

Unit Eight

*The Ministry of
Christ*

Annotated Lesson

Outlines

Journey through the Bible
Annotated Lesson Outlines

Unit Eight: The Ministry of Christ

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Overview of Lessons

Unit 8. The Ministry of Christ (Matthew–John [2])

This unit discusses the ministry and teaching of Christ as revealed in the four Gospels.

Lesson 1: Christ's Silence from Age Twelve to Age Thirty—The Lord Jesus was the first God-man, and in His living as the first God-man He set up a pattern for us to follow today. One aspect of this pattern is the period of silence between the age of twelve and the age of thirty. Although the Lord was concerned for God's house when He was at the age of twelve, God did not commission Him to carry out His ministry until He had reached the age of thirty. This indicates that the real ministry to take care of God's interests on earth requires the maturity of life. Even the Lord Jesus Himself needed to reach a certain level of human maturity before He could carry out His ministry. During these eighteen years of silence, the Lord Jesus was like a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2), meaning that He came from a poor family. He had no dignity or attraction or desirable appearance; He was despised and rejected by men; and He was tempted yet without sin. We need to know Him and appreciate Him as such a One. The young people, who are now in their "silent" years, have a golden opportunity to know and experience this aspect of Christ's God-man living. **Objective:** To show that before the Lord Jesus could begin His ministry, He had to grow unto maturity through a period of silence. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Developing a proper human vessel (character) as the basis for one's eventual use to the Lord in His economy (IV.). **Chapter(s):** Luke 2–3; Isaiah 53.

Lesson 2: Christ's Baptism and Anointing—The Lord's ministry began with His baptism and with God the Father's anointing (Matt. 3:13–17). As a man, the Lord Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness," that is, to fulfill the requirement of God. Righteousness is to be right by living and doing things in the way God has ordained. The Lord was baptized not only to fulfill all righteousness according to God's ordination, but also to allow Himself to be put into death and resurrection that He might minister not in a natural way but in the way of resurrection. Christ's baptism was followed by three things: the open heavens, the descending Spirit of God, and the speaking of the Father. The descending of the Spirit was God the Father's anointing, His sending His Spirit to be upon the Lord Jesus for His ministry. The Father's sending His Spirit to descend upon Him indicated that the Triune God would be one with Him as the source, supply, power, and authority for His ministry. God the Father's anointing of the Lord Jesus declared to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father, in whom is the Father's delight. We need to know the Lord in His being baptized and anointed. **Objective:** To see that the Lord's ministry began with His baptism and His anointing by God the Father. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 3.

Lesson 3: Christ's Temptations—After the Lord Jesus was baptized in water and anointed with the Spirit of God, He was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. This

temptation was a test to prove that He was qualified to carry out His ministry. In order to carry out His ministry, He had to defeat God's enemy, the devil, Satan, and He had to do this as a man. First, the devil tempted the Lord to ignore His status as a man and to prove that He was the Son of God by turning stones into loaves of bread. However, the Lord stood firmly on His position as a man and said, "Man..." (Matt. 4:4). Second, the devil tempted Him to act in a miraculous way to demonstrate that He was the Son of God by casting Himself down from the wing of the temple. The Lord defeated the devil by saying, "It is written..." (Matt. 4:4). Finally, the devil offered Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory in exchange for worship. Again, the Lord resisted the devil's temptation and said to him, "Go away, Satan!" (Matt. 4:10). The Lord Jesus, standing as a man, was utterly victorious, and the devil's temptation was an absolute failure. We need to know and appreciate Christ in His victory over the devil's temptations. **Objective:** To show how the Lord confronted and defeated the devil as a man. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 4.

Lesson 4: Proclaiming the Gospel and Teaching the Truth—In His ministry the Lord Jesus proclaimed the gospel of God and taught the divine truth. His proclaiming was to announce God's glad tidings to the miserable people in bondage, and His teaching was to enlighten the ignorant ones in darkness with the light of the truth. In His preaching the Lord Jesus told people to repent and believe in the gospel. To repent is mainly in the mind; to believe is mainly in the heart. To repent is to have a change of mind with regret for the past and a turn for the future. To believe in something is to believe into the thing which we believe. To believe in Christ is to believe into Him and to receive Him into us. The Lord also taught the truth. In His teaching the Lord Jesus released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death that they might receive the light of life. His teaching brings people out of the satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18). First, we need to believe in the gospel and receive the Lord's teaching. Then, we need to proclaim the gospel and teach the truth to others. **Objective:** To show how the Lord in His ministry proclaimed the gospel, telling people to repent and believe in the gospel, and taught the truth in order to deliver people from the darkness of the ignorance of God. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Mark 1.

Lesson 5: Working with the Father—As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus lived by the Father and expressed the Father. He was absolutely one with the Father. Thus, in His ministry, the Lord always carried out the Father's work, spoke the Father's word, and did the Father's will. As the Son, He submitted to the Father in everything, and thus established the prototype of a life that fulfills God's eternal purpose. As those who have become the Father's sons today, we also can work with the Father, speak the Father's word, and carry out the Father's will. **Objective:** To show the young people that the Lord Jesus did nothing of or from Himself, but instead did the work, spoke the word, and sought the will of the Father. **Crucial Matters:** An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** John 4-12.

Lesson 6: Caring for Human Need—Forgiving Sinners—In His ministry, the Lord Jesus cared for the needs of fallen and lost human beings, who were oppressed by the burden of sin and all its by-products. Because He is God, and because He would die for man's

sins, Jesus had both the authority and the ground to forgive sins. Through this aspect of His ministry, we are able to receive God's full salvation. We need to receive His forgiveness, love Him as the One who has forgiven our many sins, and be one with Him to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name. **Objective:** To appreciate the tender care of the Lord's forgiveness. **Crucial Matters:** Understanding that man fell and became sinful, corrupted, and subject to Satan and his world system (II.B.2.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Knowing, loving, and consecrating ourselves to the Lord based on His redemptive work on the cross because of His great love for us (III.C.4.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 9; Mark 2.

Lesson 7: Caring for Human Need—Healing the Sick—Sickness is an issue of sin and is a sign of man's abnormal condition before God because of sin. Therefore, in His ministry, the Lord Jesus healed people of their sick condition both physically and spiritually, and restored them to a normal condition so that they might serve Him. Today, we need to experience Christ as the One who heals our sick spiritual condition that we could minister this healing to others as we partake of the divine life and experience the virtuous humanity of Christ. **Objective:** To understand that because the Lord dealt with sin and imparted the divine life, He was able to heal those who were sick. **Crucial Matters:** Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew–John.

