 we have the sanctifying word. Although we are in the Triune God, we may slip out of the Triune God into the world. Thus, we need the sanctifying word to separate us

from the world back to the Triune God. Therefore, the second factor of genuine oneness is in the Triune God through sanctification by the holy word.

ONENESS IN THE DIVINE GLORY

The third factor of oneness is found in verse 22. "And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." The third factor of genuine oneness is glory--in the divine glory for the expression of the Triune God. Since the glory which the Father has given to the Son has been given to us by the Son, genuine oneness is in the divine glory. What is glory? Glory is the sonship given to the Son by the Father with the Father's divine life and nature to express the Father in His fullness. Notice that there are four aspects of glory: sonship, the Father's life, the Father's divine nature, and the expression of the Father in His fullness. These four things together equal the glory. This is the glory, which is a divine right and privilege, that we have in the Son. The Father has given this glory to the Son, and the Son is privileged to express the Father in this way. This is the very glory which has been given to us by the Son. Today we all have the sonship with the Father's life and nature to express the Father in all His fullness in the Son. We need to become very familiar with these points, for it is in this divine glory that we are truly one.

Verse 23 continues, "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me." Here we see that being perfected into oneness still pertains to being in the Father and in the Son. If we take care of all these verses, then we shall be able to see real oneness.

In verse 24 the Lord said, "Father, I desire that those whom You have given Me may also be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given

Me, for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world." The Lord was in the divine glory and prayed that all whom the Father had given Him would also be with Him in glory. We need to pay close attention to the tenses of some of the verbs in this verse. Here it does not say that they "shall be with Me" or that "they shall behold My glory." According to the natural, religious concept, glory is in the future, in "the sweet by-and-by." According to this concept, in "the sweet by-and-by" the glory will shine and we all shall come into that shining and be in glory. But the Lord Jesus did not use the future tense, but the present tense, saying, "I desire that those whom You have given Me may also be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." The Lord said, "may also be," and, "may behold My glory." Being with the Lord in glory and beholding His glory are not for "the sweet by-and-by"; we may experience them today. The Lord seemed to be telling the Father, "Father, You have given Me Your glory, the sonship with the divine life and nature to express You and Your fullness. This is the glory which You have given Me, and I am now in this glory. But those whom You have given Me are not yet in this glory. I pray that they also may be in this glory." When was this prayer answered? Firstly, it was answered on the day of resurrection and secondly, on the day the church was raised up. When the church was raised up, all the disciples were brought into that same glory, into the sonship with the divine life and the divine nature to express God the Father in the Son in all His fullness. Hallelujah, we all are in glory with the Son! The Son has the sonship with the divine life and the divine nature to express the Father, and we also have this. Thus, we are now where the Son is--in glory. By this we see that real oneness is in the Triune God through the process of the death and resurrection of the Son.

The first stage of oneness is the oneness of life, the second stage is the oneness of sanctification, and the third stage is the oneness in the glorification of the Triune God. The last stage, the glorification of the Triune God, is

simply the manifestation of the Triune God, that is, the glory of sonship. When we come together realizing that we have been regenerated, sanctified, and crucified, then we are one to express God, to manifest God, and to be perfected into the glorification of the Triune God.

By applying these three stages, we can discover which stage we are in. In which stage are you--the first, second, or third? Are you simply one in life, or do you have the higher oneness in sanctification, or the highest oneness in the glorification of the Triune God? Not all of us are in the same stage. Some are in the first, others are in the second, and a few, by the Lord's mercy, are in the third. As long as you have been saved and born again, you have the Father's life and the Father's name. Thus, you are the Father's child and are one with all other Christians who also are the Father's children. Hence, you are one in life. But you also need to be sanctified by the word in order to be separated from the worldly things and live in God. Then you will be one with the saints in the second stage. Finally, you need to realize the crucifixion of the cross in order to live in the glorification of the Triune God. This means that you must deny yourself, live in the manifestation of the Triune God, and be perfected into the oneness of the glorification of the Triune God. As we have seen, this is the ultimate step of oneness.

It is only in the third stage of oneness that the Lord's prayer will be fulfilled. Only in this stage will the Son of God be glorified that the Father may be glorified in and through the Son. It is only in this stage that we shall glorify the Lord and manifest the Lord in oneness. In this stage we shall be absolutely perfected into oneness to manifest and glorify the Lord. Then we shall realize the sonship because all that God is and has will be embodied in us. This means that we shall have the life of God, the nature of God, and even God Himself for the purpose of becoming the very manifestation and expression of God. Finally, we shall have the full glory which God has given to the Lord as the Son of God.

ONENESS BEING THE BUILDING

True oneness is also the building. Do not think that this is my concept or that it is not supported by the revelation in the Bible. Through the type of the tabernacle in the Old Testament we can see that oneness is the building. The mutual abode revealed in John 14 was typified, pictured, and portrayed by the tabernacle. If you are not clear about the mutual abode in John 14, you need to go back to Exodus 26 to see the composition and the building up of the tabernacle.

Every careful reader of the Bible knows that the tabernacle was not only God's dwelling place but also the dwelling place of those who served God. Those who served God dwelt in the tabernacle. Many times in the Psalms the psalmist prayed that he would abide in the temple, in the house of God. For example, Psalm 27:4 says, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." By this we can see that the temple or the tabernacle was not only God's dwelling place but also the dwelling place of those who loved God. Thus, it was a type of the mutual dwelling place, the mutual abode.

The tabernacle was composed of forty-eight boards. This is very meaningful. Since this is a type, we need to allegorize every aspect of it. Those forty-eight boards were composed with the basic number six. The number six, as the number of the six stone water pots in John 2, signifies man who was created on the sixth day. Hence, the number six is the number of humanity, the number of man. Forty-eight divided by six is eight, which, in the Bible, denotes resurrection, a new beginning. The first day of the week, following the seven days of the previous week, is the eighth day and signifies a new beginning. When was circumcision conducted? On the eighth day (Lev. 12:3). When was the Lord Jesus resurrected? On the first day of the week, that is, on the eighth day (John 20:1). Hence,

the number eight signifies a new beginning in resurrection, and the number forty-eight signifies humanity in resurrection. This is not the natural humanity but the resurrected humanity. In the church there is the need of humanity, but this should be the resurrected humanity, not the natural humanity.

The forty-eight wooden boards signifying humanity were overlaid with gold (Exo. 26:29). Gold signifies divinity including the divine nature and the divine glory. Thus, the gold overlaying the forty-eight boards in the tabernacle signifies the divine essence with the divine glory. Upon the overlaying gold were the golden rings, and within the golden rings were the golden uniting bars that united the forty-eight boards. Here we have oneness, the oneness that is the building. Therefore, we can say that the building is the oneness.

In the Bible, oneness is not just a matter of putting things together. Merely putting things together is not oneness; that is just a piling up. Oneness is the building together. In order to be built together, many pieces are not only put together but are fitly framed together to form one unit. Take the example of a house: every part of it is fit together to form one unit. Through the example of the type of the tabernacle we can see that the forty-eight boards became one building.

This oneness, this building, in the tabernacle was altogether dependent upon the gold. If the gold was removed from the forty-eight boards, the oneness would have been lost, and the forty-eight boards would have fallen apart. In themselves, the wooden boards did not possess the uniting factor or the uniting element. That uniting element was the gold. The gold overlaid the boards, on the overlaying gold were the golden rings, and within the golden rings were the golden uniting bars. Hence, it was in the gold that all the boards could be one. It is in the divine life, the divine nature, and the divine glory, not in the humanity, that all the "boards" are one. Although we are the boards in resurrection, this resurrected humanity is not the uniting factor; the uniting

factor is the divinity, the gold. The divine life, nature, and glory are the uniting factor. Likewise, our oneness is not in ourselves but in the Triune God who is our life, nature, glory, and expression. Eventually, we, like the forty-eight boards in the tabernacle, do not express ourselves but the glory of the Triune God as typified by the gold. Now we can see that the forty-eight boards are one in the divine glory, expressing the glory of the gold. This is real oneness. It is so clear that this oneness is not just a togetherness but the building. Togetherness is not adequate to have genuine oneness. This oneness must be the building.

When we come to the end of the Bible, we have the harvest of God's building work through the ages--the New Jerusalem, the ultimate consummation of God's building enterprise. Is the oneness of the New Jerusalem a pile of precious stones? No, it is a building up. The appearance of the New Jerusalem is that of jasper (Rev. 21:10-11, 18a). In Revelation 4 we see that the appearance of God, the One sitting on the throne, is also that of jasper, meaning that jasper is God's expression, God's appearance. Therefore, the whole New Jerusalem will have the same appearance as God; it will express God. This means that all the precious stones are one in the expression of God's image. This is real oneness.

Some Christians say that every local church should be distinct, being different from all the other local churches. I was deceived by this concept for a number of years. But one day the Lord showed me that while the seven churches in Revelation were distinct, they were distinct in a negative way, not in a positive way. In their negativeness, some of those seven churches were different from the others, but in their positiveness, they were all the same. Look at the four sides of the New Jerusalem. According to the opinion of those who say that each local church should be distinctly different, the four sides of the New Jerusalem should also be different. One side should be jasper, and the others ruby, emerald, or diamond, each having its own distinction. According to those who hold this opinion, each side of the wall should express something unique, something different from the others. But that is not

oneness. All four sides of the New Jerusalem have the same expression--the expression of jasper, the glorious appearance of God.

In the New Testament, the distinction between the churches is not on the positive side but on the negative side. Some may say, "Were not the churches established by Paul in the Gentile world of one kind and the churches in Judea, especially the church in Jerusalem, of another kind?" This is true, but only in a negative sense, not in a positive sense. In the positive sense, all the churches believed in Jesus Christ and had Christ as their life to express God. On the positive side, there was no difference between them. However, on the negative side there was a difference because the Gentile churches knew nothing about keeping the law, while the saints in Judea, especially some in the church in Jerusalem, still practiced the rituals of the Jewish religion, even up to the time of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem. That was a real distinction among the churches. Do you want to keep this kind of distinction? The saints in Jerusalem even convinced Paul to pay the charge for purification in the Jewish religious way, but God did not agree with that. Yes, there were distinctions between the churches, but only in a negative sense.

Shall we keep the negative distinctions, or shall we go on to keep the positive oneness? All the churches must be the same. We have one Bible, we believe in one God, we have the same one Jesus Christ as our Savior, and we all enjoy Him as our life to express God. There is no reason to be different. If we still maintain the differences, it means that we are negative. All the forty-eight boards in the tabernacle expressed the glory of the same gold, and the entire wall of the New Jerusalem will have the appearance of jasper. How happy we are that all the churches today are the same positively. We must forsake the traditional concept that the churches should be different. All the churches must be the same.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

LIFE PROCESSED FOR MULTIPLICATION

(1)

John 18 and 19 tell us about the Lord's betrayal, judgment, crucifixion, and burial. By reading the account of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels, we discover that the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are records along the same line. But the record of the Gospel of John is absolutely different. For example, in the first three Gospels the record of the Lord's crucifixion and death on the cross is accompanied by many signs. For instance, the sky became dark, and the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:45, 51). Also, the Lord's cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is another sign in these Gospels that cannot be found in the Gospel of John. However, John's record contains that which cannot be found in the first three Gospels, such as the soldiers' mocking of the Lord (19:2-3) and the blood and water pouring out from the Lord's side (19:34). Therefore, these records are along two different lines. We must know the purpose behind these two lines.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the main purpose of the Lord's death was to redeem us. He died for us and for our sins that He might accomplish the work of redemption. The Lord cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" because it was at that very moment that God put all our sins upon Him and the Lord became the sin-bearer, becoming a sinner in our stead to bear our sins. Therefore, God forsook Him. Luke especially notes that the Lord was the Redeemer to redeem us from our

sins, for he tells us that the Lord died with two sinners, two thieves, one who was saved and one who perished (Luke 23:32, 39-43). Such a record cannot be found in the Gospel of John. What then is the purpose of John's record? Since the Gospel of John is the gospel of life, his record of the death of Christ follows the line of life. John's purpose was to show that the Lord Jesus is the expression of God as our life and that He died on the cross for the purpose of releasing Himself to us as life. His death on the cross was for the purpose of imparting His divine life into us.

At this point we need to visualize the whole Gospel of John. In this book, the writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, points out that the Lord Jesus as the expression of God came as life to meet all our needs, and that He had to die and be resurrected and transfigured into another form, the Spirit, so that He might come into us, be one with us, and bring us into God and God into us, making God and us a mutual abode. In John 17 the Lord prayed that all the disciples, being born of God, knowing the name and life of the Father, and belonging to the Father's family, would be one in the Father's name, separated from the world and sanctified to live in God, and be absolutely one in the Triune God, realizing the glory of being the sons of God. As this chapter reveals, by being in the life and nature of God, in sanctification, and in the glory of the Triune God, we all may be one as God's corporate expression. In this way, the Lord, the Son of God, can be manifested and glorified through us, and the Father can be manifested and glorified in the Son through this corporate vessel. Following this, the writer gives a record showing how the Lord was crucified, went into death, and came out of death in resurrection. By considering this whole picture, we shall be able to see the purpose of the record regarding the Lord's death in chapters eighteen and nineteen.

I appreciate the title of this message--"Life Processed for Multiplication." I especially like the words "processed" and "multiplication." John 18 through 21 reveal that life has undergone a process so that it might be multiplied.

One grain has been multiplied into many grains (12:24). One unique Only Begotten Son has been multiplied into many sons. When we come to chapter twenty we shall see that the unique Only Begotten Son has produced many brothers in His resurrection and that these many brothers are His multiplication. How could the Lord have this multiplication? Only by passing through the process of death and resurrection.

I. DELIVERING HIMSELF IN VOLUNTARY BOLDNESS TO BE PROCESSED

The Lord delivered Himself in voluntary boldness to be processed (18:1-11). This means that He went into death willingly. In John 10 He told us that He would purposely give up His life for us. He is the Lord of life, and He is life. He has authority to die, and He has the authority to be resurrected. Of His own accord, He went into death and He came out of it. He does not have the problem of death; hence, it was unnecessary for Him to die. It was His prerogative whether He would die or not. He could will to die or will not to die. To us, however, death is not a matter of choice. When death comes to visit us, we cannot say, "Death, I am not ready. Please come again another day." We have neither the power nor the authority to reject death. When death comes, everyone must be subdued by it. But this was not so with the Lord, because He is the Lord of life and also life itself. If He did not prefer to die, He had the power and authority to reject death and not die. He had the authority to send death away. Although He was not forced or compelled to die, He was willing to die because He had come to impart Himself to us as life. He knew that it was only through death that He could release Himself into us as life. In fact, He had already said that He was the one grain of wheat that was to fall into the ground and die (12:24). If a grain of wheat is unwilling to die, how can it release its life to bring forth many grains? In John 18 and 19 we see clearly that the Lord Jesus was very willing to die.

A. Going to the Garden

The first proof of the Lord's willingness to die was that He went to the garden (18:1). This means that He went to a place where He could be captured. In His long message recorded in John 14 through 16, He made the process so clear. Then, in chapter seventeen, He prayed for the process. After He prayed, He went to the garden. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Lord went to the garden to pray. These three Gospels reveal that the Lord was the sin-bearer who was under the burden of bearing our sins. Thus, He had to go to the Father and pray. But there is no such record in the Gospel of John. John's record shows that He went to the garden not to pray but to present Himself to the process. He went there to be captured, to be arrested, to be presented to death. This means that He voluntarily delivered Himself. The Lord did not hide but willingly offered Himself to be processed, delivering Himself to the people who were to put Him to death.

B. Betrayed by the False Disciple

The Lord knew that Judas would betray Him (13:11, 21-27). He did not avoid it. This also proves that He voluntarily delivered Himself to be processed. Satan utilized the false disciple of the Lord to put Him to death, not knowing that by doing this he afforded the Lord the opportunity to be processed. The Lord took this as an opportunity to be glorified (13:31-32), that is, to be multiplied through death and resurrection.

C. The "I Am" Willing to Be Arrested

Another indication of the Lord's willingness to die was that the people did not discover Him but that He came to them. Judas, the false disciple, came with two kinds of people--the political and the religious. The soldiers were the political ones, and the deputies from the chief priests and Pharisees were the religious ones. The religious circle worked with the political circle to put the Lord of life to

death. However, they did not find the Lord; the Lord came to them. The soldiers did not come to the Lord and capture Him while He was praying. No, Jesus went forth to meet them and said, "Whom are you seeking?" (18:4). They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." Then the Lord said to them, "I am" (18:5). When they heard this word, they drew back and fell to the ground (18:6). They were frightened at this word "I am," which is the meaning of the name "Jehovah." This indicates that the One they came to arrest was Jehovah God. The Lord did not take this opportunity to flee but asked them a second time, "Whom are you seeking?" Thus, it was not they who arrested the Lord; it was the Lord who handed Himself over to them.

The name "Jehovah" means "I Am that I Am." The Lord Jesus is the great I Am. In 8:24 the Lord had told the Jewish people, "Unless you believe that I am, you shall die in your sins." In other words, if they did not believe that Jesus was Jehovah, the very God, they would die in their sins. The Jewish people heard this, and when they heard it again, they fell down to the ground with fright. The Lord approached them the second time, asking, "Whom are you seeking?" He was not captured; He delivered Himself to them, proving His willingness to die. If He had been unwilling to die, no one could have captured Him, for He could have frightened everyone and caused them to fall to the ground. All He had to do was speak one word and His captors would have been dead. How could they have seized Him if He were unwilling to be captured? This proves that the purpose of John's Gospel is to show that the Lord is the Lord of life and that He was willing to die in order to release Himself as life.

D. Taking Care of the Disciples in an Easy Manner

While the Lord was handing Himself over to the people, He took good care of His disciples in a very easy manner. In 18:8 Jesus said, "I told you that I am; if therefore you are seeking Me, let these go away." This was

the fulfillment of the Lord's word in 17:2, where He said, "Of those whom You have given Me, I have not lost one." We see here that under the suffering of the betrayal of His false disciple and the arrest of the soldiers, the Lord still took good care of His disciples. This reveals His easy manner in passing through the process of death. He was not at all frightened by the environment of death.

E. Without Any Resistance

His willingness to die was also proved by the incident of Peter's cutting off the right ear of Malchus, the slave of the high priest (18:10-11). Peter, a very rough brother, did not know the purpose of the Lord. Although he intended to help the Lord, he only caused trouble. The Lord Jesus said to him, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" The Lord told him to sheath his sword because He had come to fulfill the purpose of the Father, which was to give Himself as life to others. The Lord willingly took the cup from the Father; He was not forced to take it. Therefore, the Lord was not forced to die; He willingly delivered Himself to death so that He could release His life to bring forth much fruit.

In 18:10 and 11 we see that the Lord did not offer any resistance to His arrest. By delivering Himself up to death, the Lord proved that He was life. Without death, how could He have proved that He was life? When the Lord became a man, He firstly proved that He was God. From chapter one through chapter seventeen, the Lord was among men proving that He was God. Now, in chapters eighteen and nineteen, He was going into death to prove that He is life. How can we know that the Lord is life? It is by His going into death and not being subdued by it. The Lord was not frightened, troubled, controlled, or governed by death. As we read these two chapters, we discover that when the Lord went into death, He conquered and subdued it.

There are many proofs in these two chapters that the Lord conquered and subdued death. Firstly, the Lord was

not frightened by death. When the Lord knew that the religious with the political ones were coming to arrest Him and put Him to death, He was not tearful. He went boldly to meet them and delivered Himself to them. Secondly, the Lord was composed when death came to Him. In the face of death, He took care of His disciples in an easy manner telling His arrestors to let His disciples go. Suppose a group of policemen came to arrest you. Would you be at ease? But in every scene depicted in these two chapters, the Lord was at ease; He was neither moved nor influenced by the fear of death. Likewise, the Lord was composed before the high priest and before Pilate. He was so much at ease that He was not troubled even when He was crucified. While He was on the cross, He could even take care of His mother. Troubles were heaped upon Him during that time of suffering, yet the record discloses that He was always composed.

The Lord's life was a life that could subdue and conquer death. He went into death by crucifixion and came out of it by resurrection. What better proof can there be than this that He is the life that death cannot influence, subdue, or conquer? He conquered death because He is the resurrection life (11:25). John 18 and 19 show how strong and powerful the Lord was when He went into death. When death was threatening, He was strong, powerful, and not subdued by its influence. He could go into death and come out of it without being hurt by it or held by it. What a proof that He is life!