Lesson 8: Caring for Human Need—Casting Out Demons—When the Lord came to the earth to carry out His service for sinners, He met many cases of demon possession. For a person to be possessed by a demon means that he has been usurped by Satan. Therefore, the Lord in His ministry not only forgave man's sins and healed man's sickness, but He also cast out demons to deliver man from Satan's usurpation and rebellion. Man today is usurped by Satan and desperately needs this aspect of the Lord's ministry. The Lord in His ministry on earth came to destroy the works of the devil by casting demons out of people. By this, He delivered people out of the kingdom of Satan and delivered them into the kingdom of God. He carried this out not by His own effort and strength, but by the Spirit of God, by prayer, and by exercising His divine authority. May we all open ourselves to the Lord to deliver us from all rebellion, insubordination, and usurpation and give the Lord full ground to occupy our entire being. **Objective:** To show how the Lord Jesus in His ministry cast out demons, thereby delivering people from Satan's rebellion and usurpation. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding that man fell and became sinful, corrupted, and subject to Satan and his world system (II.B.2.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 8.

Lesson 9: Caring for Human Need—Opening the Eyes of the Blind—In His ministry, the Lord Jesus opened the eyes of the blind to recover their sight. He not only opened the eyes of the physically blind; He also opened the eyes of the spiritually blind. He is the light of the world who delivers man from darkness and restores his sight so that he can see spiritual things. In this lesson, we will study two cases in which the Lord uses spittle from His mouth to open the eyes of the blind. This spittle signifies the word that proceeds out of the Lord's mouth and that conveys the divine light of life. When we receive this word into us and are mingled with it, we receive an anointing by which our eyes, which were blinded by Satan, are restored to sight. How wonderful is the Lord's ministry in this aspect! He heals our blindness and, by His living word, opens our eyes to see the genuine

spiritual things. **Objective:** To show how the Lord Jesus in His ministry opened the eyes of those who were blind physically and spiritually. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Mark 8; John 9.

Lesson 10: Caring for Human Need—Raising the Dead—On certain occasions the Lord Jesus performed the great miracle of raising the dead. The dead signify those who are dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5) and thus unable to contact God. After being resurrected they can fellowship with God by means of their regenerated spirit. In John 11:25 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Because Christ is resurrection, whenever He is present, resurrection is there. Today, our Christ is the life-giving One who wants not only to heal us but also to give us life, to resurrect us from our dead condition. **Objective:** To understand that in His ministry Christ demonstrated the fact that He is the resurrection and the life by raising the dead. **Crucial Matters:** Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Mark 5, Luke 7, John 11.

Lesson 11: The Prayers of Christ (1)—In His God-man living, the Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. His prayers were not those of a common man praying common prayers, nor were they the prayers of a religious man praying in a religious way. Rather, His prayers were the prayers of a God-man who prayed to the mysterious God. As a man of prayer, He was one with God, He lived always in the presence of God, and He trusted in God. Furthermore, Satan, the ruler of the world, had no ground in Him (so His prayers were never impure or colored by hidden desires or motives). In His prayers He was altogether one with God and concerned for God's will and God's kingdom. We need to learn from Him to pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as it is in the heavens. This is to pray for the heavenly ruling, the kingdom of the heavens, to be carried out on earth. **Objective:** The Lord Jesus was a man of prayer who, in oneness with the Father, prayed for God's will to be done on earth. **Crucial Matters:** An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Praying to fellowship with the Lord and petitioning for our own and others' needs (III.E.6.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 6.

Lesson 12: The Prayers of Christ (2)—In performing the miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, the Lord Jesus trained His disciples. Before performing this miracle He took the loaves and the fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed them. This indicates several things: that He was one with the Father and trusted in Him; that He did nothing from Himself; that He did not seek His own will but the will of the Father; and that He did not seek His own glory but the glory of the Father. As the sent One, the Lord realized that the source of the blessing was not with Him, but with the Father, the sending One. After He performed the miracle, He went up to a mountain to be alone with the Father in prayer. From this we need to learn of the Lord (1) to always honor God as our unique source and (2) to spend time alone with the Lord in prayer, enjoying intimate fellowship with Him. **Objective:** To show how the Lord Jesus trained His disciples to learn from Him as a man of prayer in His performing of the miracle of feeding five thousand people. **Crucial Matters:** Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Praying to fellowship with the Lord and petitioning for our own and others' needs (III.E.6.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 14.

Lesson 13: Christ's Teaching concerning the Kingdom—As those who have believed into Christ and received Him, we have been born of God to be His children, having the divine life and the divine nature. Because we have been born of water and of the Spirit, we have entered into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a divine realm, not only of the divine dominion but also of the divine species, in which are all the divine things. Now we need to learn from the Lord's teaching concerning the kingdom how to live in this divine realm. In particular, we need to learn to be poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:6), to be merciful (Matt. 5:7), to be pure in heart (Matt. 5:8), to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), to seek God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33), and to do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). We need to help the young people realize that, as children of God, they have received a kingly life to live in the reality of the kingdom. We need to help them realize that outwardly we may appear the same as others, but inwardly we are living in another realm, the realm of the divine dominion and the divine species. **Objective:** To help the young people realize that as those who have been born of God to enter *into* the kingdom of God, we need to learn of the Lord how to live in the kingdom of God. **Crucial Matters:** Living a life under Christ's kingship to reign in life over all things (III.H.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 5, John 3.

Lesson 14: Christ's Teaching concerning Our Living in the Church Life—Much of the Lord's teaching in the four Gospels concerns our living together in the church life. In this lesson we will focus on three matters: the church life as a forgiving life, a serving life, and a shepherding life. In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus gave a serious word about our need to forgive one another in the church life. We need to realize that the Lord has had mercy on us and has forgiven us of so many things, and thus we also should have mercy on one another, forgiving one another from our hearts (Matt. 18:35). In Matthew 20:20–28, the Lord taught us about serving others. Instead of trying to be great and to exercise authority over others in the church life, we need to serve one another in humility and love. In John 21:15–17, the Lord spoke about shepherding in the church life. Shepherding is to take all-inclusive, tender care of the flock. In the church life we should practice shepherding in mutuality, that is, shepherding one another in love. To do this, we need to cherish one another with Christ's humanity and nourish one another with His divinity. **Objective:** To show how the Lord, in His teaching concerning the church life, teaches us to forgive one another, to serve one another, and to shepherd one another. **Crucial Matters:** Practicing an active, corporate church life (III.F.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 18.

Lesson 15: Christ's Teaching in Parables (1)—In this lesson we will cover four major parables in the Gospel of Luke—the parables of the shepherd and lost sheep, the woman and the lost coin, the father and the prodigal son in Luke 15, and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. The three parables in Luke 15 unveil the saving love and operation of the Triune God to save sinners. These parables reveal the operation of the Triune God in saving lost people and in bringing them into Himself through Himself. In Luke 10:25–37 the Lord Jesus portrays Himself as the good Samaritan. This parable shows in a detailed way how the Lord cares for the dying one. Through these parables we see both our need and God's salvation in Christ, our Savior. **Objective:** To see the Triune God's loving care and operation in saving sinners. **Crucial Matters:** Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.). **Chapter(s):** Luke 10, 15.