II. EXAMINED IN HIS DIGNITY BY MANKIND

A. As the Passover Lamb Examined

The Lord was examined in His dignity by mankind (18:11--19:16), being examined as the Passover lamb was examined (Exo. 12:2-6). The Lord Jesus was crucified on the Passover as the Passover lamb. According to the type, before the Passover lamb was killed, it had to be examined

to determine whether or not it had any blemish. The examination of Christ by mankind was the fulfillment of this type. After Pilate examined Him, he declared, "I find no fault whatever in him" (18:38; 19:4, 6). There was no blemish in this Passover lamb; He was fully qualified to be the lamb for God's people.

B. By the Jews According to the Law of God in Their Religion

1. In Front of the Denial of One of the Closest Disciples

The Lord was examined by the Jews according to the law of God in their religion (18:12-27). This examination was a very unpleasant thing. The Lord even suffered it in front of the denial of one of the closest disciples (18:17-18; 25-27). While He was being examined, Peter denied Him three times. Would you have been able to suffer this? If this had happened to us, we would certainly have rebuked Peter. But the Lord did not say a word.

2. The Judging One Being Judged

While the high priest was examining and judging the Lord, the high priest was being judged by the Lord in His dignity (18:19-21). The Lord was fearless and spoke to the high priest in a very dignified way. While the Passover lamb was being examined, the examiner was being examined by Him, and the blemishes of the examiner were exposed.

C. By the Gentiles According to the Law of Man in Their Politics

1. Under the Sovereignty of God

The Lord was examined by the Gentiles according to the law of the Roman Empire (18:28-38a). The law of the Roman Empire was famous. Even today many countries

base their law upon it. Before the Lord was examined by the Gentiles according to their law in the politics, He was examined according to the Jewish law for execution. Then He was examined by the Roman politics, by the law of the earthly power. The Jewish law for execution was to stone the criminal to death (18:31; Lev. 24:16). If that method of execution had been available at the time, the Lord Jesus might have been stoned to death. But that would not have fulfilled the prophecy spoken by the Lord when He said that He would be lifted up as the brass serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness (3:14).

Many years ago I read an article describing how the Jews slew the lamb during the Passover. The article said that the Jews took two wooden bars and formed a cross. They put the lamb on the cross, tying two of the lamb's legs to the foot of the cross and fastening the outstretched legs to the crossbar. Then they slew the lamb so that all its blood was shed. Thus, the killing of the Passover lamb was a portrait of the crucifixion of Christ. Although the Jewish method of execution of criminals according to their law was to stone them to death, the Jewish nation was not in power when the Lord was crucified. Hence, the Jewish nation had lost the legal right to execute criminals according to their law. Not long before the crucifixion of Christ, the Roman government adopted crucifixion as the method of executing criminals. This was decided under God's sovereignty that the prophecies regarding Christ's crucifixion might be fulfilled (vv. 31-32; 12:32-33).

2. The Judging One Being Judged

While Pilate was judging the Lord Jesus, he himself was judged by the Lord in His dignity (vv. 33-38a). Pilate, as a governor of the Roman Empire, was very timid. He was an excellent example of a politician. Although he knew what was right and what was wrong, he, like all politicians, was afraid of the people. The same is true of politicians today. Pilate found no fault in the Lord Jesus;

he knew that the Lord had done nothing wrong. But the voices of the people subdued him, and he was not honest, genuine, nor faithful.

When the Lord was brought before Pilate, again it seemed that Pilate judged Him, but eventually He judged Pilate. As we have seen, one of Pilate's characteristics was his timidity; he feared the Jewish people. He knew that the Lord Jesus was sinless and declared that he could not find anything wrong with Him. But because of his fear of the Jews, he condemned the Lord and sentenced Him to death. This was unfair and unrighteous. When the Lord told Pilate that He had come into the world to "testify to the truth" and that "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (18:37), Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" (18:38). This indicates that the Lord judged Pilate. In effect, the Lord said, "You are such a high administrator and yet you do not know what truth is. Then you are a false person. You are not true." After this, Pilate was exposed and put to shame, and stopped judging the Lord. Here we see the darkness of politics.

III. SENTENCED IN MAN'S INJUSTICE

After the Lord Jesus was examined, He, the perfect One, was sentenced in man's injustice (18:38b-19:16). This unjust sentence exposed the blindness of religion and the darkness of politics (18:38b-39; 19:1, 4-5, 8-14, 16). The Jewish religionists rejected the most just One and chose a robber (18:39-40; 19:6-7, 12, 15). How blind they were! They were veiled by their religion and with their hatred. The Gentile politician, Pilate, knew and declared that the Lord Jesus had no fault, yet he still sentenced Him to death in order to please the Jewish people (18:38a-39; 19:1, 4-5, 8-14, 16). How political he was! Religion and politics worked together to pronounce the unjust sentence upon Christ. Politics did not take the initiative; it was religion which took the initiative, utilizing the power of dark politics.

IV. TESTED IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY BY DEATH

A. Crucified at Golgotha

In the process for multiplication, the Lord Jesus was tested in God's sovereignty by death (19:17-37). After being sentenced unjustly, He was crucified at Golgotha (19:17), which, in Latin, is Calvary and means the Place of the Skull. The meaning of the place where He was crucified indicates insult and shame. He suffered death in insult and shame.

B. "Numbered with the Transgressors"

At Golgotha, "they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on this side and one on that, and Jesus in the middle" (19:18). This was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12, which said that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors." He was not only put to death in a place of insult and shame, but also was ranked with transgressors, being dealt with as one of the transgressors.

C. Killed by Mankind Represented by Hebrew Religion, Latin (Roman) Politics, and Greek Culture

According to God's sovereignty, the Lord was killed by mankind represented by Hebrew religion, Roman politics, and Greek culture (19:19-22). John 19:19 says, "Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross. And it was written, JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." This title was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (19:20). The Hebrew represented Hebrew religion, the Latin represented Roman politics, and the Greek represented Greek culture. When added together, these three represent the entire world of mankind, signifying that the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God was killed by and for all mankind. When the chief priest of the Jews asked Pilate to change what he had written, Pilate answered,

"What I have written, I have written" (v. 22). What Pilate wrote was not of him; it was under the sovereign hand of God, and he could not change it.

D. The Soldiers Parting His Garments

Religion was blind, politics was dark, the governor was false, and the soldiers were greedy. When they had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and made a part for each soldier. Since His tunic was seamless, they cast lots to see whose it would be (19:23-24). This was not of the soldiers, but of God's sovereignty. It happened that the prophecy in Psalm 22:18 might be fulfilled. The soldiers did exactly what was prophesied in Psalm 22:18. By this we see that the Lord's death was sovereignly planned. If God had not planned it, no one could have put the Lord of life to death. All the fulfilled prophecies prove that the Lord's death was not of man, but of God's sovereignty.

E. Taking Care of His Mother by Imparting His Life to His Disciple

Probably most Christians know that when the Lord was on the cross He spoke seven words. These seven words from the cross are quite famous. The first word the Lord spoke was, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34); the second was, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43); and the third was "Woman, behold your son...Behold, your mother (John 19:26-27). These three words were spoken during the first three hours of the Lord's crucifixion. The Lord was on the cross for six hours--from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. This is recorded very clearly in the four Gospels. During the first three hours, everything that was done to Him was done by man. The people persecuted, mocked, and crucified Him. But during the final three hours, everything that happened to Him was done by God. God looked upon Him as the sinner and as the substitute for sin, and judged Him. During the second period of three

hours, He spoke four other words. In Matthew 27:46 the Lord Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This was the fourth word spoken from the cross. The fifth word was, "I thirst" (19:28); the sixth was, "It is finished" (19:30); and the seventh was, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

While Jesus was being crucified, He saw His mother and "the disciple whom He loved" standing by and He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son. Then He said to the disciple, Behold, your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (19:26-27). As we have seen, the first word spoken by the Lord on the cross was, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Then in Luke 23:43 the Lord said to one of the two thieves crucified with Him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." This word was regarding salvation, because Luke's account proves that the Lord is the sinner's Savior. The word, "Father, forgive them," is a prayer for sinners. Likewise, the word, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise," is a gospel promise to saved sinners. But here, in 19:26-27, the Lord said to His mother, "Behold, your son," and to His disciple, "Behold, your mother." These words indicate the union of life, because John's Gospel testifies that the Lord is life imparted into His believers. It is by this life that His loved disciple could be one with Him and become the son of His mother, and she could become the mother of His loved disciple. According to John's record, Jesus was crucified for the transfer of life, for the imparting of His life into His disciples. Through this transfer of life, one of His disciples could be His mother's son, and His mother could be this disciple's mother. This does not indicate salvation but the transfer of life. Hence, the Gospel of John is not a gospel of salvation but a gospel of life that is transferred into all the believers.

It must be noted that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, while the Lord was on the cross, He spoke to a sinner, especially to the thief who was redeemed from the curse to

be with Him in paradise. This is definitely related to redemption. In the Gospel of John, the Lord spoke to His mother and His disciple. How could the Lord's mother become the mother of His disciple, and how could His disciple become the son of His mother? By redemption? Certainly not. It could only be by life, by a life union, by the identification of life, by life which regenerates. By His death, the Lord imparted Himself to John the disciple, who was united to and identified with the Lord by the divine life. Therefore, the Lord's mother became John's mother. Why was it that in Luke the Lord spoke to the thief and in John the Lord spoke to His mother and disciple? Because in Luke the Lord died to redeem sinners from the curse of sin. Although we may be as sinful as the thief, we too can be redeemed from the curse and go immediately to be with the Lord in paradise. Thus, in Luke we have a gospel concerning the Lord's redeeming death to preach to sinners. But in John the Lord Jesus died to release and impart Himself as life into the disciples, thus making all the disciples identified with Him. Consequently, all the disciples are sons to His mother. Because of His life and His death. the Lord imparted Himself to us, making us one with Him. In this way, we become sons to His mother. This proves that, according to the Gospel of John, His death on the cross is a death for the imparting of Himself into us as life.

F. Mocked by Being Offered Vinegar

Verses 28 and 29 continue, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had now been accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. A vessel full of vinegar was lying there; so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and brought it to His mouth." Thirst is a taste of death (Luke 16:24; Rev. 21:8). The Lord Jesus suffered it for us on the cross (Heb. 2:9). The hyssop here should be the "reed" in Matthew 27:29 and Mark 15:19, which was a hyssop reed. At the beginning of His crucifixion, the wine mingled with gall and myrrh (Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23) was offered to the Lord as a stupefying draught, which He would not drink. But at the end of His

crucifixion, when He was thirsty, vinegar was offered to Him in a mocking way (Luke 23:36). In His crucifixion, the Lord's rights of clothing and drink were robbed along with His life.

G. The Work of His All-inclusive Death Finished

Verse 30 says, "When Jesus then had taken the vinegar, He said, It is finished. And He bowed His head and gave up the spirit." The Lord worked continually until He was put on the cross (5:17). But even in His crucifixion the Lord was still working. How do we know that He was still working on the cross? Because before He died He said, "It is finished!" While He was being crucified, He was still working for the redemption of sinners, for the destruction of the serpent, for the release of the divine life, and for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. At the last minute, after everything had been accomplished, He declared to the whole universe, "It is finished!" Then He died and entered into rest. Praise the Lord Jesus! Only He could do this. Through His crucifixion, He finished the work of His all-inclusive death by which He accomplished redemption, terminated the old creation, and released His resurrection life to bring forth the new creation to fulfill God's purpose. In the process of death, He proved to His opposers and His believers by the way He behaved that He was life. The dreadful environment of death did not frighten Him in the least. Rather, it provided a contrast which proved strongly that He was life versus death, a life which could not be affected by death in any way.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

LIFE PROCESSED FOR MULTIPLICATION

(2)

We have seen that the Gospel of John reveals the Lord as the very expression of God coming to us as life. By imparting Himself into us, He becomes everything to us and meets all our needs that He may bring God into us and bring us into God, mingling God with us until God is one with us and we are one with Him. In other words, the Lord is the very expression of God, imparting Himself to us as life, meeting all our needs, and mingling God with us as one. This is the main thought of chapters one through seventeen. All who have been regenerated by Him will be one in this divine life. In fact, we are one with one another in this divine life. even as we are one with God in this divine life. After such a revelation in these seventeen chapters, in chapters eighteen and nineteen the Holy Spirit reveals the Lord's willingness to go into death and to deliver Himself to death that He might be sown as a grain of wheat into the earth to die in order that He might rise up to release and impart Himself into us, thus bringing forth much fruit by His death and resurrection.

The thought of the Holy Spirit in John 18 and 19 is not mainly that of the Redeemer bearing our sins, dying for our sins on the cross, and redeeming us from the curse of our sins. The thought of the Redeemer and His redemption is seen mainly in the first three Gospels. The thought in the Gospel of John, especially in chapters eighteen and nineteen, is mainly that of the Lord as the seed of life going into death and releasing Himself through death and resurrection. In this way, the one grain has

been released to produce the many grains. Life originally was restricted to the one grain, but now, by death and resurrection, Christ's very life has been released, has brought forth many grains, and is now in the many grains. This is the thought concerning the Lord's death in the Gospel of John.

We have seen that the Lord delivered Himself in voluntary boldness to be processed (18:1-11), that He was examined in His dignity by mankind (18:12--19:16), that He was sentenced in man's injustice (18:38b--19:16), and that He was tested in God's sovereignty by death (19:17-37). In this message we come to the very crucial matter of the issue of the Lord's death (19:31-37).

V. ISSUING IN BLOOD AND WATER

John 19:34 says, "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." Two substances came out of the Lord's pierced side: blood and water. Blood is for redemption, dealing with sins (John 1:29; Heb. 9:22) for the purchase of the church (Acts 20:28), and water is for imparting life, dealing with death (John 12:24; 3:14-15) for the producing of the church (Eph. 5:29-31). On the negative side, the Lord's death takes away our sins; on the positive side, it imparts life into us. Hence, it has two aspects: the redemptive aspect and the life-imparting aspect. The redemptive aspect is for the life-imparting aspect. The record of the three other Gospels is only for the redemptive aspect of the Lord's death, but John's record is not only for the redemptive aspect but also for the life-imparting aspect. In Matthew 27:45, 51; Mark 15:33; and Luke 23:44-45, "darkness," as a symbol of sin, appeared, and "the veil of the temple," which separated man from God, "was rent." Those were signs related to the Lord's redemptive death. Furthermore, the words spoken by the Lord on the cross in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them," and in Matthew 27:46, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" (because He bore our sin at that time), also

depict the Lord's redemptive death. But the flowing water and the unbroken bone mentioned by John in verses 34 and 36 are signs of the Lord's life-imparting death. This life-imparting death releases the Lord's divine life from within Him for producing the church, composed of all His believers into whom His divine life has been imparted. This life-imparting death of the Lord was typified by Adam's sleep that produced Eve (Gen. 2:21-23), and is signified by the death of the one grain of wheat falling into the ground for the bringing forth of many grains (John 12:24) for the making of the loaf--the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17). Hence, it is also the life-propagating, life-multiplying, regenerating, and reproducing death.

As we shall see, the Lord's pierced side was prefigured by Adam's opened side, out of which Eve was produced (Gen. 2:21-23). The blood was typified by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12:7, 22; Rev. 12:11), and the water by the water that flowed out of the smitten rock (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4). The blood formed "a fountain" for the washing of sin (Zech. 13:1), and the water became "the fountain of life" (Psa. 36:9; Rev. 21:6).

A. Not One of His Bones Being Broken

Every aspect of the Lord's death was according to God's sovereignty. Under God's sovereignty, not one of the Lord's bones was broken (19:31-33, 36). The Jews, not wanting the bodies to remain on the cross on the Sabbath, asked Pilate that their legs might be broken. The soldiers then broke the legs of the two thieves who had been crucified with the Lord. But when they came to Jesus, they saw that He had already died. Since the Lord had already died, it was needless for them to break His bones. This indicates that, in a sense, the Lord Jesus was not put to death by human hands but that He died Himself. Although He was crucified, He died Himself, fulfilling His word spoken in 10:17 and 18, where He said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to

lay it down, and I have authority to take it again." Apparently, Jesus was killed; actually, He laid down His psuche life, His soulish life, and died. While the two criminals were killed, Jesus was not. Rather, He laid down His psuche life for our redemption. Since He had already died, the soldiers did not break His legs. This sovereignly fulfilled the prophecy which said, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken" (19:36).

One of the soldiers, being concerned that the Lord might not actually be dead, pierced His side with a spear. This fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10: "They shall look on him whom they pierced." It was absolutely of God's sovereignty that these things happened in such a meaningful and wonderful way. This proves strongly that the Lord's death was not accidental, but that it was planned by God "before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19-20).

The Lord's having none of His bones broken was typified by the bones of the Passover lamb. In the institution of the Passover, God ordained that none of the lamb's bones should be broken (Exo. 12:46; Num. 9:11-12). This was a wonderful type. Later, in Psalm 34:20 this was also prophesied. Both the type and the prophecy were fulfilled in the Lord's death on the cross.

In Genesis 2:21-23, we find the Scripture's first mention of "bone," which was a rib taken out of Adam for producing and building Eve as a match for Adam. Eve was a type of the church produced with the Lord's resurrection life that was released out of Him. In other words, the church came out of the resurrection life, the unbroken life, the incorruptible life of Christ. His is the life which can never be hurt, damaged, or broken. If one of the Lord's bones could be broken, it would mean that the Lord's resurrection life could be hurt and broken by death.

By referring to Genesis 2, we can easily see the significance of bone--that it signifies resurrection life. One scriptural principle is the principle of the first mention. According to this principle, the first mention of an item in

the Bible determines its meaning throughout the Scriptures. By applying this principle to the bones of the Gospel of John, we see that the first place which mentions something about a bone is Genesis 2, where a rib was taken out of Adam and made into a bride. Eve is a type of the church, Adam is a type of Christ, and the bone is a type of the resurrection life of Christ. As Eve came out of Adam's bone, so the church comes out of Christ's resurrection life. Eve was made from a bone, and the church is produced by the divine life. Thus, the bone is a type of resurrection life. The unbroken bone of the Lord Jesus indicates that He is the resurrection life which cannot be broken by death. Hence, bone is a symbol, a figure, of the Lord's resurrection life, which nothing can break. The Lord's side was pierced, but not one of His bones was broken. This signifies that though the Lord's physical life was killed, His resurrection life, the very divine life, could not be hurt or damaged by anything. Jesus was hurt, damaged, and put to death in His psuche life, His soulish life, not in His divine life. Although His human life was destroyed by death, His divine life could not be damaged. This is the life with which the church is produced and built.

B. His Side Being Pierced

After the incident regarding the Lord's bones, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and "immediately there came out blood and water" (19:34, 37). Although the Lord's resurrection life was not broken, He Himself was broken that His divine life might be released. Here, water signifies life. This is portrayed in the Old Testament by the smitten rock out of which the living waters flowed to quench the thirst of the children of Israel (Exo. 17:6). The Lord is the rock who was smitten on the cross. He was broken so that His divine life could flow out of Him as living water. Not only did water come out of Him but also blood, the symbol of redemption. Before we can take the Lord as the living water of life, we must

firstly be cleansed. Thus, blood is mentioned as the first item and water as the second. After we have been cleansed by the blood, then we are enabled to receive the Lord as life. These points cannot be found in the other three Gospels. They are only found in the Gospel of John, because it is a book which reveals that the Lord as life could only have been released by His death. While the record of the other three Gospels is mainly for redemption, the record in the Gospel of John is mainly for the release of life.

1. Typified by Adam's Opened Side

The piercing of the Lord's side was typified by Adam's opened side (Gen. 2:21). Adam's side was opened and a rib was taken out. Here, Jesus' side was opened and blood and water flowed out from this opened side.

2. Flowing Out Blood for Redemption

The blood which flowed out of the Lord's side is for redemption (Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 3:25). Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Recovery Version). The blood here signifies the redemptive aspect of Christ's death (John 1:29). The blood which flowed out for our redemption was typified by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12:7). As Zechariah 13:1 indicates, this redeeming blood formed a fountain for the washing of sins. Hallelujah for such a fountain! This fountain is not for drinking but for washing. The blood which flowed out was also for purchasing the church (Acts 20:28). The blood which formed a fountain for the washing of sins was the price of the purchase of the church.