Lesson 16: Christ's Teaching in Parables (2)—In this lesson we will cover three parables from the Gospel of Matthew—the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23), the parable

for watchfulness (Matt. 25:1–13), and the parable for faithfulness (Matt. 25:14–30). In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus shows us that we need a proper heart, the good soil, to receive the word of God so that it may bear fruit in us. In the parable for watchfulness, He teaches us to be ready for His coming by always being filled with the Spirit of God in our whole being. In the parable for faithfulness, the Lord Jesus teaches us that we need to be faithful in our service to Him in order to be rewarded by Him at His coming. These three parables touch our heart, our life, and our service, all of which are vital aspects of our living Christ in the church life. **Objective:** To learn that in the church life we need to have a proper heart toward God, to be filled with the Spirit of God, and to be faithful in our service to God. **Crucial Matters:** The Lord's return (II.E.5.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 13, 25.

Lesson 17: Training His Disciples (1)—During the years of His ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus not only taught His disciples—He trained them, that is, He prepared them through discipling them to live and serve not according to themselves in their natural life but according to Christ in the divine life. To teach is to impart truth for one's enlightenment; to train is to shape one's character for one's future usefulness. The Lord worked on all the disciples, but in this lesson we will focus (as an example) on a few incidents in the Lord's training of Peter. In Matthew 16 and 17 the Lord, focusing on Peter, trained the disciples regarding several matters: the need of revelation to know Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13–17); the need to deny the self, take up the cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:21–26); the need to recognize Christ as the One in whom God delights and to hear Him (Matt. 17:1–8); the need to pray in faith (Matt. 17:14–21); and the need to apply the revelation and vision of Christ's sonship (Matt. 17:24–27). In these chapters we see the Lord rebuking Peter, God interrupting Peter, and the Lord disciplining Peter by sending him to the sea to fish. In all these matters the Lord Jesus touched the being of His disciples and shaped them, preparing them to serve Him as His continuation. As a result of His training, the disciples not only served Him but also became the foundations of the New Jerusalem. **Objective:** To see the need for training in order to make us useful to the Lord. **Crucial Matters:** Seeking the human and spiritual education and training that will best equip your vessel to fulfill your goals and ultimately the purpose of your life (IV.A.3.). **Chapter(s):** Matthew 16–17.

Lesson 18: Training His Disciples (2)—In the last lesson, we saw that the Lord Jesus often dealt with Peter in such a way that not only he but all the disciples would be trained by Him. In this lesson, we need to see that the Lord also dealt with John for this purpose. In his natural life John was ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant. However, the Lord trained him and gained him so that eventually he became most useful in His hand, even writing major portions of the New Testament. As a result of training, John became pure, loving, and transparent, a man constituted with the divine life for the divine building. Both Peter and John are outstanding examples of how important it is to be trained by the Lord. What a tremendous difference training makes! We need training in order to be useful to the Lord. The Lord Jesus trained His disciples not to be ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant, and in this way He made them useful to Him. **Objective:** To see the need for training in order to become useful to the Lord. **Crucial Matters:** Seeking the human and spiritual education and training that will best equip your vessel to fulfill your goals and ultimately the purpose of your life (IV.A.3.). **Chapter(s):** Mark 9–10; Luke 9.

Unit 8—The Ministry of Christ

Lesson 1—Christ's Silence from Age Twelve to Age Thirty

OBJECTIVE: To show that before the Lord Jesus could begin His ministry, He had to grow unto maturity through a period of silence.

SYNOPSIS: The Lord Jesus was the first God-man, and in His living as the first God-man He set up a pattern for us to follow today. One aspect of this pattern is the period of silence between the age of twelve and the age of thirty. Although the Lord was concerned for God's house when He was at the age of twelve, God did not commission Him to carry out His ministry until He had reached the age of thirty. This indicates that the real ministry to take care of God's interests on earth requires the maturity of life. Even the Lord Jesus Himself needed to reach a certain level of human maturity before He could carry out His ministry. During these eighteen years of silence, the Lord Jesus was like a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2), meaning that He came from a poor family. He had no dignity or attraction or desirable appearance; He was despised and rejected by men; and He was tempted yet without sin. We need to know Him and appreciate Him as such a One. The young people, who are now in their "silent" years, have a golden opportunity to know and experience this aspect of Christ's God-man living.

CHAPTER(S): Luke 2-3; Isaiah 53.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

In the last unit we covered the Person of Christ. In this unit we will cover the ministry of Christ, which is the first aspect of His work. To experience and enjoy Christ in full, we need a revelation of these two things: His Person and His work (Eph. 1:17-23; 4:13; Col. 2:2). Having covered the Person of Christ in the last unit, we go on to cover the ministry of Christ in this unit. In this lesson, it is enlightening to see that Christ did not begin His ministry right away. Rather, He matured through a period of eighteen years of silence, during which He lived a proper God-man's life for the preparation of His ministry before God. This period of silence from age twelve to age thirty has particular relevance to the young people who are living in these "silent" years. During these years, they have a golden opportunity to know and experience this aspect of Christ's God-man living.

I. Before the Lord began His ministry, He matured through a period of silence—Luke 3:23

During the Lord's ministry He preached the gospel, taught the truth, forgave the sinners, healed the sick, cast out demons, and opened the eyes of the blind. Before Christ began His ministry, He passed through a period of silence, a period in which He did not carry out a work before God. This period of silence was a time in which the Lord grew unto maturity.

A. At the age of twelve, the Lord had a concern for God's house but was not yet commissioned by God to carry out His ministry—Luke 2:49

When the Lord was twelve years old, His parents went up to Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of Passover. When they completed their stay there, they returned home, supposing

that Jesus was in the company with them. When they didn't find Him, they returned to Jerusalem and found him in the temple with the wise teachers. The Lord said to His parents, "Did you not know that I must be in the things of My Father" (or it can be translated "Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house"—Luke 2:49, footnote 2). This indicates that at the age of twelve the Lord had a concern for the Father's house, which is the church issuing in the Body of Christ which will ultimately consummate in the New Jerusalem. As the first God-man, He was living for this. We also should follow His pattern to have a concern in our youth for the church as the house of God. Verses 51 and 52 continue by saying, "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them...And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in the grace manifested in Him before God and men." Subsequently, the Gospel's record shows that, although the Lord had a concern for God's interests at age twelve, God did not commission Him then to carry out His ministry. Rather, God waited another eighteen years until the Lord reached the mature age of thirty. This is not man's way. Man likes to do things quickly, but God patiently waits, because He realizes that the genuine ministry requires the maturity of life.

B. Between the age of twelve and the age of thirty, there was a period of silence

During this period of silence, the Lord grew up like a tender plant and a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2a). He had no attracting form, no majesty, and no beautiful appearance (Isa. 53:2b). He was despised and forsaken of men (Isa. 53:3). His appearance was marred more than any man (Isa. 52:14). He was tempted yet without sin (Heb. 4:15; 2:18). All of these states and conditions make a person silent and inactive in social appearance. If we were in these states and conditions, we also would be silent and inactive, since no one would appreciate, admire, or respect us. This time of silence in the Lord's life was an important time, for it was during this time that He matured in the human life. The following points show the state and condition in which the Lord lived while living in these silent years.

1. He grew up like a tender plant before Jehovah and like a root out of dry ground—Isa. 53:2a

For the Lord to be like a root out of dry ground means that He came from a poor family.

2. He had no attracting form nor majesty, and no desirable appearance—Isa. 53:2b

Isaiah 53:2b says, "He has no attracting form nor majesty that we should look upon Him, Nor beautiful appearance that we should desire Him." There was nothing of the Lord's status or appearance that was desirable to others.

3. He was despised and forsaken of men—Isa. 53:3

Isaiah 53:3b says, "He was despised; and we did not esteem Him." No one respected Him.

4. His appearance was marred more than that of any man—Isa. 52:14

5. He was tempted yet without sin—Heb. 4:15; 2:18

C. At the age of thirty, the Lord reached a level of maturity for the carrying out of His ministry for God's interests—Luke 3:23

For the Lord to create the universe, it took only a few days. For Him to be incarnated as a man took nine months, but the time for Him to grow as a man unto maturity took thirty years. Although He had a concern for God's house at the age of twelve, He still needed another eighteen years to reach a certain level of human maturity so that He could carry out His ministry for the Father's house. The creation of the universe could be accomplished within a matter of days, but the carrying out of a genuine ministry before God required that the Lord mature through thirty years of human life. The reason for this is seen in the next point.

II. The real ministry to take care of God's interests on earth requires the maturity of life—Num. 4:3

"Many servants of God could not tolerate such a time of silence; rather, they failed such a test by God. The real ministry to take care of the house of God issuing in the Body of Christ needs the maturity of life [age] (Num. 4:3). The more maturity you have, the wiser you will be. Elders should be brothers who have grown up to a certain degree in maturity. Then they are qualified to be elders. I hope all of the young people will be trained to go on to grow up according to the pattern of the first God-man, the prototype" (The God-man Living, Message 3, p. 28).

III. In the "silent" years of our youth, we have the opportunity to know and experience this aspect of Christ's God-man living

The genuine ministry before God cannot be carried out through gifts, talent, eloquence, miracles, or doctrinal teachings. The real ministry of the New Testament requires growth and maturity in life. For this reason, we should not be anxious or quick in our desire to carry out a work before God. Rather, we should be at peace to live a normal God-man's life by advancing daily in grace before God and men. The Lord as the first God-man took this path during His years of silence (Luke 2:52). and we, as the many God-men, should follow His pattern to experience Him in this aspect and grow unto maturity. Never despise being in junior high or high school. These years are valuable years during which we are growing up unto maturity for the carrying out of a proper ministry before God. By living a God-man's life through high school, college, and the full-time training, we will grow unto maturity and build up a solid base from which we can be the real ministers of Christ for the building up of His Body (Eph. 4:12).

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Speak to the young people regarding the Lord's youth and stress that in everything He did, He was a God-man—a man with God in Him. In like manner, when we believed into the Lord, we received the life of God and became God-men born of God (John 1:12–13, 3:6). Now everything we do is with God in us. When we observe the Lord's life in the Gospel of Luke, we find that His living was a pattern for all of us to follow, a pattern of a man who lived with God in Him. When He was twelve, He had an interest in the things of God (Luke 2:49). In junior high, we also can have an interest in the things of God. In His youth, Christ cared for the Father's house, the church (Luke 2:49, footnotes 1 and 2). In our youth, we also are the many God-men who can have a heart for the church. In His youth, Christ was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). We also can live a life honoring our father and mother and being subject to them. In His youth, Christ grew in grace with God (in the expression of God) and with men (in the human virtues which are gracious to men) (Luke 2:52, footnote 2). As the many God-men, we can be the same. Then, during His years of silence, Christ lived as a carpenter doing the fine and careful work of carpentry. We also should carry out our human responsibilities in a fine and diligent manner. In all of these details, we must never forget that

we are God-men with God living in us. We are growing spiritually and humanly before both God and men until we are full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28).

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Many people consider God to be not only far away from them, but also unconcerned and unable to sympathize with or understand what they are going through day by day. However, our God is not the cold, distant, uncompassionate God of religion. He is a personal, affectionate, and understanding God who has passed through human living as a man. In incarnation the infinite God became a finite man who, though born in a lowly way into a poor family and raised in a despised region, grew in favor with both God and man. He lived His childhood unnoticed, without outward fame or recognition. Although the desire to be in the things of God His Father was in Him even from the age of twelve, He was limited by the slow process and everyday experience of normal human growth: from a child, to a young man, to an adult. He lived a normal human life, unnoticed and unrecognized until thirty years of age. Having passed through the natural course of human living, He can easily be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses because He was tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He passed through every experience and temptation that you may ever have to face. Now, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him" (Heb. 7:25a).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Developing a proper human vessel (character) as the basis for one's eventual use to the Lord in His economy (IV.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The God-man Living*, Message 3.

REFERENCES: Luke 2:49, footnote 1; Luke 2:52, footnote 2; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 64, pp. 683–687; *The Experience of Christ as Life for the Building Up of the Church*, Chapter 15; *The God-man Living*, Message 3; *The Secret of Experiencing Christ*, Chapter 3, p. 28; Chapter 4, p. 41; *Truth Lessons*, Level 1, Volume 2, Lesson 18, p. 90.

Lesson 2—Christ's Baptism and Anointing

OBJECTIVE: To see that the Lord's ministry began with His baptism and His anointing by God the Father.

SYNOPSIS: The Lord's ministry began with His baptism and with God the Father's anointing (Matt. 3:13–17). As a man, the Lord Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness," that is, to fulfill the requirement of God. Righteousness is to be right by living and doing things in the way God has ordained. The Lord was baptized not only to fulfill all righteousness according to God's ordination, but also to allow Himself to be put into death and resurrection that He might minister not in a natural way but in the way of resurrection. Christ's baptism was followed by three things: the open heavens, the descending Spirit of God, and the speaking of the Father. The descending of the Spirit was God the Father's anointing, His sending His Spirit to be upon the Lord Jesus for His ministry. The Father's sending His Spirit to descend upon Him indicated that the Triune God would be one with Him as the source, supply, power, and authority for His ministry. God the Father's anointing of the Lord Jesus declared to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father, in whom is the Father's delight. We need to know the Lord in His being baptized and anointed.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 3.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

The Lord Jesus, according to Lesson 1, had matured to an age where He could minister before God. Yet the Lord Jesus did not rush out to display His capacity and ability before others. Rather, before beginning His ministry, the Lord did something to show that as a man in the flesh before God, He was good for nothing but death and burial, and that He had no confidence in the flesh. He was then anointed by God the Father and began to minister by the Spirit. The way the Lord took is entirely contrary to the world's way of displaying one's ability.