3. Flowing Out Water for the Imparting of Life

The water which flowed out of His side signifies the life-imparting aspect of Christ's death (12:24). Water is for the imparting of life (4:14; Rev. 22:1). As we have pointed out, this is typified by the water flowing out of the smitten rock (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4). This water became "the fountain of life" (Psa. 36:9). While the blood formed a fountain for washing, the water formed a fountain for

drinking. The blood was for the purchase of the church, whereas the water, signifying the eternal life, was for the producing of the church. As we have seen, this is typified by Eve having been produced out of Adam's released rib.

This second aspect of the Lord's death is the life-releasing, life-propagating, life-multiplying death, the generating and reproducing death. When the Lord Jesus said that He was a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die that many grains might be produced (12:24), He was referring to the life-imparting aspect of His death. The dying of this grain of wheat was not for redemption; it was absolutely for imparting into the many grains the life that was in the original grain. On the negative side, Christ's death removed our sins; on the positive side, it imparted the divine life into us. As we believe in Him today, our sins are removed by His redemptive death, and eternal life is imparted into us by His life-imparting death. This life-imparting death is also the life-releasing, life-propagating, and life-multiplying death. It is the generating and reproducing death.

Consider a grain of wheat. Its life is confined within the grain. By death, the life in the grain is released. Likewise, by His death on the cross, Christ's divine life was released. Hence, His death was the life-releasing death. Since His divine life was not only released out of Him but also imparted into us, His death was the life-imparting death. On His side, it was the life-releasing death; on our side, it is the life-imparting death. Moreover, it is the life-propagating death, for by it life is spread in many directions. Furthermore, it is the life-multiplying death, causing the multiplication of life. It is also the life-reproducing death, for the one grain has been reproduced in the many grains. How we need to be impressed with these wonderful aspects of the Lord's all-inclusive death.

In chapter one of John, we saw the Lamb with the dove. It is not adequate just to have the Lamb. We also

need the dove. The Lamb is mainly for redemption, and the dove is mainly for the imparting of life. This is God's economy.

The life-imparting aspect of the Lord's death is even more wonderful than the redemptive aspect. Redemption is excellent, marvelous, and wonderful, and it seems that nothing can surpass it. But life-imparting exceeds redemption. Suppose a sinner comes to the Lord and believes on Him as the Lamb of God who died on the cross for his sins, shedding His blood for his sins. The blood even forms a fountain in which he can be cleansed. How wonderful this is! But suppose he is only washed and, experiencing nothing else, is then brought into a heavenly mansion. Although he is washed, he is still dead, like a corpse in a mortuary. He is now deadly clean, being a dead person who had been washed by the blood. By this we see that it is not enough to be cleansed by the blood. We must also be living. There is no need for us to go to a heavenly mansion, for as long as we have the divine life and are living, we have the mutual abode for us and God. If we are redeemed without being reborn, our condition is still poor. God's purpose is that redemption be followed by the imparting of life. Redemption is for this, preparing the way for us to receive the divine life. The water must follow the blood. We have seen that the blood signifies the redemptive aspect of Christ's death and that the water signifies the life-imparting aspect. The blood is for redemption, forming a fountain in which we may be cleansed, and the water is for regeneration, forming a fountain of living water from which we may drink at any time. Outwardly we have been washed and inwardly we have been filled with this divine life. Now we are living as well as clean, and we all can shout, "Hallelujah! I have been redeemed and I have been born again!"

Among Christians today, there are endless teachings about the Lord's redemptive death as seen in the first three Gospels, but the life-giving aspect of His death as seen in the Gospel of John has been much neglected. Most Christians neglect this because they have never

adequately seen the matter of life. However, during the last several years the Lord has revealed this matter to His church. We are becoming clearer that this is the main aspect of the Lord's death and that the redemptive aspect is supplementary. The eternal purpose of God is to impart Himself into us as life--this is the main aspect. But we have committed sin. Hence, redemption is necessary as a stopgap procedure. But this is not the main aspect. From eternity past to eternity future, God's intention is to impart Himself into us as life. During the process of time, we became fallen and committed sin. The fall brought about a gap in God's eternal purpose. God bridged this gap and filled it in with redemption. By this we see that redemption is supplementary to the main aspect of the Lord's death. Thus, the main point regarding the Lord's death in John's record is that it released life and imparted it into us.

VI. RESTING IN HUMAN HONOR

After the Lord had completed His work in His death, He rested (19:38-42). In John 18 and 19 we see the many evil things and sufferings which came to the Lord. Some treated Him evilly, others mocked Him, and even His most intimate disciple denied Him. Everything in His environment was dark. But, however evil were the events and however much He suffered, He endured them all and passed through them victoriously, showing that He is the victorious and conquering life. His is not the life conquered; His is the life conquering. Thus, immediately after His death, the environment was changed from black to white. After the Lord accomplished His redemptive and life-imparting death, His situation of suffering immediately changed into an honorable one. Before His death, everything was evil and deadly; after His death, everything became pleasant and agreeable. Joseph of Arimathea, "a rich man" (v. 38; Matt. 27:57), and Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1), came with linen and very expensive spices, myrrh and aloes (vv. 39-

40), to prepare His body for burial. It was not the poor but the noble who cared for His body, burying Him in a new tomb "with the rich" (v. 41; Isa. 53:9). By this we see that the whole situation was changed into a rich condition, a noble state, a new sphere. The Lord was now dear to people, and they valued Him very highly. Hence, the Lord rested in human honor. Although He was put to death in shame, He was buried in honor. The problem had been with death, but after the Lord died, this problem was solved. When He died, the trouble and the evil things were over. Now, according to God's sovereignty, in human honor of a high standard, the Lord rested on the Sabbath day (v. 42, Luke 23:55-56), waiting for the time to resurrect from among the dead. In 5:17 while the Jews were keeping their Sabbath, the Lord told them that the Father and He were working. Now that His work had been finished, He rested and enjoyed a proper Sabbath day. After this Sabbath, on the first day of the week, He would rise up from His resting place. In the next message we shall consider the Lord's resurrection.

By reading John 18 and 19 and considering all the points found in these chapters, we shall be able to understand the significance of the Lord's death. These chapters reveal how the Lord delivered Himself in voluntary boldness and conquered the environment of death and its influence, proving that He is the conquering, resurrection life, and dying that He might release Himself into us as life. After He accomplished this, He was highly valued and put into rest. The purpose of these two chapters is to show that the Lord was willing to deliver Himself to death and, by this, to prove that He is the resurrection life, the conquering life which can never be hurt, damaged, or subdued by death. He proved that death could not conquer Him but that it could only release Him as life. On the one hand, the Lord could not be broken; on the other hand, He was broken. As the resurrection life, He could not be broken; but for the purpose of releasing Himself as life, He was broken. That none of His bones

was broken proved that nothing of His resurrection life could be broken. However, He was willing to suffer and to be pierced that life might be released and imparted into us. Once this had been accomplished, He rested and waited for the resurrection.

We also arrive at the correct understanding of the Lord's death by comparing the record of the Gospel of John with the records of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three Gospels show that the Lord died for redemption, but the Gospel of John reveals that He not only died for redemption but especially for the release of life. Thus, by His death, we have been redeemed and have had His life released and imparted into us.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

LIFE PROCESSED FOR MULTIPLICATION

(3)

In this message we come to John 20, a chapter about the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's death was for His resurrection. In 12:24 He said that He was the grain of wheat which would fall into the ground and die that it might be released to impart its life into many other grains. In other words, He had to die that He might rise up and become many grains. This seems strange and mysterious to the human mind. The human mind has never entertained the thought that there is such a thing as resurrection following death. Even Satan thought that death would put an end to the Lord Jesus. To Satan, death was the end. But to the Lord, death was not the end; it was the pathway for Him to enter into resurrection. Thus, to the Lord, death was not a defeat but a way to victory. By being put into death, He gained the victory because death became a door and an entrance into resurrection. Indeed, His death was for His resurrection. Without death, He never could have produced the church. Without death, He never could have regenerated us to be the members of His Body. Therefore, everything was dependent upon the Lord's death which led into resurrection.

The record in the Gospel of John regarding the Lord's resurrection is different from that in the other three Gospels. The record of the Lord's resurrection in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is nearly the same. John's record, however, is vastly different. The Gospel of John always has the viewpoint of life. According to John's Gospel, the

Lord has come to be the expression of God to be received by us as life, and He died and resurrected to impart Himself into us as life. If we would understand this book, we must keep this viewpoint in mind. This same viewpoint is seen in this record of the Lord's resurrection. John 20 and 21 are written from this point of view, showing how the Lord was released by His death and imparted into us by His resurrection. The main purpose of these two chapters is that, after and by His resurrection, the Lord will come into us and be one with us.

The whole Gospel of John is directed toward resurrection. The purpose of the Lord's incarnation as a man was that He might impart Himself into many people and reproduce many sons of God. He was the Only Begotten Son of God, but God needed the reproduction and the multiplication of His Only Begotten Son. The only way in which the Only Begotten Son of God could be reproduced and multiplied was by death and resurrection. For example, the only possible way for a grain of wheat to be reproduced and multiplied into many grains is the way of death and resurrection. As we have seen, the entire Gospel of John points in this direction--toward the reproduction and multiplication of the Only Begotten Son of God. In this way, the Only Begotten Son becomes the many sons (Rom. 8:29). In order to have His corporate expression, God requires the many sons. For this purpose, the Only Begotten Son of God had to be released through death and imparted into us through resurrection.

VII. RESURRECTING IN DIVINE GLORY

We have been considering how life was processed for multiplication. After passing through the examination, the sentencing, and the testing of death, He rested in human honor. Then, after passing through the death portion of the process, Christ resurrected in divine glory (20:1-13, 17). Now, having resurrected, He is in the divine glory.

A. "On the First Day of the Week"

The Lord resurrected "on the first day of the week" (20:1). The resurrection of the Lord was a new start opening the way to a new generation and a new age. This is why the Lord resurrected "on the first day of the week." This day is the greatest day in the Bible. That it is called "the first day of the week" means that it is a new beginning. A week is a period of seven days, and the first day denotes a new start. Why did the Lord not rise up on the sixth or seventh day, or on any other day of the week? Because His resurrection ushered in a new period, a new age, a new generation. In the old creation there were seven days. God created for six days and rested on the seventh. These seven days were the generation of the old creation. By the resurrection of the Lord Jesus another generation was newly started. The old creation belonged to the seven days. Now, after the seven days, there is a new start with another first day. In other words, by the resurrection of the Lord, the old creation has passed away and a new creation has begun; the old generation is over and the new generation has started. Thus, the first day of another week signifies the beginning of a new creation, a new generation, and a new age.

Have you ever noticed the type in the Old Testament which indicated that the Lord would resurrect on the first day of the week? In Leviticus 23:10, 11, and 15, a sheaf of the firstfruit of the harvest was offered to the Lord as a wave offering on the "morrow after the sabbath." That sheaf of the firstfruits was a type of Christ as the firstfruit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Christ resurrected exactly on the day after the Sabbath. In these verses in Leviticus 23, the term "the first day of the week" is not used; instead, another term is used--"the morrow after the sabbath." The Sabbath is the seventh day, and the morrow after the Sabbath is the first day of the week. The firstfruits of the harvest were offered to the Lord "on the morrow after the sabbath," meaning the first day of the

following week. The firstfruits of the harvest typify the resurrected Christ. He is the firstfruit of resurrection. Since the Lord resurrected from the dead as the firstfruit of the harvest, when was the firstfruit of the harvest offered to God? It was on the morrow after the Sabbath, that is, on the first day of the week. This is not only a type but also a prophecy which was fulfilled in John 20.

The firstfruit of the harvest offered to the Lord was the wave offering signifying resurrection. The wave offering is contrasted with the heave offering. The wave offering was offered with a back-and-forth motion signifying Christ in resurrection; the heave offering was lifted with an up-and-down motion signifying Christ in ascension. To wave indicates constant motion. Hence, Christ is moving in life because He has resurrected. He is the wave offering on the first day of the week.

Another matter to be considered here is the circumcision of the children of Israel. On what day did God instruct them to be circumcised? It was on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12). After a period of seven nays, there is the first day of another period of seven days--that is, the eighth day. The significance of the Lord's instructing the children of Israel to be circumcised on the eighth day was that they had to eliminate their old nature and live the resurrected life. They were born naturally and had to cut off their old nature and have a new nature which lives by the resurrection life. Thus, the Israelites were commanded to be circumcised on the eighth day. Colossians 2:11 and 12 declare that in Christ we all have been circumcised by His cross. It is God's intention that His people put off the old nature and put on the new nature that they might live in the resurrection life. This is something of the eighth day, the first day of the week. This simply denotes resurrection because resurrection is a new beginning for a new generation in a new creation.

By His all-inclusive death, Christ terminated the old creation, which had been completed in six days plus one Sabbath day. In His resurrection, He germinated the new

creation with the divine life. Hence, it is the beginning of a new "week"--a new age. The day of His resurrection was appointed by God. Psalm 118:24 says, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." If we read this verse in its context, we shall see that it refers to the day of the Lord's resurrection. The day of His resurrection was a special day, a day appointed by God. The day of the Lord's resurrection was prophesied as being "this day" in Psalm 2:7, which is quoted in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5. When the Lord Jesus was still walking on earth, He prophesied that He would be crucified and that He would rise up from the dead on the third day (Matt. 16:21; John 2:19, 22). This "third day" was the first day of the week. Later, this day was called by the early Christians "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). What a wonderful day it was!

It should also be pointed out that the Lord was not only resurrected on the first day of the week, but also during the first part of the day. He resurrected in the morning, not in the evening. Once again this signifies a new start, a new beginning, a new period, a new generation, a new age, a new creation, and a new day. The resurrection of the Lord is the beginning of a new day because He resurrected early in the morning of the first day.

B. As "the Firstfruit" of "Resurrection"

Christ resurrected as "the firstfruit" of "resurrection" (1 Cor. 15:20-23). In resurrection He was begotten as the Firstborn Son of God. As the unique, Only Begotten Son of God, He did not need to be begotten, but in order for the Only Begotten Son to become the Firstborn Son He had to be born in resurrection (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5). On the day of His resurrection, Christ was born to be the Firstborn Son of God and "the Firstborn from among the dead" in order to be "the Head of the Body, the church" (Col. 1:18).

C. Leaving the Old Creation in the Tomb

When the Lord Jesus resurrected, He left the old creation in the tomb (20:1-10). Peter entered into the tomb and "beheld the linen cloths lying there, and the

handkerchief which was on His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place apart" (vv. 6-7). Before the body of Jesus was buried, it was bound in linen (19:40). This means that He went into the tomb with something of the old creation, indicating that the old creation was brought into the tomb by His burial. All the things which were cast off from the Lord's resurrected body and left in His tomb signify the old creation, which He wore into the tomb. He was crucified with the old creation and buried with it. But He resurrected from within it, leaving it in the tomb and becoming the firstfruit of the new creation.

Everything left in the tomb was a testimony to the Lord's resurrection. If these things had not been left there in a good order, it would have been difficult for Peter and John to believe (v. 8) that the Lord had not been taken away by someone but had resurrected by Himself. These things were offered to the Lord and wrapped about Him by His two disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus (19:38-42). What they wrought on the Lord in their love to Him became very useful in the Lord's testimony. The Lord resurrected from the dead, leaving all the old creation which He had brought into the tomb as a testimony that He had walked away from death.

In the eyes of God, the entire old creation was buried in that tomb. This is a wonderful fact, whether you believe it or not. The old creation, including your old man and your old self, was buried in the tomb with Jesus and left there. When the all-inclusive Christ went into the tomb, we went there with Him. When He resurrected, He left us there. In this universe there is such a wonderful, all-inclusive tomb where our old man has been buried and still remains. Now our old man is in the tomb, and our resurrected new man is in the church.

The cloths and the handkerchief were left in the tomb in a very good order (v. 7). Who took the linen cloths and the handkerchief from off the Lord Jesus, and who folded the handkerchief and left it in a good order? It was not

done by angels but by the Lord Jesus Himself. The proof of this is the resurrection of Lazarus in chapter eleven. After Lazarus had been raised from the dead and had come out of the tomb, he was "bound hands and feet with burial cloths, and his face was bound about with a handkerchief" (11:44). Hence, Jesus said to the people, "Loose him and let him go" (11:44). Lazarus needed help to be released from his burial cloths because he was the resurrected one, not the resurrecting One. But the Lord Jesus was the resurrecting One, not the resurrected one. He rose up by Himself and did not need the help of angels. The angels were merely observers. If the angels had removed the wrappings, it would have meant that the Lord was unable to rise up from the dead Himself.

I believe that at a certain point the Lord might have said to death, "Death, your time is over. Now I shall rise up, walk out of your domain, remove the wrappings from off My body, put everything in a good order, and leave it in the tomb as a testimony that I have raised Myself up from among the dead." Then the Lord might have said good-bye to death and walked away. In principle, at least, it must have been this way. The Lord was not in a rush. He did not run excitedly away from the tomb like a kidnap victim who hurriedly flees after he has been released. No, the Lord was at peace and very much at ease. He might simply have taken a good look at death, finding that it was powerless to do anything with Him. Although death tried its best to retain Him, this was impossible. Being very much at ease, the Lord removed the wrappings, folded the handkerchief, and put them in a good order. Death watched Him as He easily did this. He was unafraid and nothing threatened Him. He might have said, "Death, I have finished My mission. You can do nothing with Me, and I am not afraid of you. Now is the time for Me to walk out of your domain. I am not in a hurry. I could stay here for another day if I wanted to, but now it's time to leave." This was the true situation when the Lord rose from the dead.

The testimony of the Lord's resurrection was from two

sides--from man and from the angels. As we have seen, all the wrappings were offered to the Lord by two honorable disciples. Eventually, what they provided the Lord out of their love for Him became a solid and substantial testimony of His resurrection. This was the testimony from man's side. As we shall see later, God sent two angels to be a testimony from the heavens. Hence, there were two sides of the testimony of the Lord's resurrection, one from man on earth and the other from the angels in heaven. Praise the Lord that both man and angels, earth and heaven, are a testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

LIFE PROCESSED FOR MULTIPLICATION

(4)

This message is the continuation of the last one.

D. Discovered by the Seeking Ones

Although the Lord's resurrection had been accomplished, the discovery of it required the seeking of His disciples. The discovery of His resurrection was made by the loving seekers of the Lord Jesus. John chapter twenty shows the kind of person who will realize the Lord's resurrection, the kind of person to whom the vision of His resurrection can be disclosed. How can we have the revelation of the Lord's resurrection? There is such a wonderful and mysterious fact as the Lord's resurrection accomplished in this universe. But how can we know it? How can it be revealed to us? How can we have this vision? Only by loving the Lord and seeking Him. The fact of the Lord's resurrection has been accomplished, but it must be discovered and seen. Before Mary the Magdalene came to the tomb, the resurrection in life had in fact been accomplished. But Mary had to discover it by loving and seeking the Lord. This lays down a principle. Today the resurrection of Christ is an accomplished fact, yet so many people have not seen it. They have never come to the point where they have discovered it. Have you discovered the fact of Christ's resurrection? Have you received the revelation or vision that the Lord has been resurrected? I know you have the knowledge, the doctrine, and the story of His resurrection, but have you discovered the fact of it

in the spirit? If we would make such a discovery, we must first love the Lord and seek Him.

Why is it that when you come to a meeting you have nothing to minister or to testify about? It is simply because you have not made the discovery and lack the revelation. Look at Mary. What did she do after she made this discovery? She ran to the disciples to tell them something new. I am sure that when you meet the Lord in the morning and make a new discovery about Him, you will surely come to the evening meeting and burst out with something to tell us. The spiritual discovery, the spiritual revelation, the spiritual vision, depends very much upon seeking the Lord. If you do not seek Him, it will be rather difficult for you to share anything of the Lord.

Mary the Magdalene had no knowledge. She was absolutely in life and was altogether not in the tree of knowledge. She did not know anything. In a human sense, it was foolish for her to come to the tomb and especially to come early in the morning. Nevertheless, she was the first to discover the fact of the Lord's resurrection.