I. The Lord's ministry began with His baptism and with His anointing by God the Father—Matt. 3:13–17

The central thought of this lesson is that before the Lord Jesus began His ministry, He was first baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill God's righteous requirements and then anointed by the Father for the carrying out of His ministry. We need to know the Lord in His being baptized and anointed. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist began to minister in the wilderness of Judea, preaching repentance for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 3:1–2). All the people came out to the wilderness to hear him, and all whom John received he baptized in the Jordan River to terminate them (Matt. 3:5–6). His ministry was a terminating ministry. Then the Lord Jesus came to John and also wanted to be baptized and terminated. John tried to prevent Him from doing so, but the Lord Jesus told John to allow it in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:13–15). After the Lord took this step to be baptized, the heavens were opened and the Lord Jesus was anointed by God the Father in front of all the people (Matt. 3:16–17).

II. Before the Lord Jesus began His ministry, He was first baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill God's righteous requirement—Matt. 3:13–15; Rom. 3:20–21; Matt. 21:32

In the Old Testament, God's righteous requirement was that His people keep the law given to them through Moses. However, the law was not able to perfect the Old Testament saints, and they were not able to be justified before God by the keeping of the law (Heb. 10:1; Rom. 3:20). When John the Baptist came, God abolished the principle and the rituals of the Mosaic law (Life-

study of Matthew, Message 20). God ended the dispensation of the law when John the Baptist came with a new way—the way of righteousness (Matt. 21:32; 3:15; Mark 1:1).

A. As a man, the Lord Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness”—Matt. 3:15

“John’s preaching was the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1). He declared, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near’ (Matt. 3:2). When people repented, he would put them into the water to bury them. John baptized people with water, indicating that man in the flesh is good only for death and burial. But then the Lord Jesus came to put people into the Spirit to have life (v. 11). This is the New Testament. Christ’s ministry commenced by His baptism (vv. 13–17). Before He carried out any part of His ministry, the first thing He did was to be baptized to fulfill the righteousness according to the way of righteousness brought in by John” (The God-man Living, Message 4, p. 35).

1. **Righteousness is to be right by living and doing things in the way God has ordained**
2. **The Lord was baptized to fulfill all righteousness according to God’s ordination, that is, to fulfill the requirement of God**

In the flesh, no one can please God (Rom. 8:8). The way of righteousness brought in by John the Baptist was that we should recognize that man in the flesh is good for nothing but death and burial. God has ordained that for us as men in the flesh to serve Him, we should first be put to death and buried. This is His righteous requirement. This is also the way of righteousness brought in by John—if you want to please God you must be baptized in order to be put to death and buried. The Lord Jesus, as a man in the flesh, was baptized in this way to fulfill God’s righteous requirement.

B. The way of righteousness is to recognize that in your flesh you are good for nothing but death and burial—Matt. 3:15; Rom. 1:3; 8:8; Gal. 2:16; 1 Cor. 15:50

According to God’s righteous way, even the Lord Jesus recognized that according to His flesh He was good for nothing but death and burial. Christ came out of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3), and “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). Even though Christ’s flesh was sinless flesh (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3), Christ still recognized that in His flesh He was good for nothing but death and burial. In this way, Christ fulfilled all God’s righteousness.

C. The Lord was also baptized in order to allow Himself to be put into death and resurrection that He might minister not in a natural way but in the way of resurrection

Christ’s baptism was a preliminary step, even a prerequisite, for beginning His ministry. Even though He was perfect and sinless, He did not come to serve God in a natural way. Because He was a man in the flesh, the Lord Jesus took the way of baptism to allow Himself to be put into death and resurrection, that He might minister not in a natural way, but in the way of resurrection. His taking this way, God’s way of righteousness, was also a pattern for all of us (cf. Rom. 6:3–4). Just as the Lord was baptized, we also should be baptized to be terminated and thus fulfill all righteousness. After baptism, we should live

in a way that takes our baptism as the base of our living and ministry before God, realizing that our flesh is good for nothing but death and burial.

III. After He was baptized, Christ was anointed by God the Father for the carrying out of His ministry—Matt. 3:16–17

Christ's baptism was followed by three things: the open heavens, the descending Spirit of God, and the speaking of the Father. The opening of the heavens indicated that the significance of His baptism was accepted and sealed by the heavens. The sending of the Spirit to descend upon Him indicated that the Triune God would be one with Him as the source, supply, power, and authority of His ministry. The Father's speaking was to declare to the whole universe that according to Christ's divinity He is the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father, in whom is the Father's delight. In the flesh, Christ was good for nothing but death and burial. However, by anointing Christ, God the Father declared to the whole universe that Christ was also according to another source, the source of His divinity, the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4).

A. The Father's sending of the Spirit was His anointing of Christ for Christ's ministry on the earth—Matt. 3:16b

The descending of the Spirit was God the Father's anointing, His sending His Spirit to be upon the Lord Jesus for His ministry. The Father's sending His Spirit to descend upon Christ indicated that the Triune God would be one with Him as the source, supply, power, and authority for His ministry.

B. Christ's anointing was with the opened heavens, indicating that the significance of His baptism was accepted and sealed by the heavens—Matt. 3:16

C. Christ's anointing was with the Father's declaration—Matt. 3:17; Rom. 1:4

In His anointing of Christ, God the Father declared to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father, in whom is the Father's delight. As a man in the flesh, Christ was baptized. This was to declare that according to the flesh, He was good for nothing but death and burial. His baptism in this way fulfilled God's righteousness. However, according to His divinity, Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father. When Christ took the step to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, God the Father took the step to anoint Him and declare to the universe that His delight is in Christ.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: The way that Christ took for His ministry was baptism. His baptism was to fulfill God's righteousness, to be right by doing things in the way God has ordained. When we were baptized after believing into the Lord, we may not have realized the full significance of baptism, that baptism is to be put into death and buried (Rom. 6:3–4). Baptism is a declaration that in our flesh we are good for nothing but death and burial. However, after being baptized, we need to live a life in the same way of righteousness. To be put to death and buried, practically speaking, is to put aside our preference and go along with others. For example, suppose your friends ask you to go out with them, but your mother asks you to help her around the house. Obviously, you have to go along with your mother, but how you do so determines if you are right with God or not. If you help your mother grudgingly and half-heartedly, while murmuring and complaining under your breath or out loud, then you are not living in the way of baptism. If, however, you turn to the Lord in that situation, you will find that your preference does not matter that much, and you will actually be happy and cheerful in helping your mother. This happiness is a sign of resurrection. How wonderful it is

to be able to turn to the Lord in every situation to live in the reality of His death and resurrection.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Even the Lord Jesus, with His perfect humanity, acknowledged His need to be baptized in order to fulfill "all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). He realized that, as a man in the flesh, He was good for nothing but death and burial. Do you have the same realization? Regardless of your standing or position by birth, regardless of your high ethics or good morals, even regardless of your religious conduct and practices, outside of Christ "there is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Although baptism in itself cannot save you, the significance behind it is powerful. By the Lord's mercy we need to drop our pride and abandon the trust that we place in our own righteousness, which is as filthy rags before God (Isa. 64:6). Next, we must open to the Lord with a repenting heart, realizing our unrighteous stand before God, and call on the name of the Lord to receive Him as our Redeemer, our Savior, and even as our very righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). Then, just as the Lord was baptized, we also should be baptized to be terminated and thus fulfill all righteousness. Many new believers think that it is good enough just to believe into the Lord and receive Him. According to the Bible, however, baptism is a matter of righteousness (Matt. 3:15). We must be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, that is, to satisfy God's requirement. No matter how good or righteous we think we are, we are still in the flesh and we can never please God (Rom. 8:8). If we want to please Him we must be baptized in order to be put to death and buried. When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death and buried with Him (Rom. 6:3-4). Believe into Christ and be baptized to be delivered from your unrighteousness into Christ as the righteousness of God.

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The God-man Living*, Message 4, pp. 34-36; Message 5.

REFERENCES: *The God-man Living*, Messages 4-5, 8-9.

Lesson 3—Christ's Temptations

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord confronted and defeated the devil as a man.

SYNOPSIS: After the Lord Jesus was baptized in water and anointed with the Spirit of God, He was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. This temptation was a test to prove that He was qualified to carry out His ministry. In order to carry out His ministry, He had to defeat God's enemy, the devil, Satan, and He had to do this as a man. First, the devil tempted the Lord to ignore His status as a man and to prove that He was the Son of God by turning stones into loaves of bread. However, the Lord stood firmly on His position as a man and said, "Man..." (Matt. 4:4). Second, the devil tempted Him to act in a miraculous way to demonstrate that He was the Son of God by casting Himself down from the wing of the temple. The Lord defeated the devil by saying, "It is written..." (Matt. 4:4). Finally, the devil offered Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory in exchange for worship. Again, the Lord resisted the devil's temptation and said to him, "Go away, Satan!" (Matt. 4:10). The Lord Jesus, standing as a man, was utterly victorious, and the devil's temptation was an absolute failure. We need to know and appreciate Christ in His victory over the devil's temptations.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 4.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

I. The first God-man was led by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil—Matt. 4:1

Matthew 4:1 says, "Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil." This verse indicates that the Lord's going into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil was under the Spirit's leading and under God's arrangement. This temptation was a test arranged by God to prove that Jesus was qualified to carry out His ministry. In order to carry out His ministry, He had to defeat God's enemy, the devil, Satan, and He had to do this as a man. God as the Creator would never deal directly with Satan, His creature. This would not be a glory to God since God the Creator could easily defeat His creature. God desires to destroy Satan by the very man whom Satan poisoned and spoiled. In this way, man, a creature, defeats Satan, another creature. This is a glory to God. Therefore, the Lord had to defeat the enemy as a man to be qualified to carry out His ministry for the accomplishment of God's eternal economy.

II. The first God-man overcame each of the devil's temptations by standing on His position as a man—Matt. 4:2-11

The test that the first God-man experienced was actually a battle between God and Satan for the fulfillment of God's eternal economy. God needed Christ to defeat Satan as a man. So Satan's strategy was to tempt the first God-man to ignore His status as a man and assume His position as the Son of God. If the Lord had done this, He would have lost His standing to defeat Satan, God's creature. However, the Lord, knowing Satan's strategy, fought back each time by emphasizing that He was a man, a creature of God, dealing with Satan, another creature of God. By this, He defeated the devil and won the war for the glory of God. We see His victory in each of the following temptations.

A. First, the devil tempted the Lord to change stones into loaves of bread—Matt. 4:2-4

Matthew 4:2-3 says, "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, If You are the Son of God, speak that these stones may become loaves of bread."

1. The Lord was tempted to ignore His status as a man and assume His position as the Son of God—Matt. 4:3

The tempter said to the Lord, "If You are the Son of God..." (Matt. 4:3). Forty days prior to this, the Father from the heavens declared concerning Christ, "This is My Son, the Beloved" (Matt. 3:17). Christ was indeed the Son of God, but for the Lord to defeat God's enemy, He had to stand on His position as a man. The devil, knowing this, took the Father's declaration as a base to tempt the Lord to ignore His status as a man and assume His position as the Son of God. He wanted the Lord to prove that He was the Son of God by miraculously turning the stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. If the Lord had done this and made a show of Himself to prove His status as the Son of God, He would have left His position as a man and lost His standing to defeat Satan. But the Lord stood on the base of His baptism by remaining in His position as a man in the flesh (see Lesson 2).

2. The Lord defeated the devil by standing in the position of a man—Matt. 4:4

The Lord confronted the devil by saying, "Man..." (Matt. 4:4). This one word was a killing word to the enemy by which the Lord emphasized His standing in the position as a man (a creature) in dealing with Satan (another creature). The Lord held on to His position as a man and by this defeated Satan. The Lord continued by saying, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The Lord did not quote His own words, but spoke God's word to the enemy. The word the Lord quoted indicates that He did not care for His hunger, and He did not care to make a show by turning the stones to bread. Rather He cared for God's interest and took the Scriptures as His bread and lived on it. The Greek word translated "word" here is "rhema," which refers to the instant word. The word on which the Lord had been living became the instant word applied to His situation. In like manner, we can take the Word as our nourishing food and apply it to every tempting situation that we encounter throughout the day.

B. Second, the devil tempted the Lord to jump from the wing of the temple—Matt. 4:5-6

Matthew 4:5-6 says, "Then the devil took Him into the holy city and set Him on the wing of the temple, and said to Him, If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down; for it is written, 'To His angels He shall give charge concerning You, and on their hands they shall bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"

1. The Lord was tempted to act in a miraculous way to demonstrate that He was the Son of God—Matt. 4:6

The tempter again said, "If You are the Son of God..." (Matt. 4:6), based on the Father's declaration that Christ was the Son of God. Satan tempted the Lord to assume His divinity by jumping from the wing of His temple and miraculously having the angels bear Him up. Satan quoted the Scriptures in a subtle way and again tempted the Lord to leave His standing as a man and prove He was the Son of God.

2. The Lord defeated the devil by standing as a man to not test the Lord His God—Matt. 4:7

The Lord fought back by saying, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not test the Lord your God'" (Matt. 4:7). The Lord quoted the Scriptures again and in quoting them,

indicated that He was a man before God who should not test the Lord His God. Again, He held on to His standing as a man. The devil's first temptation was related to human living. The devil's second temptation is related to the matter of religion. The devil often tempts us in the religious realm to do something to prove that we are somebody. We should reject this temptation by not caring for self-glory or self-exaltation. Rather than jumping from the wing of the temple to demonstrate that we are somebody, we should simply walk down in a slow way, allow others to think we are nobody, and testify that our Christ is everything. This will defeat the enemy.