Sisters, you may love the Lord very much and might be the first to see the fact of His resurrection, but, like Mary, you still need the brothers to help you. Mary immediately ran to the two leading brothers, Peter and John, and told them of her discovery. It is interesting to note that when Mary went to the disciples, only two responded and went to the tomb. Why did the others not go? Possibly because, on the one hand, they were not seeking, and, on the other hand, they were lazy. They probably loved their bed. Only Peter and John ran to the tomb to see what Mary had discovered. John, who might have been younger than Peter, outran Peter and arrived at the tomb first, but, for some reason, he did not go in. Peter, who had more experience, was the first to enter into the tomb. When the two brothers saw the linen cloths and the napkin folded and left in a good order in the tomb, they were clear that the Lord must have resurrected from the dead. They were

much clearer than their foolish sister who had said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" (20:2). Peter might have said, "I sympathize with my foolish sister and do not blame her. But now I realize that the Lord was not taken away. Look at the wrappings. He has certainly walked out of the tomb."

This shows us a picture of how to seek the Lord. The first one who saw the tomb was Mary, and the first person who entered into the tomb was Peter. Here the brothers are really the brothers because they are clearer in the mind and find it easier to believe the fact than the sisters do. The two brothers saw the empty tomb, the linen cloths, and the napkin, and were very clear that the Lord must have been resurrected. Although they saw the fact, realized it, and believed in it objectively, they did not have the experience subjectively. After being satisfied with the objective fact they left the tomb. However, Mary, the sister, lingered, for she was still waiting, looking, and expecting. It was her additional seeking that gained the experience of the Lord's resurrection. Since the Lord revealed Himself to her, she not only received the fact but also the experience. She was the first to experience the resurrected Lord.

Here we see a picture disclosing the two sides related to the Lord--the fact and the experience. You may believe in the fact but not have the experience. Peter and John realized and believed in the fact, but they lacked the experience of the Lord's resurrection. Mary had both the fact and the experience. For example, you may have the fact of the Lord's crucifixion but fail to experience the cross. In the same principle, you may have the fact of the Lord's resurrection but fail to experience the resurrected Lord. We need both the fact and the experience. Mary firstly saw the revelation of the fact, but she was not satisfied merely with the fact. She went further and received the experience of the resurrected Lord.

As a rule, the brothers are usually very objective and the sisters very subjective. According to the Scriptural

principle, the man always represents the objective truth while the woman always represents the subjective experience. As an illustration, Abraham represents the doctrine of faith or the truth of faith, but Sarah represents the experience of obedience. Faith is related to truth and is objective; obedience is related to experience and is subjective. Likewise, Peter and John believed in the fact of the Lord's resurrection objectively, but Mary experienced it subjectively. Many Christians today have never seen the fact of the Lord's resurrection. While a few definitely have the revelation of the Lord's resurrection, they only have the revelation, not the experience.

In the church life the brothers are always more clear than the sisters. They are clear in the truth and in the fact, but they do not care much for experience. Perhaps Peter said to John, "Undoubtedly the Lord has resurrected from the dead. Let's not waste time staying here. Let's go back." Although the two leading brothers went back, Mary, the foolish sister, remained, weeping. Mary might have said, "Who took the Lord away? I want to know where He is now." But the two brothers could not help her. Many times in the church life the brothers cannot help the sisters. Thinking them to be foolish, we leave them where they are and go back home to rest. We are clear about Romans 6, having seen and believed the fact. Why must the sisters pray with tears and waste time? This is the real situation in every local church. All the leading brothers are the clear ones, and all the sisters are the weeping ones. Eventually, however, it is the foolish, weeping ones who have the experience. They do not care for the truth, the facts, or even for the faith. They only care for a real touch with the living Lord, declaring, "I don't care about the wrapping. I only care for Him. I want to be with Him and touch Him. Tell me where you have put Him." The sisters often pray this way in the prayer meeting. During the past forty years, I have been offended many times by these foolish, weeping prayers. But we brothers must learn not to blame or rebuke the sisters. We must appreciate the fact that we have so many foolish, weeping, seeking

sisters, for they are the first to have the real experience of the Lord's resurrection.

Possibly the Lord Jesus Himself did not intend to meet any of His disciples. Being the firstfruit of resurrection, He should be presented to the Father in His newness and freshness. He should not firstly have been met by anyone other than the Father. But due to the earnestness and to the seeking heart of this sister, the Lord Jesus could not stay away from her. Thus, He appeared to her. When she tried her best to touch Him, the Lord seemed to say, "No, I am just for you to look at. Do not touch Me. My freshness in resurrection must be for the Father. After I present the freshness of My resurrection to My Father, I'll come back to you. That will be the time for you to enjoy My resurrection." We brothers must learn the lesson of the sisters. In many instances, we brothers just hold the facts with faith, but we do not have the experiences like the sisters do.

If we want to see something more of the Lord, we must have more fellowship with Him. Mary's seeing the Lord was the best morning watch. In this morning watch, she met the Lord and the Lord met her; she prayed to the Lord and the Lord spoke to her; she fellowshipped with the Lord and the Lord gave His word and His revelation to her. As we shall see, the Lord revealed to her that, from then on, the disciples were His brothers. He also told her that He was going to the Father and that the Father was not only His Father and His God but also their Father and their God. This revelation was brought by Mary to the brothers.

On that morning, Mary saw the tomb, the two angels, and the Lord. At first, she did not recognize the Lord, but eventually, after the Lord had called her by name, she did recognize Him. When did the Lord come to Mary? Since the tomb was empty, the Lord was not there. Since He had not yet ascended into heaven, He was not there either. Therefore, after He left the tomb and before He went to heaven, where was the Lord? I believe that the Lord was near the tomb but not in it. Although He was near the

tomb. Peter. John, and Mary did not see Him at first. Eventually, the Lord revealed Himself to Mary, but even before He did so, He was already there. The Lord was present the whole time, but Mary did not know it. She thought that He had been taken away by someone. Even when Peter and John were there, I believe that the Lord was also there. They simply did not recognize Him, and the Lord did not reveal Himself to them. Do you realize that at this very moment the Lord is here, but we do not realize it and it has not been revealed?

In this chapter it is quite evident that there are three kinds of disciples. The first kind is represented by Mary, the second by Peter and John, and the third by the lazy ones. The lazy disciples had no revelation or discovery of the Lord's resurrection. Peter and John had the discovery and the revelation but not the experience. Mary had the discovery, the revelation, and the experience. What is shown in this record is also true of Christians today. This record reveals the accomplished fact of Christ's resurrection, but the discovery of His resurrection still requires our seeking, and the experience of His resurrection demands even further seeking. In other words, the revelation depends upon our seeking, and the experience depends upon our further seeking. We must first seek the Lord before we can discover His resurrection, and we must seek the Lord even more before we can experience His resurrection.

E. Testified to by the Angels Sent by God

The resurrection of Christ was not only discovered by the seeking ones but also testified to by the angels sent from God (20:11-13). When Mary looked into the tomb, she saw "two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (20:12). These two angels were like the cherubim on the propitiation cover, watching and observing how the

glorious Lord, who is the resurrection, carried out the wonderful task of walking away from the threatening of death. These two observing angels became the strongest witness that the Lord Jesus had resurrected. As the linen cloths and the napkin were the testimony from man's side, the angels were the testimony from God's side. All these were seen only by a sister who sought the Lord.

F. Bringing Forth Many "Brothers"

In 20:17 the Lord Jesus said to Mary, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." In this verse the Lord refers to His ascending to the Father. On the day of His resurrection, the Lord ascended to the Father. This was a secret ascension, the ultimate fulfillment of the going predicted in 16:7, forty days prior to His public ascension before the eyes of His disciples (Acts 1:9-11). On the day of resurrection, early in the morning, He ascended to satisfy the Father, and late in the evening He returned to the disciples (20:19). The freshness of His resurrection must first be for the Father's enjoyment, as the firstfruit of the harvest was, in type, brought first to God.

In her experience, Mary nearly experienced what God the Father experienced shortly thereafter. The Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Mary even earlier than He did to the Father when He ascended into heaven. Mary saw the resurrected Lord earlier than God the Father did. At that time, Mary was trying to touch the Lord, but He forbade her. It was sufficient for her to see Him. As we have seen, the Lord prevented her from touching Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father. He had to present Himself to the Father and contact Him first. When He came to the disciples in the evening of the same day, He asked them to touch Him (Luke 24:39). By these incidents we can realize that Mary was the first one to see the resurrected Lord.

The Lord Jesus also told Mary, "Go to My brothers."

Here we come to one of the greatest points in the Gospel of John, a point which not many Christians have seen clearly. Prior to His resurrection, the Lord never called His disciples "brothers." The most intimate term He used before that time was "friends." In 15:14 and 15 He said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his lord is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." But now, after His resurrection, His "friends" have become His "brothers." Through His resurrection, His disciples have been regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3) with the divine life released by His life-imparting death, as indicated in 12:24. All His disciples were regenerated in His resurrection. First Peter 1:3 says that we were regenerated through Christ's resurrection. It was through His resurrection that the Lord imparted Himself as the Spirit into all His disciples. By receiving His life, they were all reborn, regenerated, and became His brothers. Remember that on the cross the Lord told His mother to take His disciple John as her son, and that He told His disciple to take her as his mother (19:26-27). On the day of His resurrection, the Lord's word on the cross was fulfilled. At that time, John became a brother to the Lord; hence, the Lord's mother became his mother.

By the resurrection of Christ, the disciples became the brothers of the Lord because they now had the same life as the Lord. The Lord regenerated them by His resurrection, and thus they were no longer merely disciples and friends but also His brothers. The Lord was the one grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died and grew up in resurrection to bring forth many grains for the producing of the loaf which is His Body (1 Cor. 10:17). Before His death, He was only one, unique grain. But after His resurrection that one, unique grain became the many grains. This is the multiplication of life through the death and resurrection of Christ.

In His resurrection, the Only Begotten Son became "the Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). The

"many brothers" are those who have been regenerated through His resurrection with the divine life released by His life-imparting death. Through His resurrection, the divine life of the Father has been imparted into us. Thus, we all have become sons of God. In this way the unique Son of God has become the "Firstborn among many brothers." Therefore, the Lord did not tell Mary, "Go to My friends"; He said, "Go to My brothers."

Before His resurrection, Christ, as the Father's Only Begotten Son, was the Father's individual expression. Now, through His death and resurrection, the individual expression of the Father has become the corporate expression of God the Father in the Son.

Christ's many brothers as the "many sons" of the Father are the "church" (Heb. 2:10-12) to be a corporate expression of God the Father in the Son. This is God's ultimate intention. Therefore, the many brothers are the propagation of the Father's life and the multiplication of the Son in the divine life. Hence, in the Lord's resurrection, God's eternal purpose is fulfilled.

Let us consider Hebrews 2:10-12 in more detail. Verse 10 says, "For it was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Recovery Version). The One "for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things" is the Father, and the Captain of salvation is the Son. The Father is bringing many sons into glory.

Verse 11 says, "For both He Who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Recovery Version). In this verse, "He Who sanctifies" is the sanctifying Son, and "those who are being sanctified" are the sanctified sons. The "one" here refers to the Father. Thus, the Son, who is the Sanctifier, and we, who are the sanctified, are all of one Father. Therefore, "He is not ashamed to call us brothers." When did He first call us "brothers"? In John 20:17, when He told Mary, "Go to My brothers." Why is He

not ashamed to call us brothers? Because we all have received His Father's life. After His resurrection, all His disciples received the Father's life. Now, because both He and we are of the same source and have the same life with the same nature, He is not ashamed to call us brothers.

Verse 12 continues, "Saying, I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise unto You." Here we see the Son declaring the Father's "name" to His brothers, that is, making the Father known as the source of life and as the begetting God. This verse also tells us that the Son sings hymns of praise to the Father in the midst of the church. By this we see that the brothers are the church. I have spent much time to find another verse which says that the Lord Jesus sings praises to the Father. Eventually, being unable to find one, I realized that whenever His brothers sing praises to the Father He sings in their singing. While we are singing, He sings in our singing.

G. Making His Father and God Theirs

In 20:17 the Lord Jesus also said to Mary, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." Through His life-imparting death and resurrection, the Lord has made His disciples one with Him. Therefore, His Father is also His disciples' Father, and His God is also their God. Through His resurrection, they have received both the Father's life and God's divine nature. By making them His brothers, He has imparted the Father's life and God's divine nature into them. By making His Father and His God theirs, He has brought them into His position--the Son's position--before the Father and God that they might participate in His Father and God in resurrection. Thus, in life and nature inwardly and in position outwardly, His brothers are the same as He is. Inwardly we have the reality, and outwardly we have the position. The Father is not only the Father of the Lord Himself; He is also the Father of the disciples. Henceforth, all the

disciples are sons of God. We are the same as the Firstborn, and He is the same as we are. This is the church in His resurrection. Praise Him!

Why did the Lord tell Mary that He was ascending to the Father and to God? On the one hand, the Lord is the Son of God; therefore, He will see the Father in the Person of the Son. On the other hand, He is still the Son of Man; therefore, He will see God in the person of man. We also are men on one hand and sons of God on the other. Since we are men, God is God to us; since we are the sons of God, God is also the Father to us. At this very moment, because we are both men and sons of God, we have both God and the Father. All the disciples, as human beings, have become brothers to the Lord and sons to the Father because they have received the same life as the Lord. This is the revelation which Mary brought to the Lord's brothers.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(1)

We have seen that the Gospel of John is composed of two major sections. The first section, comprising chapters one through thirteen, unveils the eternal Word incarnated coming to bring God into man. The second section, comprising chapters fourteen through twenty-one, reveals Jesus crucified and Christ resurrected going to prepare the way to bring man into God, and as the Spirit coming to abide and live in the believers for the building of God's habitation. In this second major section there are four subsections: life's indwelling for the building of God's habitation (14:1--16:33); life's prayer (17:1-26); life processed for multiplication (18:1--20:13, 17); and life in resurrection (20:14-21:25). In John 14, 15, and 16, the Lord expounded how He would come into us to be our life and to be mingled and built together with us that there might be a mutual abode for God and man. This mingling of divinity with humanity is the very organism in which the Triune God grows and expresses Himself. After expounding this matter, the Lord prayed for it in chapter seventeen. After praying, He went through the process of examination, death, and resurrection. Having passed through the process and having come out of death, He is now the life in resurrection. When He is in resurrection, He is life as the Spirit, for He is the Spirit in resurrection. In this message we need to see how this life is now the Spirit in resurrection.

I. APPEARING TO HIS SEEKER

As life in resurrection, the Lord firstly appeared to His

seeker (20:14-18). This was His first appearing after His resurrection. Mary, however, could only see Him; she could not touch Him because the freshness of His resurrection was reserved for the Father. In His appearing to Mary, the Lord unfolded the revelation of the issue of His resurrection--the "brothers" and the "Father" (20:17). This is the revelation of the brotherhood and the Fatherhood. In His resurrection, all His disciples have become His brothers, and His Father has become their Father.

II. ASCENDING TO THE FATHER

In 20:17 the Lord Jesus said to Mary, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." After He appeared in resurrection to His seeker, He secretly ascended to the Father on the day of resurrection. Many Christians have never seen this matter of the Lord's secret ascension. Before the Lord ascended publicly in the sight of the disciples forty days later (Acts 1:9-11), He ascended secretly early in the morning of the day of His resurrection to the Father for the Father's enjoyment and satisfaction.

The Lord offered Himself to the Father as "a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest" for the "wave offering" (Lev. 23:10-11, 15). According to the Old Testament, the harvest was taken to the barn, but the firstfruits were always brought into the temple as a wave offering (Exo. 23:19; Lev. 23:10-11). As we have seen, the wave offering, which was offered with a back-and-forth motion, typifies resurrection, and the heave offering, which was offered with an up-and-down motion, typifies ascension. The firstfruit, which was brought into the temple and offered in the presence of God as a wave offering, typifies Christ coming into the presence of God for His satisfaction early on the morning of the day of His resurrection.

Have you ever noticed that Leviticus 23:11 speaks of "the sheaf"? A sheaf is not just one stock of harvested grain but many stocks which have been bound together. What is the significance of this? Matthew 27:52 and 53 say that after the Lord Jesus died, "the graves were opened;

and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Thus, the firstfruits of resurrection were not only the Lord Himself, but also the others who had been raised from the dead. Together they were a sheaf.

The Lord's secret ascension was the fulfillment of the going predicted in 16:7, where He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." John 16:7 was not fulfilled in Acts 2 but in John 20. Most Christians think that it was fulfilled in Acts 2, but it was fulfilled in chapter twenty of John.

III. COMING AS THE SPIRIT TO BE BREATHED INTO THE BELIEVERS

A. With the Resurrected Body

Christ ascended to the heavens with a resurrected body, and now, in John 20, He comes back to the disciples also with a resurrected body (Luke 24:37-40; 1 Cor. 15:44). With a resurrected body, the Lord came into the room where the disciples were with "the doors shut" (20:19). Since the doors were shut, how could He enter with a body of bones and flesh? Our limited mentality cannot comprehend it, but it is a fact, and we must receive it according to the divine revelation. According to Luke 24:37-40, the Lord showed His disciples His physical body, and according to 1 Corinthians 15:44, this body was a resurrected body. Consider the illustration of a carnation seed. A carnation seed has a tiny, round body. But when it has been planted and has grown out of the ground, it has a stem and a blossom. Is this not also a body? Before the carnation seed was sown into the ground, it had a little body. After growing out of the ground, it had a different body. This is exactly what Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:44: "It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body." The body is sown in one form and raised up from the ground in another form. The one sown is the original,

natural body, and the one grown up is the resurrected body. After His resurrection, Christ had a resurrected body; yet it was physical and could still be touched. Even though the doors were shut, Christ entered into the room with this body.

Although the Lord had a resurrected body, the prints of the nails were still in His hands and feet (20:20, 27; Luke 24:40). Why did the resurrection not heal the prints, and why was His side still open? We do not understand it, but we know that it is so. Do not try to know so many things by your mentality. Do not trust in your limited ability to know, for there are a great many mysteries in this universe. Even we ourselves are a mystery. Tell me, where are your conscience and your soul? Are you able to locate your spirit? Many scientists refuse to believe in anything which they cannot see or understand. This is nonsense. I would ask those scientists if they have ever seen their conscience or their physical life. Although we have a physical life, we have never seen it. If we cannot understand ourselves, then how about the Triune God, the Divine Being?

B. Fulfilling the Promise to Meet with the Disciples for Their Joy

After the Lord showed them both His hands and His side, the disciples "rejoiced when they saw the Lord" (20:20). This was a fulfillment of the Lord's promise in 16:19 and 22, where He said, "You therefore now indeed have sorrow; but I shall see you again and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you." Now the disciples saw the newborn "child" (16:21). who was the resurrected Lord born in His resurrection as the Son of God (Acts 13:33). As we shall now see, this fulfillment by His coming back to His disciples brought them five blessings: His presence, His peace, His commission, the Holy Spirit, and the authority to represent Him (v. 23).

C. Bringing Peace to the Disciples

In both 20:19 and 21 the Lord said to His disciples,

"Peace be to you." This took place in the first meeting of the Lord with His disciples after His resurrection. Peace is something which is often brought to us in the meetings. Many times we need to come to the meetings before we can have peace. The Lord brought peace to the church. Hence, we must attend the meetings, for it is in the meetings that we enjoy peace.

D. Commissioning the Disciples

After saying, "Peace be to you," the Lord said to His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (20:21). The Lord said that just as the Father sent Him, so He would send us in the same way. The sending of the Lord is the same as the sending of the Father. The Father sent Him, and He will send us. By what way did the Father send the Lord? It was only by the way of the Father's being in the Son. The Father sent the Son by being in the Son. The Father's life, nature, presence, and the Father Himself came with Him. The Lord sent His disciples with Himself as life and as everything to them. In the same way, the Son now sends us. He sends us with His life, His nature, and His presence. As the Father sent the Son by being one with the Son and by being within the Son, so in the same way the Son sends us by being one with us and by being within us.

The way the Lord sends us is by breathing the Holy Spirit into us (20:22). This was why, immediately after saying, "I also send you," He breathed the Holy Spirit into them. By His breathing, He entered as the Spirit into the disciples to abide in them forever (14:16). Hence, wherever His disciples are sent, He is always with them. He is one with them. As we shall see, to breathe the Holy Spirit into us means that the Lord breathes Himself into us. The Lord sends us by being within us. The only way that the Lord can be one with us and be within us is by breathing Himself into us. Therefore, we must receive the Spirit, which is the reality of Christ. If we have received the Spirit of Christ, we have received the reality of Christ. In

other words, this simply means that we have received Christ Himself. By this we see that the Lord sends us by breathing Himself into us.