C. Third, the devil tempted the Lord to worship him—Matt. 4:9

Matthew 4:8–9 says, "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me."

- 1. The Lord was tempted to gain the worldly kingdoms and their glory which were a bait to hook Him so that He would worship the devil as God and serve him as his subordinate—Matt. 4:8–9**

"It should have been that in the preadamic age God appointed the archangel to be the head of the preadamic age (Ezek. 28:13–14), and the authority and glory of the kingdoms of the earth should have been given to him. After he rebelled against God and became God's enemy, Satan, he was judged by God (Isa. 14:12–15), but the full execution of God's judgment upon him will not be completed until the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:7–10). Hence, until that time he has authority over the kingdoms of the earth. In his subtle temptation of the Lord, he offered the earthly kingdoms and their glory to the first God-man as a bait to hook Him so that He would worship him as God and serve him as his subordinate" (The God-man Living, Message 6, p. 57). (See also Luke 4:6, footnote 1.)

- 2. The Lord defeated the devil as a man by not loving the worldly kingdoms and their glory, but by worshipping God and serving only Him—Matt. 4:10**

The Lord responded to the tempter by saying, "Go away, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'" (Matt. 4:10). "[T]he first God-man saw through the evil tempter's devilish device and conquered him by chasing him away and telling him in a shaming way that as a man before God He would worship God and serve Him only" (The God-man Living, Message 6, p. 57). Again, the Lord defeated the enemy by standing on the ground of man to worship and serve only God. The first two temptations were regarding human living and religion. This temptation was regarding worldly glory, promotion, ambition, position, and a promising future. Even among young people there is this desire to be a leader and a desire to have worldly glory. "Whenever you are seeking a certain position, deep within you know that you are worshipping an idol. For this reason, the Apostle said that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5)" (Life-study of Matthew, Message 11, p. 145).

III. The first God-man utterly defeated the devil as a man and was qualified to carry out His ministry—Matt. 4:11

In all of His "fighting back" answers to the devil, the Lord strongly emphasized His standing as a man. In His first response He said, "Man..." (Matt. 4:4). In His second and third response, He

said, "You shall not test the Lord your God" and "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:7, 10). With each of these statements the Lord emphasized that He was standing in the position of a man, a creature, to defeat Satan, another creature. By this He passed the test and was qualified to be the anointed Christ to carry out His ministry. In this initial warfare, Satan lost the war and Christ won the war for the glory of God. Satan was put to shame before the angels of God (Matt. 4:11), who "came triumphantly and ministered to the God-man, taking care of His forty-day fasting hunger [Matt. 4:11b]" (The God-man Living, Message 4, p. 39).

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: First John 2:14b says, "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one." Here we see a connection between the word of God and overcoming the evil one. "How can the young men overcome this evil one? They can overcome him because they have the word of God abiding in them. The Word of God is also their refuge, stronghold, and fortress. Day by day, the young men need to stay in the Word of God. We know from our experience that when the word of God abides in us and we stay in the Word as our refuge, we are protected from the evil one" (*Life-study of 1 John*, Message 20, pp. 171–172). "[T]he young men are nourished, strengthened, and sustained by the word of God which abides in them and operates in them against the Devil, the world, and its lust" (*Life-study of 1 John*, Message 19, p. 164). In an age when the evil one is seeking to destroy the young generation, we must be those who daily receive the word into us and allow it to abide in us. This will cause us to overcome the evil one and his world system.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Sometimes we may wonder why God Himself does not just simply destroy Satan once for all. This question is answered when we see how God will defeat Satan. Our God is the infinite and omnipotent God, the Creator of the universe and all its creatures (including Satan). For God to simply annihilate His creature Satan as easily and as instantly as He created him would be meaningless. Rather, God intends to defeat Satan through another creature—man. Our God is a most wise God, carrying out His economy in the most precise and meticulous way according to His infinite wisdom. His desire is to defeat Satan through man and be glorified through man. Yet, for about four thousand years, every man—one after another—was defeated by Satan. No one was able to resist the temptations of Satan until the God-man Jesus came. Satan repeatedly tempted Jesus on the ground that He was the Son of God, but the Lord stood firmly on His position as a man. It would have been easy for Jesus to demonstrate what He could do as the Son of God by performing miraculous acts such as changing stone into bread (Matt. 4:3–4) and casting Himself down from the wing of the temple to be borne up by angels (Matt. 4:6–7). But hallelujah! He stood firmly on the position of a man and defeated Satan as a man. He became the first man in the history of mankind to overcome all of Satan's temptations! As the first God-man, He defeated Satan, and paved the way for the rest of mankind to experience His victory over Satan and all his temptations. All we need to do is to tell Him, "Lord, I admit I am a helpless sinner. Instead of defeating Satan Your enemy, I got defeated by him. Lord, I need You as the One who defeated Satan as a man. I open to receive You as my God-man Savior. Come into my spirit so that you can defeat Satan through me." What a glory to God that He can defeat Satan, one of His creatures, not only through the first God-man Jesus, but also through us the many God-men!

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The God-man Living*, Message 4, pp. 37–39.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of 1 John*, Message 19, p. 164; Message 20, pp. 171–172; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 11; *The God-man Living*, Message 4, pp. 37–39; Message 6.

Lesson 4—Proclaiming the Gospel and Teaching the Truth

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord in His ministry proclaimed the gospel, telling people to repent and believe in the gospel, and taught the truth in order to deliver people from the darkness of the ignorance of God.

SYNOPSIS: In His ministry the Lord Jesus proclaimed the gospel of God and taught the divine truth. His proclaiming was to announce God's glad tidings to the miserable people in bondage, and His teaching was to enlighten the ignorant ones in darkness with the light of the truth. In His preaching the Lord Jesus told people to repent and believe in the gospel. To repent is mainly in the mind; to believe is mainly in the heart. To repent is to have a change of mind with regret for the past and a turn for the future. To believe in something is to believe into the thing which we believe. To believe in Christ is to believe into Him and to receive Him into us. The Lord also taught the truth. In His teaching the Lord Jesus released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death that they might receive the light of life. His teaching brings people out of the satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18). First, we need to believe in the gospel and receive the Lord's teaching. Then, we need to proclaim the gospel and teach the truth to others.

CHAPTER(S): Mark 1.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

After the Lord grew to maturity in His period of silence, and after He was baptized, anointed, and tested, He came forth to accomplish His ministry. The first thing the Lord did in His ministry was to preach the gospel and teach the truth. These two things were the all-embracing structure of His evangelical service. Man today needs these two items of the Lord's ministry. Because man is in bondage, he needs to hear the glad tidings of the gospel with all of its wonderful contents. Because man is in darkness and is ignorant of God, he needs the teaching of the truth to enlighten him regarding God and His purpose. By preaching the gospel and teaching the truth, the Lord brought the good news to people and enlightened them with the light of the truth.