E. Breathing the Holy Spirit into the Disciples

Verse 22 says, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." The Lord is the Word who is the eternal God (1:1). In the Gospel of John, the Word passes through a long process and eventually becomes the breath, the pneuma, that He might get into the believers. For the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose, He took two steps. Firstly, He took the step of incarnation to become a man in the flesh (1:14), to be "the Lamb of God" to accomplish redemption for man (1:29), to declare God to man (1:18), and to manifest the Father to His believers (14:9-11). Secondly, He took the step of death and resurrection to be transfigured into the Spirit that He might impart Himself into His believers as their life and their everything, and that He might bring forth many sons of God, His many brothers, for the building of His Body, the church, the habitation of God, to express the Triune God for eternity. Originally He was the eternal Word. Through His incarnation, He then became flesh to accomplish God's redemption, and through His death and resurrection He became the Spirit to be everything and to do everything for the completion of God's building.

Never forget that the eternal Word took two steps: the step to become flesh (1:14) and the step to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). We must remember these two "becomings"--becoming flesh and becoming the life-giving Spirit. The eternal Word firstly became flesh and then, as the last Adam, He became the life-giving Spirit. The first step was the step of incarnation, and the second step was that of resurrection. The first step was for redemption and the second step was for life-imparting. After becoming

flesh to be the Lamb of God to shed His blood for our redemption, He became in resurrection the life-giving Spirit for the purpose of imparting Himself into us as life. Not many Christians have seen this clearly. Most Christians only realize that Christ took the step of incarnation for the accomplishment of redemption. They do not see the second step--that in resurrection the last Adam in the flesh became the life-giving Spirit that He might come into us to be our life. But the Gospel of John clearly reveals both steps. In chapter one, the eternal Word became flesh to be the Lamb of God. In chapter twenty, this wonderful One took another step, the step of resurrection, to become the life-giving Spirit. Thus, in the evening of the day of His resurrection He came and breathed Himself as the Spirit into the disciples.

This Gospel testifies that the Lord is God (1:1-2; 5:17-18; 10:30-33; 14:9-11; 20:28), the life (1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6), and the resurrection (11:25). Chapters one through seventeen prove that He is God among men. Men are the contrast to Him as God. Chapters eighteen and nineteen prove that He is life in the environment of death. Death, or the environment of death, is the contrast to Him as life. Chapters twenty and twenty-one prove that He is the resurrection in the midst of the old creation, the natural life. The old creation, the natural life, is the contrast to Him as the resurrection, of which the Spirit is the reality. As the resurrection, He can only be realized in the Spirit. Hence, He is the Spirit in resurrection. He is God among men (ch. 1-17), He is life in death (ch. 18-19), and He is the Spirit in resurrection (ch. 20-21).

1. The Fulfillment of His Promise

The Holy Spirit in verse 22 is the Spirit expected in 7:39 and promised in 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; and 16:7-8, 13. Thus, the Lord's breathing of the Holy Spirit into the disciples was the fulfillment of His promise of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. As we shall see, this fulfillment differs from the one in Acts 2:1-4. In chapter fourteen the Lord promised that He would ask the Father to send another Comforter. Here in chapter twenty He brings to

His disciples the other Comforter, the Spirit of reality. Now the Spirit of reality has come into His disciples to be within them; now the disciples know that the Lord is in the Father and that the Father is in the Lord; and now they are in the Lord and the Lord is in them. They realize that they are now one with the Triune God. Therefore, all that the Lord had spoken to them in chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen is fulfilled at this very moment. We must read those three chapters in order to understand what is happening here. The fulfillment here is just that the Lord went by death and resurrection and now comes to the disciples as the Spirit, coming as the second Comforter to be their reality that they might be one with the Triune God. At this time the disciples were happy and glad. The Lord had told them they would not see Him for a little while (16:16). Now, after a little while, the disciples saw the Lord again, fulfilling what He had spoken in chapters fourteen through sixteen.

2. Different from the Fulfillment in Acts 2

The fulfillment in 20:22 is different from that in Acts 2:1-4. Most Christians, however, think that the promise made in John 14, 15, and 16 was fulfilled in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, thinking that the Comforter came on the day of Pentecost. The fulfillment in Acts 2:1-4 was the fulfillment of the promise of the Father given in Joel 2:28-32 and referred to by the Lord in Luke 24:49, which says, "Behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." The Lord reminded the disciples of the Father's promise after His resurrection, close to the time of His public ascension. Everybody agrees that this promise of the Father of being "clothed with power from on high" was fulfilled in Acts 2. The promise in John 14, 15, and 16, however, is not the Father's promise of power but the Son's promise of the Comforter. This promise of the Comforter was fulfilled on the day of the

Lord's resurrection. Before He reminded the disciples of the Father's promise, the promise of the Comforter made in John had already been fulfilled. After His resurrection, close to the time of His public ascension, the Lord reminded the disciples to wait for the Father's promise of power.

The fulfillment on the day of resurrection was the promise of the Holy Spirit as the life and the truth, the reality. The fulfillment on the day of Pentecost was the promise of the Holy Spirit as power. These are two aspects of the Holy Spirit. On the day of resurrection, the disciples got the Spirit of life as the reality of Christ, and fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, they received the Spirit of power. Pentecost simply means fifty days. On the first eighth day (this signifies resurrection), the Holy Spirit was received as the life and reality of Christ; on the eighth day (this signifies resurrection in resurrection), that is, on the first day of the eighth week, the Holy Spirit was received as the power and equipment for their work.

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts were both written by Luke. Luke's line is the line of power for work, and John's line is the line of life for life. If we read the Bible carefully, we shall see that the Spirit is firstly the Spirit of life and secondly the Spirit of power. In Luke's line the Spirit of power is likened to clothes which we put on. In John's line, the Spirit is likened to water which we take in by drinking. Clothes are something outward to cover us, and drink is something inward to fill us. According to Luke's line, when the Spirit comes, it comes upon us (Acts 1:8). In John's line, on the contrary, the Spirit comes into us, for the Spirit of reality abides in us (14:17). Thus, John's line is for life in us, and Luke's line is for power upon us. Furthermore, if we read Acts 4 carefully, we shall see why power is likened to a cloak, a uniform. A policeman's uniform gives him authority. Likewise, the Holy Spirit came upon Peter and the other disciples as power to be their uniform. But on the day of resurrection, the Spirit was breathed into them. This was not for outward clothing but for inward filling. In Luke's line the Spirit of power is

also likened to "a rushing violent wind" (Acts 2:2). The wind is for power. In John's line, the Spirit of life is likened to breath. Breath is not for power; it is for life. In John 20:22 the Spirit as the breath was breathed as life into the disciples for their life. By breathing the Spirit into the disciples, the Lord imparted Himself as life and everything into them. Thus, all that He had spoken in chapters fourteen through sixteen was fulfilled.

As the falling into the ground to die and the growing out of the ground transforms the grain of wheat into another new and lively form, so the death and resurrection of the Lord transfigured Him from the flesh into the Spirit. As "the last Adam" in the flesh, through the process of death and resurrection, He "became a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). As He is the embodiment of the Father, so the Spirit is the realization, the reality, of Him. It is as the Spirit that He was breathed into the disciples. It is as the Spirit that He was received into His believers and flowed out of them as "rivers of living water" (7:38-39). It is as the Spirit that through His death and resurrection He came back to the disciples, entered into them as their Comforter, and began to abide in them (14:16-17). It is as the Spirit that He can live in the disciples and they can live by and with Him (14:19). It is as the Spirit that He can abide in the disciples and they can abide in Him (14:20; 15:4-5). It is as the Spirit that He can come with the Father to His lover and "make an abode with him" (14:23). It is as the Spirit that He can make all that He is and has to be fully realized by the disciples (16:13-16). It is as the Spirit that He came to meet with His "brothers" as "the church" to declare the Father's name to them and to praise Him in their midst (Heb. 2:11-12). It is as the Spirit that He can send His disciples with His commission, with Himself as life and everything to them, in the same way that the Father sent Him (20:21). Hence, the disciples are qualified to represent Him with His authority in the fellowship of His Body (20:23).

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(2)

This message is the continuation of the foregoing one.

3. The Comforter

The Spirit breathed into the believers was the Comforter (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). This Comforter is the "Paraclete," the One along side of us who takes care of our cause and affairs. The Greek word translated Comforter is the same word that is rendered Advocate in 1 John 2:1. If we put 1 John 2:1 together with John 14:16, we see that today the Lord Jesus is our Advocate at the right hand of God in the heavens and, at the same time, He is also the Comforter in our spirit. In the heavens, He is the Advocate with the Father; in our spirit He is the Comforter. This is why He is the ladder upon whom the angels of God are ascending and descending (1:51). As the ascended Lord, He is our Paraclete with the Father, taking care of our case in the heavens. As the indwelling Spirit, He is the "Paraclete with us" (14:16-17), the One along side of us who is taking care of us. How I appreciate Him as the Comforter! He is both here and there at the same time.

4. The Spirit of Reality

The Spirit is the Spirit of reality (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Son is the embodiment of the Father with His fullness (Col. 2:9), and the Spirit is the realization, the reality, of the Son with His fullness (16:13-15; 1:16). The Father with all His fullness is embodied and expressed in the Son. Apart from the Son, no man can see and contact the Father. The Son with all His fullness is revealed and

realized as the Spirit. Outside the Spirit, no man can receive or experience the Son. The Spirit is the reality of the Triune God for our experience.

5. The Spirit of the Glorified Jesus

The Spirit breathed into the disciples was also the Spirit of the glorified Jesus (7:39). Before Christ's resurrection, the Spirit was just the Spirit of God having only the divine element. But after His resurrection it became the Spirit of the glorified man Jesus, having both the divine element and the human element. The Spirit of God has thus become such an all-inclusive Spirit.

Our God today is the "processed" God; He is no longer the same as He was. Before His incarnation, He was only God with His divinity. By passing through the steps of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, He has become the "processed" God. Please do not reject this concept or attempt to argue with it. In eternity past, He was God. One day, He was incarnated as a man and lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, passing through the experiences of human life. Was that not a process? Then He was put to death by being nailed to a cross. He entered death, visited it, passed through it, and eventually walked out of it. Was that not also a process? Certainly it was. Consider the process which the Passover lamb passed through. As the real Passover Lamb, Christ also has passed through a process. Through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the very God is now different from what He was before the incarnation. Never again will He be the same as He was in creation. In creation He was merely God, the Divine Being. But after passing through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, what a God He has become! Now He is God not only with divinity but also with humanity, human living, the all-inclusive crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. He is now such a wonderful Person with divinity, humanity, and so many virtues attributes, and attainments. This is our God today who reaches us and enters into us as the all-inclusive Spirit. This is the processed God for our

enjoyment. Today we are enjoying such a processed God. Although some Christians may criticize me for using the term "processed," the more they attempt to write books criticizing it, the more they will see the light. The truth is the truth. We are enjoying the "processed" God, and this "processed" God today is the life in resurrection. The very reality of this resurrection is the life-giving Spirit. Hence, the life-giving Spirit is the life in resurrection. Praise Him that after His resurrection, He became the life in resurrection which is the Spirit of the glorified Jesus.

6. "The Spirit of Jesus, " "The Spirit of Christ," "The Spirit of Jesus Christ"

This Spirit is also the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Jesus mainly refers to the Spirit of the Lord as a man living on earth and passing through all the human sufferings for the accomplishment of our redemption (Acts 16:7). The Spirit of Christ mainly refers to the Spirit of the Lord resurrected as the divine Person with the uplifted humanity who dwells in our spirit as our life (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit of Jesus Christ indicates that the Spirit today is the all-inclusive Spirit of the Lord as God and as man, including His divinity, His humanity, His human living, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension with all His divine attributes, human virtues, and attainments in His achievements. Hence, this all-inclusive Spirit has "the bountiful supply" (Phil. 1:19). Regardless of what situation we are in and what need we may have, this all-inclusive Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, can render the proper supply to meet our need. While the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians 1:19, he was suffering imprisonment. Under that kind of situation, he experienced the bountiful supply of the all-inclusive Spirit of the suffering Jesus and the resurrected Christ.

7. "The Last Adam" Becoming the "Life-giving Spirit"

As we have seen, 1 Corinthians 15:45 says that the "last Adam" became the life-giving Spirit." His first form was the flesh (1:14), and his second form is the Spirit.

Therefore, now the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). The Lord has taken two steps in order to become our experience. In the first step of incarnation, He took the form of the flesh with the blood for accomplishing redemption for us. In the second step of resurrection, He was transfigured into the form of the Spirit for imparting Himself into us as our life. Through all these, we have been redeemed and regenerated to partake of Him as our life and our everything.

8. The Spirit of Life

Romans 8:2 says that the Spirit is the Spirit of life. The Spirit of life is the breath of life breathed into and abiding in the disciples (14:16-17). This is for the life in John's line. For the power in Luke's line, the Spirit is likened to a mighty wind (Acts 2:2-4) blowing upon the disciples. In John's line, the Spirit is likened to the breath of life breathed on the disciples (20:22) and abiding in them as their life. This Spirit of life is nothing less than the resurrected Christ who is now the life-giving Spirit.

F. Authorizing the Disciples

After breathing on His disciples, the Lord said to them, "Whosesoever sins you forgive, their sins have been forgiven them; and whosesoever sins you retain, they have been retained" (20:23). Here we see that the Lord gave His disciples the authority to represent Him in forgiving people, granting them the authority to bind and loose. This is the authority to forgive people or to keep them under condemnation. Although the disciples had this authority, it was not to be exercised in themselves, but in the Holy Spirit. When we are in the Holy Spirit and filled

with the Holy Spirit, we have the authority to decide whether or not a person is forgiven by God. If we say that he has been forgiven, it must be so. But this authority can only be exercised when we are in the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, this authority must be in the fellowship of the Body and for the fellowship of the Body. It is in the fellowship of the Body that we have this authority to represent the Lord in forgiving people. This is also for the Body, that we, representing the Lord, may receive the God-forgiven people into the church, His Body.

G. The First Meeting of the Church before Pentecost

The gathering of the disciples in 20:19 in the evening of the day of the Lord's resurrection may be considered as the first meeting of the church before Pentecost. This meeting was to fulfill Psalm 22:22 according to Hebrews 2:10-12 for the Son to declare the Father's name and to praise the Father in the church. To declare the Father's name is to make the Father known to the disciples as the source of life that they might partake of His divine nature. To praise the Father in the church is to praise the Father in the praising of His believers in the church meetings. According to Psalm 22:22 and Hebrews 2:10-12, the resurrected Lord did both of these things in the first meeting of the church on the day of His resurrection.

After His resurrection, the Lord came to meet with His disciples, starting from the evening of the first day. Thus, in the Lord's resurrection, the matter of meeting with the saints is crucial. Mary the Magdalene met the Lord personally in the morning and obtained the blessing (20:16-18), but she still needed to be in the meeting with the saints in the evening to meet the Lord in a corporate way to obtain more and greater blessings (20:19-23). In this first meeting of the Lord with His disciples after His resurrection, we have the Lord's presence, the peace, the Lord's sending, the breathing, and the authority to bind

and loose. These are the blessings which the Lord brought to His disciples in that church meeting. However good Mary's fellowship was with the Lord during the morning watch, she still needed to come to the evening meeting to obtain all these blessings. These blessings are greater and more important. We may receive something from the Lord and even of the Lord during the morning watch, but this is something we need personally and individually. We must also come to the meetings to receive something more important. The morning watch and the church meetings are two aspects. We need the personal blessing of the first aspect as well as the corporate blessing of the second.

Thomas missed the first meeting the Lord held with His disciples after His resurrection. However, he was compensated for what he missed in that meeting by attending the second meeting (20:25-28). Oh, we must not miss any of the church meetings! We should not say that it does not matter and that we shall rest at home. If the Lord comes, we, like Thomas, may miss Him. Thomas missed the Lord's appearing. Due to his absence from that church meeting, he really lacked something. This chapter is full of revelation, but Thomas missed it all. He missed the revelation, the discovery, and the experience of the Lord's resurrection because he missed the morning watch and the church meeting. He missed the revelation that the disciples are the brothers of the Lord and the sons of God. He missed the peace, the breathing of the Holy Spirit, the divine commission, and the authority. He was saved and he was a brother, but because he did not attend that meeting, he missed a great deal.

In the mornings we should have the morning watch personally and individually, but in the evenings we must come to the church meetings. How we need to come together with the other brothers and sisters! Then the Lord will come with something more, something different, and something greater. Do not be proud of your wonderful experiences during morning watch, and do not say that morning watch by itself is good enough. You also need to

come to the church meetings and meet with the saints. Some of us miss the morning watch and some miss the evening meeting. But we must have a personal morning watch as well as attend the corporate evening meeting. The morning watch cannot replace the evening meeting, and the evening meeting cannot be a substitute for the morning watch. We need both. With God, everything is of two aspects. Even in contacting the Lord, there are two aspects, the personal and the corporate. For this matter, there are the morning watch in the morning and the meetings in the evening. Therefore, we must neglect neither the morning watch nor the church meetings. Mary received something new, fresh, and firsthand in the morning, and nothing could replace it. Nevertheless, she still needed something more--the peace, the sending, the breathing, and the commission. These things can only be received in the church meetings. The commission from the Lord is to the church, not to the individual. Thus, we must be in the church before we can be sent. The commission is a matter of the Body. Hence, we must be sent by the Lord in and through the church.

It is strange that this chapter never indicates that the Lord departed. It never tells us that He left the disciples. It is so strange that the Lord, with a physical body which could be touched, came in through the closed door. This means that, after His resurrection, the Lord was the Spirit. Because the risen Lord is now the Spirit, He can be with the disciples at any time and at every place. Since His resurrection, the Lord has no problems with time or space. The Lord can now be with us under any circumstances. Although we may shut the door, He is still with us. According to this chapter, we do not know from where He comes or when He comes and goes. I have read this chapter many times and I cannot find any indication where the Lord went. This means that after the resurrection, the Lord is the Spirit and is with us as the Spirit at any time, at any place, and under every circumstance. The Lord is always with us; the only difference is that sometimes we sense His presence and sometimes we do not. Even when we do not sense His

presence, He is still here. With us today, it is not a matter of His coming or going; it is a matter of His appearing or disappearing. When He comes, it means that He appears; when He goes, it means He disappears. Actually, however, He is here all the time. Whether we sense His presence or His absence, the Lord is still here. There is now no coming or going with the Lord. Now it is only the difference of His appearance or disappearance. Since He has accomplished everything, He has made Himself one with the disciples, and they are now one with Him.

IV. MEETING WITH THE BELIEVERS

A. "After Eight Days"

John 20:26 says, "And after eight days, His disciples were again within, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be to you." The gathering of the disciples here may be considered as the second meeting of the church held with the Lord's presence before Pentecost. As the phrase "after eight days" indicates, this gathering was on the second first day of the week, the second Lord's day after the Lord's resurrection. Praise the Lord that there was not only one Lord's day, but a second one. On the second Lord's day, Thomas was there. As we shall see, the Lord came this time purposely for Thomas, coming directly to him to meet him and to deal with him.

After His resurrection the Lord firstly appeared to His seeker, Mary the Magdalene. Then He ascended secretly to the Father, presenting the freshness of His resurrection to the Father for the Father's satisfaction. After this, He came back as the Spirit to breathe Himself into His disciples and to meet with His brothers. Now, in verse 26, we see that He is continuing to meet with His brothers. Never consider meeting with the believers as a small thing. It is a great thing, and we should not miss it. I

appreciate what Mary experienced early in the morning on the day of resurrection. She certainly had the best morning watch. That morning watch caused her to attend the evening meeting.

B. His Coming Being His Appearing

After the Lord came in verse 19, eight days before, there is no word or hint in John's record showing that the Lord left the disciples, because actually He stayed with them, though they were unconscious of His presence. After the Lord breathed Himself into the disciples, He abode in them and stayed with them. Since His disciples were not always conscious of His presence, there was the need of His appearing. His coming in this verse was not an actual coming; it was an appearing of His presence. Before His death, the Lord's presence was visible in the flesh. After His resurrection, the Lord's presence is invisible in the Spirit. His manifestations or appearings after His resurrection were to train the disciples to realize, to enjoy, and to practice His invisible presence, which is more available, prevailing, precious, rich, and real than His visible presence. This dear presence of His is just the Spirit in His resurrection whom He has breathed into the disciples and who will be with them all the time.

C. Dealing with the Unbelieving of the Disciple by the Prints of His Death Remaining in His Resurrected Body

In 20:27 the Lord said to Thomas, "Bring your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side, and be not unbelieving, but believing." Because Thomas had missed the first meeting with the Lord in resurrection, he had become very backward. Now the Lord appeared to deal with this unbelieving disciple by pointing to the prints of His death remaining in His resurrected body. As I have already mentioned, I do not know how the prints of His death could still remain in His resurrected body. Although Thomas had become the most backward, after the second meeting of the church, Thomas

became the first, for it was he who said, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). Thomas was the first to recognize that the Son of Man is the Lord (Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 14:9; 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11) and God (John 1:1-2; 5:17-18; 10:30-33; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; 1 John 5:20). Thomas was not only the first to realize that the Son of Man is the Lord and God; he was also the first to declare that Jesus is the Lord and the very God.

D. Training the Disciples

In 20:29 the Lord said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." The Lord not only appeared to deal with the unbelief of Thomas but also to train the disciples to believe without seeing. The Lord was training them to practice His invisible presence. Because the Lord's presence in resurrection today is not a visible presence but rather an invisible presence, we must believe without seeing. If we expect to see before we believe, we are wrong. We must practice believing without seeing because the Lord's presence now is not like it was when He was in the flesh. That was His visible presence. Now that His presence is invisible, we must exercise our faith to realize it. Although we cannot see Him, we have the assurance that He is with us. According to Acts 1:3-4, the Lord stayed with the disciples for forty days to train them to realize and to practice His invisible presence.

E. The Purpose of the Gospel of John

Verses 30 and 31 say, "Many other signs therefore Jesus did before His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." These verses indicate that the purpose of John's Gospel is to testify that Jesus is the Christ (1:41; 4:25, 29; 7:41-42; Matt. 16:16; Luke 2:11) and the Son of God (1:34, 49; 9:35; 10:36; Matt. 16:16; Luke 1:35). Together with 21:25, these verses

affirm that this Gospel is the record of a selection of things that serve the purpose of testifying to the matter of life and building.

The Christ is the title of the Lord according to His office, His mission. The Son of God is His title according to His Person. His Person is a matter of God's life, and His mission is a matter of God's work. He is the Son of God to be the Christ of God. He works for God by the life of God that men also, by believing in Him, may have God's life to become God's many sons and to work by God's life to build the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), thus fulfilling God's purpose of His eternal building.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(3)

The intention of the Holy Spirit in writing the Gospel of John was to show us that we have been made the sons of God by the resurrection of Christ. This is wonderful and glorious. We human beings were worthless, sinful, low, mean and dirty. But by the Lord's death and resurrection, we have been made the sons of God. We have the life of God, the nature of God, and the fullness of God. Thus, we are the sons of God, just like the Only Begotten Son of God. How wonderful! The Lord has given us the glory which the Father gave Him from eternity past. What is this glory? It is the life and nature of God which we have received and which make us the sons of God for the expression of God.

Being the sons of God simply means to be the expression and the manifestation of God. In other words, Christ is the Son of God who has the life and nature of God and who is the very manifestation of God. This is the glory which God the Father has given to the Son, and it is the glory which the Lord has given us by His death and resurrection. By His death and resurrection, the Lord released Himself and imparted Himself into us so as to make us exactly the same as He is. He is the Son of God, and He has made us to be the sons of God. He has the life and the nature of God, and He has made us to have the life and the nature of God. He is the very expression and manifestation of God, and He has made us to be the expression and manifestation of God. Therefore, we have

the same life, nature, and position that He has. This is the glory which the Lord has given us. It is truly wonderful!

As we have seen, the Lord sends us just as the Father sent Him (20:21). The Father sent Him by being in Him and by being one with Him. Likewise, Christ sends us by being in us and by being one with us. Now we are the expression and the manifestation of God because the Son of God has been imparted into us and is now within us. Since He is now the Spirit, He is, within us and is one with us. Hence, we have what He has, we are where He is and we are exactly the same as He is. Consequently, He could send us and give us the divine and heavenly commission. This is the purpose of God which was designed in eternity past. God's eternal purpose is simply to work Himself into us, mingling Himself with us so that we may become His expression and manifestation.

The Lord has accomplished all this by His death and resurrection. He was the one grain of wheat which was multiplied into many grains by death and resurrection (12:24). He was the Only Begotten Son who has been duplicated and multiplied into many sons (Heb. 2:10). By His resurrection He multiplied Himself, and after His resurrection He revealed to Mary that the disciples were now His brothers (20:17). He was the Only Begotten Son, but now He has become the Firstborn Son of many sons. Before His death, He was the only Son of God without any brothers. But after His resurrection, the Only Begotten Son became "the Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). Consider the illustration of a grain of wheat. After it falls into the ground and dies, it is resurrected and multiplied into many grains. Where is the original grain of wheat ? It is now in the many grains. In fact, it even is the many grains. In chapter twelve Christ was the one grain, but in chapter twenty He became the many grains. This was made possible only by death and resurrection. Before chapter eighteen, He was the Only Begotten Son of God, the only manifestation of God. Throughout the whole universe and among the entire human race, there was only one Person who was the very image and

manifestation of God. But after chapters eighteen and nineteen, we have many sons of God and many manifestations of God. Through the death and resurrection of the Only Begotten Son of God, the many sons have been produced. The one grain has now been multiplied into the many grains. Thus, all the Lord's disciples have become His brothers. These brothers can now be the very manifestation of God and can now represent the Triune God. They have been committed with the divine, heavenly mission to do something on this earth whereby they can express and manifest God. This is the meaning of the Gospel of John.

At the end of chapter twenty, everything is wonderful and complete. It seems that we have touched upon something divine, spiritual, heavenly, eternal, and beyond our conception, and that there is no need for chapter twenty-one. What is the meaning and purpose of this additional chapter? By the end of chapter twenty, the Lord has come back as the Spirit to be with the disciples and to be everything to them. Therefore, this Gospel is closed there (20:30-31). Thus far, this Gospel presents something divine, but we are human. It reveals something heavenly, but we are still on earth. It unfolds something eternal, but we are still in time. In other words, although we have been born again as the sons of God, we are still in this physical body. We are the sons of God, yet we are still the sons of man. We have been committed with the heavenly commission, but we still must provide food for our eating and our living. How can the disciples make a living? What should they do to carry out the Lord's commission? How should they follow Him after His resurrection? What will be their future? An additional chapter is needed to deal with these problems. Thus, chapter twenty-one covers some very practical matters. We cannot always just sit here, praising the Lord and shouting, "Hallelujah, everything is wonderful, heavenly, divine, and eternal! Oh, now we are the sons of God! We have the life and the nature of God, we have the glory of God, and we are the representatives and manifestation of God!" But what

about tomorrow? What shall we eat? Where shall we obtain money to buy food? We cannot fast all the time. Because of these additional problems, we have chapter twenty-one to help us take care of our living, our family, and the many other things on this earth.

If we compare the levels of chapters twenty and twenty-one, we shall see that the level of chapter twenty is very high, but that the level of chapter twenty-one seems quite low. The reason for this is that the last chapter deals with such practical matters as our living and eating. How we earn a living is very practical. We need to understand the reason for having chapter twenty-one after chapter twenty, for having an additional chapter after the conclusion. This chapter simply shows that after we have been wonderfully and divinely regenerated as the sons of God, we are still in this world, we are still on this earth, we are still in time, we still have some practical needs, and we still have some practical problems which must be solved. Because of this, the Holy Spirit continues to write another chapter.

V. MOVING AND LIVING WITH THE BELIEVERS

In 21:1-14 we see the Lord moving and living with the believers. In resurrection, the Lord was not only meeting with the brothers but also moving and living with them. He is not only with us when we meet; He is even with us in our daily walk. Wherever we go, He goes. Whatever we do, He is there with us. Whether we are right or wrong, the Lord is with us.

A. Moving with the Disciples to the Sea

In 21:1-11, the Lord moved with the disciples to the sea, manifesting Himself again to them at the sea of Tiberias. Peter, the leading brother, took the lead to

backslide into the world, saying, "I am going fishing" (21:3). Six of the other disciples said, "We also are coming with you." Not only did the six disciples follow Peter, but even the Lord Jesus followed him. The Lord did not say to Peter, "Peter, what are you doing? Are you backsliding from My call? Are you going back to the sea? I will never go with you. If you go there, you must go on your own." Some may say, "If I go to a movie theater, will the Lord Jesus go there with me?" Yes, He will go with you. He is not only with you in the meeting place but even in a movie theater. But He will not go with you to the theater to give you peace, but to trouble you, to stir you up, and to tell you to leave that place. Because He would be with you at the movie theater, you could never have a sweet enjoyment while being there. Eventually you would have to say, "I must forget about this movie, for Jesus will not leave me alone." This is life in resurrection. In resurrection, the Lord Jesus moved to the sea with the disciples.

1. Appearing Again to Train the Disciples to Realize His Invisible Presence

Verse 1 says, "After these things, Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias." This proves that His coming to the disciples in 20:26 was actually a manifestation, for here it says that He "manifested Himself again." Once again, He was training them to practice His invisible presence. It was not a matter of His coming but of His manifestation. Whether they were conscious of His presence or not, He was with them all the time. But for the sake of their weakness, He sometimes manifested His presence in order to strengthen their faith in Him.

2. Training the Disciples to Live by Faith in Him

The Lord manifested Himself to the disciples in chapter twenty-one to train them, especially Peter, to live by faith in Him. John 21:2-14 reveals two main things: the weakness of the regenerated people who have been committed with the divine mission of God, and the all-sufficient provision of the Lord who can help us live on this

earth for His commission, for His purpose, and for His testimony. Let us first consider the weakness of those who had been regenerated and commissioned by God.

a. Peter and Other Disciples Backsliding to Their Old Occupation from the Lord's Call

At the beginning of this chapter, we see a picture of seven disciples under the leadership of Peter (vv. 2-3). Along with Peter, there were Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. The number seven represents the whole Body. What were the whole Body and their leader doing? They were backsliding from the Lord's call to their old occupation (Matt. 4:19-20; Luke 5:3-11). Peter said to the other six disciples, "I am going fishing" (v. 3). His purpose in going fishing was to make a living, to get some food to eat. All the other disciples said, "We also are coming with you" (v. 3). Because Peter was the leader, the others went fishing under his leadership. Thus, the whole Body went fishing, forgetting their divine commission. The Lord had instructed them to tarry at Jerusalem, for they had been commissioned (Luke 24:49). The Lord had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the day when they would all be clothed with heavenly power from on high. But this picture in chapter twenty-one reveals that the disciples had left that position, giving up that ground. By leaving Jerusalem and coming to Galilee, they gave up their position. They had decided to go to the sea to fish. Peter and the other disciples went fishing because of their living. They might have lacked a sufficient supply of food and were very concerned about it. Peter might have said, "We only have food for one meal. I don't know where the next meal is coming from. I'm going fishing." Not only did the six disciples go fishing with Peter; the Lord Jesus went also.

b. The Miracle of Professional Fishermen Catching No fish

In verse 3 we are told that the disciples "went forth and got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing." Peter and the sons of Zebedee (John and James) were professional fishers, the sea of Tiberias was large and full

of fish, and night was the right time for fishing, but through the entire night they caught nothing. It was a real miracle for the disciples to fish the whole night and yet not to catch any fish. As expert fishermen, they knew that nighttime was the best time for fishing. But although the sea was full of fish, they did not catch even one. They cast their nets again and again the entire night, but they caught nothing. The Lord must have sovereignly controlled all the fish, keeping them away from the nets. Perhaps the Lord Jesus commanded the fish, saying, "Fish, stay away from this net."

The miracle of catching no fish was a lesson to Peter and the other disciples, and it is a lesson for us today. We should not think that we can just go out, find a job, and make a living. If the Lord keeps all the jobs away, we shall never be able to find one. Do not think that you can go to the sea and easily catch some fish. If our fishing is under the Lord's guidance and according to His will, we shall surely catch some fish. But if it is not according to the Lord's will and we go out on our own, all the fish might be frightened away, sovereignly being kept away from us. As Christians who have been regenerated and commissioned by the Lord, we must go and do things according to the Lord's will, even in the matter of making a living. Since we have been regenerated and the Lord has committed to us a divine, heavenly mission, we must walk according to His will. We should not think of making a living naturally. Others can, but we cannot. There might have been quite a number of unbelievers fishing in the sea of Tiberias at the same time the disciples were, and they probably caught many fish. These believing disciples labored the whole

night, and only from them were the fish kept away. This was a miracle. Therefore, do not think that we can just go to the sea and catch fish. If we do this on our own, we shall probably end up with nothing.

Verses 4 and 5 say, "Now as the morning was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, Little children, do you have any fish to eat? They answered Him, "No." The Lord Jesus appeared as "the morning was breaking." The Lord did not come--He appeared. In verse 14 we are told that "Jesus was manifested to the disciples." "Before the Lord Jesus stood on the shore, He was there already. When the disciples were in the boat fishing, the Lord was already there, for He was within them. But at this particular point, the Lord appeared and showed Himself to them.

c. The Disciples Having Fish when They Were in the Right Position

We may compare 21:5 with Luke 24:41-43. When the disciples were in the right position, as in Luke 24:41-43, they had--even inside the house--more fish than they needed and they offered a piece to the Lord. But here they were in a backslidden condition. Thus--even on the seashore--after fishing the entire night they had no fish not even one piece. Not only did they have nothing, to offer the Lord; they had nothing with which to feed themselves. The Lord asked them if they had any fish to eat, and they said, "No." Their answer must have made them feel very shameful. If I had been Peter, I would have been ashamed to answer the Lord's question.

d. The Miracle of Catching an Abundance of Fishes at the Lord's Word

Verse 6 says, "He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. They cast therefore, and they were not able to haul it in, because of the abundance of fishes." The morning (v. 4) was not the right time for fishing, but when the disciples, at the word

of the Lord, cast their net they caught an abundance of fishes. Surely this was a miracle. It must have been that the Lord bade the fish come into their net. By this miracle their eyes were opened, and the "disciple" whom Jesus loved said then to Peter, It is the Lord!" (21:7). The first one to recognize that it was the Lord was John. When Peter realized that it was the Lord, he jumped into the sea and came to the Lord. The other disciples came in the little boat, dragging the net full of fishes.

e. Calling and Recovering Peter by Miracles In Fishing

In Luke 5:3-11, the Lord called Peter by a miracle in fishing. Here He also recovered him to His call by a miracle in fishing. He is consistent in His purpose.

f. The Miracle of Having Fish Prepared on the Land

When the disciples got out onto the land, "they saw a fire of coals laid there, and fish lying on it and bread (v. 9). Peter and the disciples very clearly saw the fish on the coals of fire and the bread. There had been no need to catch any fish from the sea, for there were some fish on the land already. The Lord performed this miracle to teach the disciples that under His will they will find fish at any place, even on the land. But it is not under His will, they will not find any fish even if they go to the sea. Catching fish does not depend upon the natural way; it depends upon His will. He is sovereign, and everything is under His control. Even in a place where people think that there is no fish naturally, the Lord will prepare fish for us. This is not the fish in the sea; this is the fish already cooked and prepared for us.

In this chapter we see three miracles indicating three signs; the miracle of no fish (v. 3), the miracle of a multitude of fishes (v. 6), and the miracle of the fish on the fire and the bread (v. 9). Here the Lord trained Peter's faith in Him for his living. Peter and those with him

fished the entire night, but caught nothing. Then, according to the Lord's word they caught an abundance of fishes. But without these fish, even on the land where the fish were not, the Lord had prepared fish and even bread for them. This was a miracle. By this, the Lord trained them to realize that without His leading, though they went to the sea where the fish were, and in the night, the right time for fishing, they could catch nothing; but with the Lord's leading, even on the land where the fish were not, and in the morning which is not the right time for fishing, the Lord could provide fish for them. Though they caught many fish according to the Lord's word, the Lord would not use these to feed them. This was a real lesson to Peter. For his living he should believe in the Lord who "calls things not being as being" (Rom. 4:17, Recovery Version).

B. Living with the Disciples

The Lord not only moved with the disciples; He also lived with them. In verses 12 through 14 the Lord prepared breakfast and served it to His disciples. The Lord's words, "Come and have breakfast," indicate His gracious care for the need of His called ones. The Lord did not say, "Peter, breakfast is ready. Help yourself." No, verse 13 says. "Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise." Bread represents the riches of the land, and fish represent the riches of the sea in the Lord's provision. How good the Lord is! He served the disciples breakfast. This picture is much better than a thousand words. Although the Lord did not rebuke Peter, I believe that Peter never forgot this lesson.

How would you have felt if you had been Peter? If I had been Peter, I would have covered my face in shame. I would not have known what to say to the Lord. Could Peter have said, "How are You, Lord?" or, "Lord, I'm sorry that I gave up the right position to come here to fish." Although Peter did not have the face to eat, he was probably so hungry that he had to eat. Perhaps Peter did

not eat very much and what he did eat, he might have eaten shamefully. Peter was in an awkward situation. on the one hand, he had some fish in his hand cooked by the Lord; on the other hand, he looked at the multitude of fish in the net. This was a glory to the Lord, but it was a lesson to Peter.

This is a very interesting lesson. We do not need any descriptive words; we only need to look at the picture. The Lord showed them that some fish had been prepared already. Thus, there was no need for them to go to the sea. In effect, the Lord was saying "If I want you to go to the sea to catch some fish, then I will tell you to do it. Look at these one hundred fifty-three fish. There is no need for these fish, for I have already prepared some fish for you." Once again, I say that if I had been Peter I would have felt very much ashamed. On the one hand, I would have thanked the Lord, but, on the other hand, I would have had to say to myself, "How foolish I am! There is no need for me to come here to fish outside the will of the Lord."

The matter of our living is very practical. This is why the Gospel of John has this additional chapter. Since we are the sons of God who have been regenerated and committed with the divine commission, the Lord will certainly take care of our living. We must learn the lesson of not giving up the Lord's commission because of our living. We must not give up the Lord's burden in order to care for our existence. We are not the people of the world; we are the children of God. We must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then the Lord will add the practical supply to us (Matt. 6:33). He will take care of our need. It we have been truly commissioned by the Lord for His burden, for His work, and for His testimony, we may be at peace and rest assured that the Lord will grant us the provision we need. This is the lesson in this portion of John 21.

Look at the picture once again. The disciples labored the entire night and caught nothing. Then the Lord appeared to the to them and told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat, and they caught a multitude of fish. Those fish were unnecessary, however, because the

Lord had already prepared some fish, as well as some bread, for them to eat. This was not a lesson in words; it was a lesson by miracles. The Lord did not teach Peter and the other disciples by giving them a lecture, a sermon, or a message. He gave them a lesson by three miracles. The first miracle was that seven men fishing the whole night could not catch even one fish. The second miracle was that they finally caught one hundred fifty-three fish in one net at the Lord's word. The third miracle was that without the fish caught from the sea, some fish and some bread had already been prepared on the land. The Lord taught His disciples a lesson by these three miracles.

The lesson the disciples learned here was that they must take care of the Lord's commission and trust in the Lord for their living. We must take care of the Lord's work and testimony instead of our living. If we give up the Lord's commission to look after our living, we shall fail. In 21:2-14, the Lord gave the disciples a lesson about their sustenance, showing them that their living does not depend upon their natural means but upon the Lord's will. If we are in the Lord's will and under His will, He will prepare a living for us even in the impossible places. However, if we take the natural way and go to the sea, that is, to the world, to find employment for our living, we shall be faced with failure. If we have been called by the Lord, we should not worry about our living. The Lord Jesus has a way to prepare fish without fishing. He will take care of our food, for He is the One who calls things not being as being. The Lord who has called us will take care of our living.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(4)

VI. WORKING AND WALKING WITH THE BELIEVERS

In 21:1-14 we saw that, in resurrection, the Lord moved and lived with the believers. Now, in 21:15-25, we see that He is also working and walking with the believers.

A. Working as the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd

The Lord is working as the Shepherd to build up the church by shepherding His flock (21:15-17; 10:16). There are three aspects of the Lord as the Shepherd: the good Shepherd (10:11), the great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), and the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Shepherding is not for individuals; it is for the flock. The flock is the church, and the church is the building. By reading John 21 and 1 Peter we can see that shepherding is for the building of the church.

1. Stirring up the Disciples' Love toward Him

In 21:15 the Lord Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" The Lord was here restoring Peter's love toward Him. Peter did have a heart to love the Lord, but he was too confident of his own strength, his natural strength. His love for the Lord was precious, but his natural strength had to be denied and dealt with. The Lord allowed him to utterly fail by denying Him to His face three times (18:17, 25, 27) so that His natural strength and his self-confidence might

be dealt with. Furthermore, Peter had just taken the lead in backsliding from the Lord's call. His natural confidence in his love toward the Lord must also have been dealt with by this failure. Since he might have been somewhat disappointed, the Lord came to restore his love toward Him, to charge him with the shepherding of His church, and to prepare him for his martyrdom, so that he would not follow Him with any confidence in his natural strength.

When the Lord spoke to Peter in 21:15-17, He did not call him "Peter," which was his regenerated name, the new name of his regenerated person. The Lord called him "Simon." Simon was his old name, the name depicting his natural person. Because Peter was still a natural person, the Lord asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" The reason the Lord asked him this question first was because Peter had boldly told the Lord on the eve of His betrayal that he would not give up the Lord, even though all the other disciples would forsake Him (Matt. 26:33). Peter had said that he would follow the Lord unto death (John 13:37; Matt. 26:35). By saying this, Peter made himself different from the other disciples. Yes, he was different from them--in his weakness, not in his strength. When the Lord asked him, "Do you love Me more than these?" the Lord was reminding Peter of what he was. He was a man so self-confident and proud.

Peter's love toward the Lord was precious, but his natural strength had to be dealt with. Peter's strength was dealt with in two ways: in his denying the Lord and in his taking the lead to backslide from the Lord's call. Peter failed the first test by denying the Lord three times, and he failed the second test by going fishing. The reason the disciples went fishing was because they were without food. When Abraham was in Canaan, he also was tested by the same problem and went down to Egypt because of the famine. In the same principle, Peter and the other disciples went to the sea to fish, being tested by the lack of food. Peter thought that he was strong, and able to withstand any test, even death itself. He had told the Lord

that the would follow Him even unto death. Thus, the Lord tested Peter twice, and Peter failed both tests.

How did the Lord deal with Peter's natural strength? By temporarily taking His hand off him. In 10:28, the Lord said that no one is able to snatch the believers out of His hand. When Peter betrayed the Lord, denying Him to His face three times, it meant that the Lord had taken His hand off him for a while. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Peter, you have too much confidence in yourself. You don't know that your standing depends upon My holding you in My hand. If I don't hold you, you cannot stand. Let Me take My hand away for a while and see if you are able to stand." Then the Lord stood back a little, and Peter fell. Do not think that you have the power to stand. No, an unseen hand upholds us all the time. I appreciate the fact that throughout the years, and even now, many saints have been praying for me. In my fellowship with the Lord in the spirit, I have the deep sense and appreciation that so many dear ones are praying for me. By myself, I cannot stand. By myself, I cannot minister. I know the source of the power of ministry. And I know that the source of the strength to stand is not in me--it is in Him. We all need to realize this. Because Peter was so strong, having too much confidence in himself, the Lord was forced to temporarily remove His hand. As a result, Peter fell and denied the Lord three times. Moreover, Peter could not stand the test of his daily living and took the lead to backslide to the sea. Perhaps Peter thought that he had reason to do this because, at that point, he had not seen the supply of the Lord. Nevertheless, by his backsliding Peter was exposed. The Lord withdrew His hand for a little while, and Peter was fully exposed. This was the Lord's dealing.

In chapter twenty-one, Peter was humble and very low. Undoubtedly he was quite disappointed. Thus, the Lord came in to recover, strengthen, and restore him. It is quite meaningful that, in front of all the other disciples, the Lord asked Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" The Lord seemed to be saying, "Simon, have you forgotten that

a few days ago you said, in the presence of all the others, that although they would forsake Me, you would follow Me to death? That was your word. Now, Simon, I ask you if you love Me more than these do?" If I had been Peter, I would not have had the face to say anything. Peter simply replied, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You" (v. 15). Peter could not answer the Lord with a clear word, for he was in a very perplexing situation. He did not say, "Lord, I love You," or, "Lord, I don't love You." How would you have answered the Lord if you had been Peter? Would you have said, "Yes, Lord, I love You more than all of these"? Would you have said, "Lord, I'm sorry I don't love You," or, "Lord, I'm sorry that I boasted and was unable to fulfill it"? Peter had lost his self-confidence and could say nothing except, "Lord, You know that I love You." In other words, Peter seemed to be saying, "I don't know whether I love You or not. Lord, You know. If I say that I love You, I know that this does not mean anything. Formerly, I told You that I loved You, but I failed. In fact, You told me that I would fail and deny You three times, and it was so. Now, Lord, it is up to You. You know--I don't." Here we see a man who had become a tested and broken person.

In verses 16 and 17, we see that the Lord twice more asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" When the Lord asked him this the third time, Peter was deeply grieved. He was grieved for two reasons. The first was that the Lord asked him this question three times. If I asked you the same question three times, you also would feel quite troubled. The second reason Peter was grieved was that by asking him this question three times, the Lord was reminding Peter that he had denied Him three times. When Peter denied the Lord, he was warming himself by a fire (18:25). There was also a fire in John 21. The Lord's action was very meaningful, for now, having a fire to remind Peter, He seemed to be saying, "Peter, do you remember that fire? Do you remember that it was by a fire that you denied Me? By that fire you denied Me, but by this fire I supply you." Thus, the Lord caused Peter to

remember what he did by that fire and to realize what he was and where he was. Peter fully learned that lesson. In the whole New Testament, the best picture of Peter is the one in John 21. I do like Brother Peter in this chapter. Here he is a soft, meek, and broken person, a man who has truly learned the lesson of being tested and broken by the Lord.

2. Charging Them with Lamb-feeding and Sheep-shepherding

After restoring Peter's love toward Him, the Lord Jesus charged him, saying, "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." The first twenty chapters of the Gospel of John stress the matter of believing in the Son that we may have life (3:15). But in this chapter it is not a matter of believing but of loving. The fruitbearing in chapter fifteen is the outflow of the riches of the inner life. Here the lamb-feeding is the nourishing with the riches of the inner life. In order to feed others we need to enjoy the riches of the Lord's divine life. This requires that we love Him. To believe in the Lord is to receive Him, and to love the Lord is to enjoy Him. The Lord came as life and as the life supply to us. We need to have faith in Him and love toward Him. According to the Gospel of John, these are the two requirements for participating in the Lord.

Lamb-feeding is by the nourishing with the riches of the inner life. and sheep-shepherding is for the building of the church. Shepherding is for the "flock" (10:14, 16), which is the church (Acts 20:28). Therefore, it is related to God's building (Matt. 16:18). Later, in his first Epistle, Peter indicated this by saying that growth, by feeding on the pure milk of the Word, is for the building of God's house (1 Pet. 2:2-5), and by charging the elders to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1-4). The growth by nourishing is for the building. The Lord is still working with His disciples in this way. Today by lamb-feeding and sheep-shepherding, the Lord is working with us for the building of the church.

By considering three chapters, John 10, and 1 Peter 2 and 5, we shall see that feeding the lambs and

shepherding the sheep are for the building up of the church. According to John 10, the Lord laid down His soulish life that His sheep might have His divine life and be brought together as one flock. To bring all His sheep together as one is truly the building. In 1 Peter 2, Peter says that we, as newborn babes, must be fed with the pure milk of the Word that we might grow up to be built up together as a spiritual house. Finally, in 1 Peter 5, Peter, as one of the elders, charges the elders to care for the sheep by feeding and shepherding them. Feeding the sheep is different from shepherding them. In 21:15 the Lord said, "Feed My lambs"; in 21:16, He said, "Shepherd My sheep"; and in 21:17, He said, "Feed My sheep." To shepherd means to take care of the sheep, and to feed means to supply food to the sheep. While we are serving the Lord today, we must not only care for His sheep, but also feed them with spiritual food. It is not sufficient simply to care for and to look after the brothers and sisters; we must also feed them. In verse 15 the Lord said, "Feed My lambs," and in verse 17 He said, "Feed My sheep." By this we see that both the young believers and the more matured believers need the feeding. If the Lord has committed to us the burden of His flock, we must be sure to do two things--to feed them and to care for them.

B. Walking with the Disciples as His Followers

1. Instructing Them to Follow Him to Death

In 21:18-23, we see that the Lord Jesus walks with the disciples as His followers. After restoring Peter's love for Him and charging him with lamb-feeding and sheep-shepherding, the Lord, by predicting Peter's martyrdom, instructed the disciples to follow Him to death. In verse 18 the Lord said to Peter, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." In saying this to Peter, the

Lord was "signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." Later, in 2 Peter 1:14, Peter referred to this. Here in this chapter the Lord was preparing Peter to follow Him to death, but not by anything of himself nor according to his own will. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Peter, you did not keep your word, but I will keep My word. You said that you would even die for Me, but you did not keep your word. One day you will die for Me, for you will die to glorify God. While you are young, you will be free. But the day will come when you are old. Then people will catch you, bind you, and bring you to a place where you do not want to go." After hearing these words, Peter realized that he would be martyred for the Lord. At that time, Peter did not say either yes or no.

After predicting Peter's martyrdom, the Lord said to him, "Follow Me!" We all must follow the Lord as the indwelling One. The "Me" whom we are to follow is in us. As verse 18 indicates, we must not follow the Lord by our own will but according to His leading. Our following Him even unto death is to glorify God (v. 19). Furthermore, we must follow Him without paying attention to others. After the Lord told Peter to follow Him, Peter turned to John and said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" (v. 21). To this, the Lord replied, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" (v. 22). The Lord was telling Peter that what would happen to John was none of his business and that he had to follow Him.

This chapter is a picture showing that after we have been regenerated and commissioned by the Lord, we must love the Lord at any cost and follow Him to the end at any sacrifice. By following the Lord in this way, we shall accomplish the Lord's purpose to feed His lambs and to feed and shepherd His sheep.

2. Indicating that Some of His Followers Will Live Until He Comes

Verse 23, referring to what the Lord had said to Peter

about John, says, "This word therefore went forth among the brothers that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, If I want him to remain until I come. what is that to you?" In this word the Lord indicates that some of His followers will live until He comes.

3. The Disciples Following Him and Living with Him in His Invisible Presence and Waiting for Him to Come in His Visible Presence

It seems that in this portion of the Word there are some contradictory elements. When the Lord said, "Follow Me," He was there with the disciples. How then could He say "until I come"? Since He was there, He need not come. If He meant that He would leave them and later come back to them, how could He say to them, "Follow Me"? How could they follow Him? When I was young, I was troubled by this and said to myself, "If the Lord is here for us to follow Him, then there is no need for Him to come. He is here already. But if He is coming, then He must be away from us. How then can He ask us to follow Him?" The answer to all these questions is the Lord's invisible presence. According to His visible presence, He would leave the disciples and come back later. But according to His invisible presence, He would be with them all the time. On the one hand, He would be with them, and, on the other hand, He would be away from them. Therefore, on the one hand, they could follow Him, and, on the other hand, they would have to wait for His coming back.

There are two aspects of the Lord's presence--His invisible presence and His visible presence. Because of the Lord's invisible presence, we can follow Him. Invisibly, the Lord is here, and we follow Him. Visibly, He is not here, and we must wait until He comes The key is the Lord's wonderful presence. In this age, His invisible presence is better than His visible presence. His invisible presence is more precious, available, prevailing, rich, and real. I hope

that we all understand these two aspects of the Lord's presence. Visibly speaking, we are waiting for Him; invisibly speaking, He is walking with us and we are following Him. After His resurrection, the Lord remained with the disciples for forty days (Acts 1:3-4) in order to train them to realize, practice, and live by His invisible presence. In verse 23 the Lord indicated that some of His believers would follow Him to death and that some would remain, would live until He comes.

John 21 is a very practical chapter. We have seen that we have been regenerated as the sons of God and have the life and nature of God. Thus, we are the manifestation of God. God has committed to us His heavenly and divine commission, and we must do something to accomplish the Lord's purpose--feed His sheep and shepherd His flock until all the sheep are brought together as one Body to be a spiritual house. Although we must do these things, there is still the practical matter of our living. In this chapter we see that the Lord will provide for our needs and take care of our living. We must simply commit the matter of our living into His hands and leave it there. If we are under His will, the Lord will certainly maintain our living. Furthermore, we must also realize that we must suffer and sacrifice for the Lord's testimony, following Him even unto death.

The span of things covered in John 20 and 21 is very broad. It begins with the discovery of the Lord's resurrection and ends with His coming back. These two chapters show everything that will happen to us between the Lord's resurrection and His coming back. Between these two events are all the things related to the Christian life during the church age: seeking the Lord with love toward Him especially in the personal morning watch; seeing the Lord in resurrection; receiving the revelation of the issue of the Lord's resurrection concerning the "brothers" and the "Father" by experiencing His manifestation; meeting with the believers to enjoy the Lord's presence; being breathed on by the Lord with the Holy Spirit and being sent by the Lord with His

commission and authority to represent Him; learning how to live by faith in the Lord and to trust in Him for our daily living; loving the Lord with our natural strength having been dealt with and having learned the lesson of being broken, of losing our self-confidence, and of putting our trust in the Lord; shepherding the flock for the building of the church; practicing the Lord's invisible presence in which some follow Him even to death to glorify God, not by self-will but according to His leading, and some live until He comes back.

As we have seen, the Gospel of John begins with the Word in eternity past. After passing through the long process of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, this Word has become the life-giving Spirit, the holy pneuma, the holy breath (20:22). In Greek, the word pneuma is used for both breath and spirit. The very eternal Word has become such a breath, such a Spirit. This is the processed God for our enjoyment. He is now the life and the Spirit in resurrection, moving, living, working, and walking with us. Furthermore, He meets with us all the time. As the life, the Spirit, the holy breath, in resurrection He is constantly with us invisibly. He will continue with us invisibly, meeting, moving, living, working, and walking with us, until He comes visibly. This is the very Jesus Christ in whom we believe; the very Lord whom we have received; the very God whom we serve, worship, and enjoy; and the very all-inclusive Spirit who is always with us and within us. Praise Him!

The Gospel of John has no conclusion. This book is not closed; it is still under the Spirit's composition. Perhaps today's Gospel of John has two or three thousand chapters. This book is still being composed, and we are included in its composition. Praise the Lord!

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FIFTY

THE ULTIMATE CONCLUSION

Although we have completed our life-study of the Gospel of John, we still need to see something more as a conclusion to all these chapters. The Apostle John not only wrote the Gospel of John but also his Epistles and the book of Revelation. His writings are of three important categories. The Gospel of John is for the imparting of life, his Epistles are for the fellowship of life which is for God's building, and the Revelation is for the consummation of God's building. Thus, there are three stages of spiritual matters in his writings. The first stage is that of life imparting, the second stage is that of spiritual growth and building, and the last stage is that of maturity and the completion of God's building. Therefore, after studying the Gospel of John, which is related to the first stage of spiritual matters, we must at least mention something about the second stage of spiritual growth and about the third stage of maturity and conclusion. Revelation is not an easy book, but we can still receive something about the ultimate conclusion, or ultimate completion, of God's dealings throughout the generations.

HIS COMING AND HIS GOING

We have seen that John's Gospel is divided into two parts: chapters one through thirteen and chapters fourteen through twenty-one. As we have pointed out, in the first part the Lord as the Son of God came to bring God to man, and in the second part He went to bring man to God. In other words, the first part reveals that the Lord is the manifestation of God who came to man, brought God to man, and mingled God with man. The little man

named Jesus is the mingling of the very God with man; He is the unity of God with man. In Him and through Him, God is one with man. In the little man named Jesus we see God (God is with Him), and we see man (man is with God). In Matthew 1:23 Jesus is referred to as Emmanuel, which means God with us, or God with man. By His incarnation, God has mingled Himself with man. This refers to the Lord's coming.

The second part of this Gospel refers to the Lord's going. Firstly, He came from God to man. Then He went from man to God and brought man into God. His death and resurrection prepared the way for man to be brought into God. Fallen man was separated from God and was a great distance from Him. But by His death the Lord eliminated the distance and all the hindrances which separated man from God. Now, through Christ's death and by His blood, man can be brought into the presence of God--and not only into the presence of God, but also into God Himself. By His death and resurrection, the Lord not only went back to God from man; He also went to God with man and brought man into God. Therefore, by His coming, God is mingled with man, and by His going, man is brought into God. By the Lord's coming and going, God and man, man and God, are mingled together as one.

GOD IN MAN

There is another way of looking at this Gospel: it may be divided into three parts. The first part, composed of the first seventeen chapters, reveals that God is manifested in man. The first seventeen chapters present a picture showing that the very God Himself, the almighty, infinite, unlimited, and eternal God, has been manifested in a man. These chapters are a history of a man, a real man of flesh and blood, a man named Jesus who lived on earth and manifested God. When the Lord Jesus lived on earth as a man, He did not live by the life of man; He lived by another life, the life of God. In these seventeen chapters

we do not see a human life lived out through this man; rather, we see a divine life lived out through Him. Thus, the unlimited and infinite God was manifested through this little man. It is for this reason that the Lord told people many times that He did not speak of Himself but of the Father (12:49). Whatever He spoke was of the Father, for it was the Father speaking in Him. Furthermore, whatever He did was not of Himself (5:30). He did everything in and by the Father, for the Father was working in Him. Because He lived, not by man's life, but by God's life, God was manifested in and through Him.

LIFE IN DEATH

If we would divide this Gospel into three parts, the second part would consist of chapters eighteen and nineteen. In these two chapters we see a picture of how the Lord was arrested, brought to trial, sentenced to death, and crucified on the cross. But we must realize that this picture is a revelation of life manifested through death. In the first part of this Gospel, God is manifested in man; in the second part, life is manifested in death. Everything that happened to the Lord Jesus in chapters eighteen and nineteen was an aspect of death. Judas' betrayal of the Lord, his bringing the soldiers to arrest the Lord, the judgment before the high priest and Pilate, the cruel treatment of the Lord, the false sentence against Him, and His being nailed to the cross--all were aspects of death. Nevertheless, all that happened to the Lord in these chapters did not put Him to death. If we say that the Lord was put to death, we are wrong. The Lord went into death voluntarily. Just as He was God coming into man, so now He is life going into death. As He was God manifested in man, so here He is life manifested in death.

Throughout the whole universe, nothing other than God is more powerful than death (S. S. 8:6). It is so powerful that no one can resist it. Only the God of resurrection can overcome it. Whenever death comes to a

person, it is merciless, strong, and cruel. It does not care about your wife, children, or family. Therefore, everyone is afraid of death and no one would go into it voluntarily. Who would willingly offer himself to be visited by death? But in these two chapters we see that the Lord Jesus went into death willingly. He chose to go to the garden and to deliver Himself into the hands of the people. Knowing that His captors would come to the garden to seize Him, He went there deliberately for the purpose of being arrested. In doing this He showed that He is life. The only way in which life can be manifested is by entering into death. In and by death, the real life is manifested. In 12:24 the Lord referred to Himself as a grain of wheat. How do we know that there is life in a grain of wheat? We know it by putting the grain of wheat into death. By burying the grain of wheat in the earth, that is, in death, we see that life comes out. Thus, the life in the grain of wheat is manifested through death. If you bury a grain of sand in the earth, nothing will come out because there is no life in it. Hence, death is the means by which life is manifested.

As we have pointed out, everything the Lord Jesus experienced in these two chapters was an aspect of death. But the Lord, being life, was not afraid to die. He was never frightened nor troubled by death. Rather, He victoriously met every threat and attack of death. Even when the disciples were attempting to rescue Him, He told them not to resist, saying, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (18:11). When the Lord Jesus asked those who came to arrest Him whom they were seeking and they answered, "Jesus the Nazarene," He said, "I am" (18:5-6). When He said, "I am," His captors, terrified by this word, "drew back and fell to the ground" (18:6). This proves that if the Lord had been unwilling to deliver Himself up to them, they could never have arrested Him. Moreover, as the soldiers were arresting the Lord, He easily and calmly took care of the disciples, saying, "If therefore you are seeking Me, let these go away" (18:8). All this reveals that

the Lord was the life manifested in death and that death could do nothing to Him.

RESURRECTION IN THE SPIRIT

Chapters one through seventeen show that the Lord is God in man, chapters eighteen and nineteen reveal that the Lord is life in death, and now chapters twenty and twenty-one unfold the Lord in resurrection as the Spirit. The Lord is God, the Lord is life, and the Lord is resurrection. He is God manifested in man, He is life manifested in death, and He is resurrection manifested as the Spirit. Through man, God is manifested; through death, life is manifested; through the Holy Spirit, resurrection is manifested. In the three parts of the Gospel of John, we have the Lord as God in the first part, the Lord as life in the second part, and the Lord as resurrection in the last part. Thus, He is God, life, and resurrection. In the first seventeen chapters the Lord was in man as God; in the next two chapters the Lord was in death as life; and in the last two chapters the Lord is the Spirit as resurrection. This is the Lord in three stages.

The Spirit is the reality of the Lord's resurrection. After the Lord's resurrection, what is He? He is the Spirit, and as the Spirit He is the resurrection. In 11:25, the Lord clearly said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." He is not only life--He is also resurrection. Do you prefer the Lord as God, the Lord as life, or the Lord as resurrection? I prefer the Lord as resurrection because it is in resurrection that God can be one with us and experienced by us. It is only in the Lord's resurrection that we can have a subjective relationship with the Lord. It is by the resurrection that we can be in God. If God were only God, He could not be life and could not have anything to do with man. It is much better for God to be life than merely to be God. But even if God is only life, it is still rather difficult for us to have a real relationship of fellowship with Him. However, in resurrection, God can be one with us and we can experience Him in a very subjective way. Have you ever realized how far away God was from you?

And do you realize how near He is to you today? When He was only God, He was very far from us. But now that He is in resurrection, He is very near to us, for He has come into us.

After His resurrection, the Lord came into His disciples and breathed on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). What is the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is just God reaching man. God the Father is the source, God the Son is the expression, and God the Spirit is God's entering into man. The Spirit as God entering into us is for our enjoyment. If God were only the Father and not the Son and the Spirit, we could never experience Him. But God is in the Son as life, and God is the Spirit as resurrection. By resurrection God releases Himself and imparts Himself into us. Therefore, the Lord told the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit. To receive the Holy Spirit is to receive God Himself. It is only in resurrection and by resurrection that God can be within us and be one with us.

Do you realize that God is not only life, but that He is also resurrection? Is this a fact and a reality to you, or is it merely a teaching and a doctrine? By the death and resurrection of Christ, God as resurrection is living within us. This must not be a mere doctrine to us. The One who is stronger and more powerful than all things is living in us. This One is the very God who became life, and this life is now the resurrection within us. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the reality of this resurrection. Therefore, He and we, we and He, have become one. Resurrection means the wonderful mingling of God and man in the Spirit. In resurrection, God and man are mingled together. Man becomes the abode of God, and God becomes the abode of man. Hence, man and God, God and man, can mutually abide in one another.

THE MUTUAL ABIDING IN JOHN'S EPISTLE

The fact of abiding is mentioned in the New Testament Epistles. After the Gospel of John, there are the Epistles of John. In his first Epistle, John covers this matter of the

mutual abiding. We abide in God and God abides in us (1 John 4:15). How do we know that God abides in us and that we abide in Him? We know that God abides in us by the Spirit (1 John 3:24), and we know that we abide in Him by the anointing (1 John 2:27). The most important matter today is for God to abide in us and for us to abide in Him. God abides in us by the Holy Spirit, and we abide in Him by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

THE BUILDING IN REVELATION

What is the issue of this mutual abiding? According to the last book of John, the book of Revelation, the issue is the churches, the temple, and the city. The book of Revelation mentions the churches (1:11, 20), the temple (3:12; 7:15), and the city (21:2, 10), which are different aspects of God's building. The building issues from the mutual abiding. When we abide in God and God abides in us, we are built up in the divine life. In His resurrection, the Lord on the one hand is in heaven and, on the other hand, He is in us. These two aspects are seen in the writings of John. For instance, in John 21:22 the Lord, referring to the Apostle John, said to Peter, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" If I had been there, I would have said, "Lord, are You not here? Since You are already here why do You say that You will come?" In order to answer this question, we must see the two aspects of the Lord. On the one hand, the Lord is in heaven; on the other hand, He is with us and within us. The book of Revelation discloses both aspects, revealing that the Lord is among the seven churches (1:13) and that He is also on the throne in heaven (4:2). If we would realize the presence of the Lord, we must see that He is not only in heaven but also in the midst of the seven churches.

In Revelation 3:12 we are told that if we realize the Lord's presence, we shall be overcomers and pillars in the temple of God. A pillar is something that the temple relies upon. The temple simply denotes the presence of God. Hence, the presence of God depends on our experience as a

pillar. In other words, we must be a pillar for the presence of God. Where the pillar is, there the temple of God is. This means that where you are, there the presence of the Lord is. If you are a pillar of the temple, then you are one on whom the presence of God depends.

Three names are written on the pillar mentioned in Revelation 3:12: the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of the Lord. This means that this pillar is the victorious one who becomes the very expression and manifestation of God. Because he is the manifestation of God, the name of God is written on him; because he has become a vital part of the New Jerusalem, the name of the New Jerusalem is written on him; and because he becomes the new manifestation of the Lord, the Lord's new name is written on him. The name of God is written on the pillar because the pillar has become the manifestation of God. Why is the name of the New Jerusalem also written on it? Because it has become a part of the New Jerusalem. Likewise, the new name of the Lord is written on this pillar because it has become the new manifestation of the Lord Himself.

In the last writing of John, the book of Revelation, there are the churches, the temple, and the city. The temple depends upon the pillar, which means that the presence of God depends upon the victorious ones. Where they are, there the presence of God is and there the New Jerusalem, or the building of God, is. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate expression of the mingling of God with man.

THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Now we must see how to practice this experience. We have already seen the way in the last two chapters of the Gospel of John. If we would experience God in resurrection, if we would experience God as the Spirit, if we would experience God in the way that God and we are mingled together, if we would experience being a pillar for the Lord's presence, if we would experience the writing of God's new name, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the

name of the Lord upon us, then we, like Mary the Magdalene, must seek the Lord. Mary sought Him early in the morning. Along with seeking Him, we must believe that the Lord has been resurrected and that He is now with us, realizing His presence by believing, not by seeing. Do not be like Brother Thomas, who said, "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will by no means believe." (20:25). We must believe in the Lord without seeing, feeling, or touching Him. Furthermore, we must attend the church meetings. Do not neglect the meetings. In the morning, we should seek the Lord personally in the morning watch, but, in the evening, we must attend the church meetings.

As we seek the Lord, we should not be troubled by the practical matters of our living. In addition to seeking the Lord, believing in Him, and attending the church meetings, we must also trust the Lord for our living. Remember the Lord's promise: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). If we seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God will certainly take care of our living. Do not go out on your own to fish. If you try to earn a living on your own, you will experience failure and eventually receive nothing. Remember that John 21 reveals that the Lord can prepare fish even on the land where there are no fish. The Lord will give us the fish which have already been cooked.

Finally, we must learn the lesson of Peter's life and have the experience of being broken. Do not think that you are strong. You may be strong in your natural life, but this strength must be broken. The Lord wants your heart, not your strength. Our self must be dealt with until we love the Lord with our whole heart. We must love the Lord by giving up our strength. As we have seen, Peter had two great failures: denying the Lord three times in His presence and giving up the Lord's commission and going fishing. Peter denied the Lord, and then took the lead to

go into the world to make a living. But the Lord met him and asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" (21:15). In chapter twenty-one we see that Peter had learned the lesson and had become a broken man. Then the Lord seemed to tell him, "Peter, you must follow Me, work for Me, feed and shepherd My sheep, and build up the church."

May we all remember the five things which we need to experience: seeking the Lord, believing in the Lord, coming to the meetings, trusting in the Lord for our living, and being broken in our natural man. However strong, clever, and wise our natural man may be, it must be broken. We must forsake our natural strength, cleverness, and wisdom. The Lord wants our heart but He does not want our strength. When we think we are strong, we shall fail. Why must we learn the lesson of forsaking our natural strength, our natural cleverness, and our natural wisdom? Because the Lord Himself must be our life, our strength, our wisdom, and our everything. The Lord needs our heart to love Him so that we may cooperate with Him and give Him the opportunity to be our life. Although the Lord does not need our strength, wisdom, and cleverness, He does need our cooperation. If we love Him, we shall cooperate with Him and give Him the opportunity to live in us. Then we shall be the same as He was when He lived on earth. As He lived by the life of God, so we shall live by the life of Christ. Then we shall experience resurrection. We shall experience that the Lord is not only God in man but also life in death and resurrection in the Spirit. If we seek Him, believe in Him, meet with the saints, forget about the matter of our living, and learn the lesson of denying the natural man, then we shall experience Christ as the resurrection in the Spirit. If we do all this, the Lord will be our reality. This is what it means to be a pillar for God's manifestation, a part of the New Jerusalem, and the new expression of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF JOHN

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

BEARING FRUIT BY THE OVERFLOW OF THE INNER LIFE

Since the time I was saved and began to love the Lord and the Bible, I have been attracted to John 15, where we have the illustration of the grapevine. For more than fifty years, this illustration has never been far away from my consideration.

BEING PARTS OF CHRIST

Christ is the vine, and we are the branches (15:5). The fact that Christ is the vine and we are the branches of this vine clearly indicates that we are part of Christ. What a great matter this is! John 15 is not merely a parable; it is an illustration showing how we are now a part of Christ. We are not simply those who have been redeemed, forgiven, justified, reconciled, and saved. We are actually a part of Christ! If we view the illustration from this angle, we shall realize how profound it is. Christ is the very embodiment of God, and we are pitiful, corrupted, fallen, and even devilish sinners. How could such sinners have become a part of Christ? Nevertheless, as profound as it may seem, we are truly a part of Him.

THE ORGANISM OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE DIVINE DISPENSATION

The vine with the branches is the organism of the Triune God in the divine dispensation. One day the Lord showed me clearly that this vine is the unique organism in the universe. The vine in chapter fifteen is not a small, local, individual organism; it is a great, corporate, universal organism, the organism of the Triune God.

THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

No other book in the Bible unveils the Trinity as fully as the Gospel of John does. This whole book concerns the Trinity. In no other book are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit revealed in such a practical way as They are here. The entire Gospel of John is a book on the Son with the Father and with the Spirit. Hence, the organism in chapter fifteen is not merely an organism of Christ, but of the Triune God.

In the opening word of this chapter the Lord Jesus, the Son, says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman." You may wonder where the Spirit is in this chapter. The Spirit is the sap, the life juice, in the vine. Therefore, we see that the Trinity comprises this organism, which includes us. The organism of the vine is constituted not only with divinity, but also with humanity. Praise the Lord that this universal organism is composed of both the Triune God and us! In fact, we are the crucial part of this organism. This is a matter of great significance.

GOD AS LIFE GROWING IN AN ORGANIC BODY

The organism of the vine tree in John 15 is the focus of the whole Bible. An organism is an organic body containing life and having organs. Many Christians think of John 15 merely as a parable used by the Lord to describe our relationship with Him. But it is not merely a parable; it is a reality that reveals the focus of God's intention. God is life, and life needs an organic body in which to grow and express itself. Even the life element within the seed of a flower needs an organic body. The seed is the organic body whereby the life within it can grow and be fully expressed. God desires to grow within an organic body and to have Himself expressed by means of that body. This body is the organism of Christ and the church.

The focus of the Bible is God as life growing in an organic body. This means that God is the growing life and that the growing life needs an organism, an organic body, in which God can grow and through which He can express Himself.

We have been told that God was our Creator, the object of our worship, and that we, the creatures, had to worship Him. Although this is not wrong, it is a very superficial understanding of the revelation in the Bible. It is definitely not the inner content of the focus of God's revelation

The inner content of the divine focus is that God is not only our Creator and the object of our worship, but that He is life. Life does not require worship. How foolish it would be to put a carnation seed on the table and worship it! If you did this and the carnation seed could speak, it would say, "Stupid man! What are you doing? The more you worship me, the more I suffer. Instead of worshipping me, please sow me into the soil. If you do this, I will be happy." Ultimately, God is not the object of our worship; He is life and He desires to grow in an organic body so that He may be expressed.

GOD'S STEPS TO PRODUCE THE ORGANISM

God has taken a number of steps to produce this organic body. Through creation, He formed a spirit within man (Zech. 12:1). Because we have a spirit, we can receive God into us. God has also accomplished the work of redemption, and eventually, He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Now He is not only the Creator and Redeemer--He is the very *pneuma,* the life-giving Spirit, for us to contact Him. The moment we contact Him, He comes directly into our spirit. The entering of this Spirit into our spirit makes us part of this organic body. Now God is growing within us so that He may be expressed. This is the Lord's desire today.

If we see that we are part of this divine organism in which God is growing and through which He is being expressed, so many things will fade away. All our religious concepts regarding worship will disappear. God does not care for our concepts; He wants to be the life growing within us that He may be expressed through us. This is the organism revealed in John 15.

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE PICTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

We have seen that according to John 15 the preaching of the gospel is the overflow of life for the bearing of fruit. However, this is not a simple matter; rather, it is very high and profound. It is much higher than what is commonly considered the Christian life. If we would gain any understanding of what it means to bear fruit by the overflow of life, we need to see an all-inclusive picture of John's Gospel.

This Gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." One day, the Word became flesh (1:14), and this flesh was the Lamb of God (1:29). When the Lord was crucified, He was not only the Lamb to accomplish redemption; He was also in the form of the serpent (3:14). He was lifted up on the cross that He might deal with Satan, the old serpent. In His death He was not only in the form of the Lamb and the serpent, but also in the form of a grain of wheat (12:24). As a grain of wheat, He died to produce the many grains, which include all of us. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." This life was the light of life (8:12). When the Word became flesh, He was full of grace and reality, truth.

Thus far, we have ten significant words: the Word, God, flesh, Lamb, serpent, grain, life, light, grace, and truth. Christ was the Word, who was God, and who became flesh. This flesh was the Lamb who was crucified for our redemption. In His crucifixion Christ was in the form of the serpent to destroy the Devil, and in His death He fell into the ground as a grain of wheat to produce many grains. These many grains now have His life. This life has become their light. To them, this life is grace, and this light brings them reality.

CHRIST'S INDWELLING MAKING US A PART OF THE ORGANISM OF THE TRIUNE GOD

After the Lord Jesus died, resurrected, and secretly ascended to the Father, He came back on the same day and, with a physical body, entered a closed room in a

mysterious way (20:19). No scientist or scholar can explain how Christ was able to enter into that room. According to 20:22, "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." Apparently, this is the conclusion of the Gospel of John; actually, this Gospel has not yet been completed. The Lord's breathing into His disciples indicates that this mysterious One, the all-inclusive One, had come into them. In John chapter twenty there is no record that the Lord left the disciples. He came, but He did not go away. After breathing into them, He did not say, "Good-by. I will visit you again another day." When I read this chapter as a young man, I was troubled by the fact that there is no record here telling us that the Lord went away from the disciples. Later I realized that when the Lord breathed into them, He came into them. He was no longer outside the disciples; He was within them.

In the beginning, that is, in eternity past, Christ was far away in both space and time. He existed as the Word, as God's expression. But by the end of the Gospel of John, He has come into us in a mysterious way. Just as no one can define or explain how One with a physical body that could be touched and seen could enter into a closed room, so no one can explain how Christ indwells us. The principle is the same in each case. Christ's indwelling is mysterious. At the beginning of this book, Christ was far away from us, but now He is within us. As far as space and time are concerned, there is no longer any distance between Him and us. He and we are one. Furthermore, Christ has made us a part of Himself. This oneness is the organism illustrated by the grapevine, the organism of the Triune God with humanity in the divine dispensation. Today we are in this organism. We all need a clear vision of this.

THE ENTRANCE INTO THE ORGANISM

You may be wondering how you can experience this organism. This living organism is like a building with an entrance. In this Gospel we have both the gate through which we can enter the organism and the way to experience this organism. The gate is in 3:3 and 5. The

Lord Jesus said to a sinner named Nicodemus, "Unless a man is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The organism is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the organism. The Lord was telling Nicodemus that he had to be born of the Spirit. We enter this kingdom, this organism, by being born in our spirit of the divine Spirit. Thus, the new birth is the entrance into the organism of the Triune God.

THE WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE ORGANISM

The way begins in chapter four. In verse 24 the Lord said, "God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality." To worship God is to contact God, to enjoy God, and to partake of all He is. Worshipping God is a matter of taking God into us. It is not merely objective, but also subjective. This is proved by the fact that on the one hand, in this chapter the Lord speaks about worship and, on the other hand, about drinking the living water (v. 14). If we put verses 14 and 24 together, we shall see that to drink of the living water is to worship God. Moreover, worshipping God by our spirit and in our spirit is the real drinking of the living water, which is God Himself. God Himself is the Spirit, and this Spirit is the living water. We drink this living water by worshipping God. Hence, drinking of God and worshipping Him are synonymous. We all must drink the very God who is the living water, the Spirit.

Another aspect of the way is unveiled in chapter six. In verse 48 the Lord said, "I am the bread of life," and in verse 57 He said, "He who eats Me shall also live because of Me." The way is not only to drink God as the living water, but also to eat Christ, the embodiment of God, as the living bread. The Lord's word about eating Him was offensive to the religious people, and they could not bear it (v. 60). In verse 63 the Lord said to His disciples, "It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." The Lord seemed to be saying, "I am the bread of life. But I can

only be dispensed into you as your life supply through the living Word. This living Word is the Spirit." Thus, we must not contact the living Word as the black and white letters; we must contact the living Word as the living Spirit by exercising our spirit. Thus, the way to experience the organism is to contact the very God, who is the Spirit, and to eat and drink of Him.

THE OVERFLOW

If we truly contact the Lord and eat and drink of Him, we shall have the overflow spoken of in 7:37 and 38. On the last day of the feast of Tabernacles Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." What an overflow! Whoever believes in Him will have an overflow of rivers of living water. The water the believers take in of Christ will become overflowing rivers. This is the overflow we are talking about in this message.

The overflow of life is in chapter seven, not in chapter fifteen. But the overflow in chapter seven is for the fruit-bearing in chapter fifteen. By contacting God and eating and drinking of Him, we have such an overflow. This overflow is nothing less than the Triune God, who is the constituent of the organism and who is living Himself out of us. Therefore, the overflow of life is the Triune God living Himself out of us.

THE OVERFLOW OF LIFE BEING OUR FRUIT-BEARING

Now we can understand what it means to bear fruit by the overflow of life. We need to see this vision. If we do, we shall say, "I am part of the organism of the Triune God. Daily I contact my God, drink of Him, eat of Him, and live by Him. Now, spontaneously, this very God is flowing out of me." This overflow of life is our fruit-bearing. Our fruit-bearing is God being lived out of us. As we are with our relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and friends, we must have this kind of living and be this kind of person. Recently a sister shared about meeting a woman in an airport and

spontaneously testifying to her of her rich supply in Christ. That woman surely must have been impressed by our sister's testimony. Coming out of the mouth of our sister was not simply preaching; it was the Triune God being lived out of her. If we have such a testimony with our relatives and friends, they will be impressed with the overflow of life, and this flow will certainly get into some of them. They will be infused with the flow and become a fruit born by this organism. This is fruit-bearing by the overflow of the inner life.

If you have such an overflow, could you help but love the Lord? Could you still live in sin and continue to love the world? This would be impossible. There is no need to strive to overcome sin and the world. There is not even any need to try to love the Lord. In fact, there is no need for us to do anything. Because we realize that we are part of this organism, that the Triune God has been wrought into our being, and that we have been constituted with His riches and have become parts of Him, something naturally and spontaneously will flow out of us.

We are the branches of the divine vine; we are part of the organism of the Triune God. In life, in nature, and in position we are the same as He. Hallelujah! Daily we are contacting our God. He is not simply the object of our worship, but the Spirit within us as the living water. As we drink of Him and eat of Him, we have the overflow of life. This overflow is our fruit-bearing in our daily living. Whether or not the ones we contact will receive this flow is a matter of God's choice. But we can be assured that the chosen ones will receive it and become fruit born by the divine organism. This is the way to increase the organism, and to spread the kingdom of God. This is what it means to bear fruit by the overflow of the inner life.