I. The Lord proclaimed the gospel to announce God's glad tidings to the miserable people in bondage—Mark 1:14; Luke 4:18

In Luke 4:18, the Lord said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor." The first thing that the Lord as the Messiah was commissioned to do was to announce the gospel to the poor. The Greek word rendered "announce the gospel" means to announce good news, to declare glad tidings, to preach the gospel. The Lord brought these glad tidings to "the poor." "The poor" refers to those who were poor in heavenly, spiritual, and divine things (Luke 12:21; Rev. 3:17). In today's corrupted age, many young people are poor in the divine things and need the glad tidings of the gospel. Christ came to announce the glad tidings by preaching the gospel to the miserable people in bondage.

A. He told people to repent—Mark 1:15

Mark 1:14–15 says, "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel." In the Lord's preaching of the gospel, He told the sinners to do two things: repent and believe. "To repent is to have a change of mind with regret for the past and a turn for the future. To repent before God is, on the negative side, to repent not only of sins and wrongdoings, but also to repent of the world and its corruption that usurp and corrupt

people whom God made for Himself, and to repent of our God-forsaking life in the past. On the positive side, to repent is to turn to God in every way and in everything for fulfilling His purpose in making mankind. This is a 'repentance unto God'; it is to 'repent and turn to God' (Acts 20:21; 26:20)" (Life-study of Mark, Message 5, p. 49).

B. He told people to believe in the gospel—Mark 1:15

Whereas repentance is mainly related to the mind, believing is mainly related to the heart (Rom. 10:9). "To believe in something is to believe into the thing which we believe. It is also to receive the things which we believe into us. To believe in the gospel is mainly to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), and to believe in Him is to believe into Him (John 3:15–16) and receive Him into us (John 1:12) so that we may be organically united with Him. Such a faith in Christ (Gal. 3:22) is given to us by God (Eph. 2:8) through our hearing of the word of the truth of the gospel (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13). This faith brings us into all the blessings of the gospel (Gal. 3:14). Hence, it is precious to us (2 Pet. 1:1). To believe is to receive the Lord Jesus not only for forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43) but also for regeneration (1 Pet. 1:21, 23), that those who believe may become the children of God (John 1:12–13) and the members of Christ (Eph. 5:30) in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19)" (The Conclusion of the New Testament, Message 65, p. 690). In the New Testament, this gospel is called the gospel of Jesus Christ (because Jesus Christ, with all of His process, is the content of the gospel), the gospel of God (because God planned, promised, and accomplished the gospel), and the gospel of the kingdom (because it brings the believers into the realm of the heavenly ruling to participate in the blessings of the divine life in the divine kingdom). When we consider all of this, we realize how wonderful it is for a person to hear the gospel and believe in it.

II. The Lord taught the truth to enlighten the ignorant ones in darkness with the light of the truth—Mark 1:21–22

The Lord not only preached the gospel, but He also taught the truth to the ignorant ones in darkness.

A. Due to the fall, man became ignorant of the knowledge of God and is in darkness—Luke 1:79; Acts 26:18; Eph. 5:8

"Man's fall into sin broke his fellowship with God. As a result, man became ignorant of the knowledge of God. Such ignorance issued first in darkness and then in death" (Life-study of Mark, Message 6, p. 51). "What terrible ignorance there is among fallen people concerning God and the things of God! Even though our society may emphasize the importance of education, people are still ignorant of the divine truth. They do not know God, they do not know the meaning of human life, and they do not know where they came from or where they are going. Instead, in their ignorance, they care for the lusts of the flesh and the pleasures of the world. Therefore, people today need the proper teaching of the Word of God, the teaching that will enlighten them" (Life-study of Mark, Message 5, p. 47).

B. The Lord's teaching released the word of light to enlighten man—John 8:12; 12:46

"The [Lord], as the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5), came to Galilee, the land of darkness, where people were sitting in the shadow of death, and He came as a great light to

shine upon them (Matt. 4:12–16). His teaching released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death so that they might receive the light of life (John 1:4)” (Life-study of Mark, Message 6, pp. 51–52). We should learn to not only preach the gospel but also teach the truth to others.

III. We can preach the gospel and teach the truth to our friends and relatives—2 Tim. 4:2a

We can all learn to preach the gospel and teach the truth. These two things go together. The real gospel preaching depends on the effective teaching of the truth (Eph. 1:13). If we would pick up the truths and be constituted with them, we would be able to present them to others in the way a jeweler presents a diamond. For example, during a short break between classes at school, we could speak to someone about the promise concerning the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. We could let them know that the Lord was the fulfillment of this promise and destroyed God’s enemy on the cross. This truth is a diamond in the Word and conveys divine light to the listener. As a result, they would want to hear more. If many young people would do this, there would be a great impact on this earth and many would be freed from the satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18).

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: In this corrupted age of darkness, good news is hard to find. Newspapers and magazines alike report of the destitute condition of mankind (robberies, murders, fornication, scandals, gossip, plane crashes, car accidents, etc.). Unfortunately, there is little good news, and the good news that exists never seems to rescue man from his miserable condition. However, the New Testament announces the good news and glad tidings to all who would listen. This good news is the gospel. The gospel (in a simple form which even a junior higher can speak) is this: “Man has fallen into sin and is guilty, and can do nothing to save himself. He is destined to perish, but Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:15). Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of man’s sins and resurrected so that man may receive eternal life. Whoever would repent and believe in the gospel will be forgiven of his sins and will receive the eternal life of God to become a genuine child of God (John 1:12–13).” This is truly good news. You may feel to help the junior highers memorize John 3:16.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: “Man’s fall into sin broke his fellowship with God. As a result, man became ignorant of the knowledge of God. Such ignorance issued first in darkness and then in death” (*Life-study of Mark, Message 6, p. 51*). “What terrible ignorance there is among fallen people concerning God and the things of God! Even though our society may emphasize the importance of education, people are still ignorant of the divine truth. They do not know God, they do not know the meaning of life, and they do not know where they came from or where they are going. Instead, in their ignorance, they care for the lusts of the flesh and the pleasures of the world. Therefore, people today need the proper teaching of the Word of God, the teaching that will enlighten them” (*Life-study of Mark, Message 5, p. 47*). Although a secular education may be rich in worldly knowledge, it is in poverty in relation to the wealth of the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel (Eph. 3:8). In Luke 4 we see that the gospel, as the good tidings, are to be preached to the poor. As you are listening to this gospel message, allow your eyes to be touched by the Lord that you may see your real situation of indigence. You may be rich in knowledge, morals, ethics, culture, and even religious philosophies and practices, but altogether impoverished in relation to the real, eternal riches in the universe. Today, the good news is being presented to you. Open to it and receive the knowledge that can make you wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15), fill you with the precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1), cause you to receive the unsearchably rich Christ (Eph. 3:8), and be regenerated with the divine, eternal, incorruptible life through the gospel (1 Pet. 1:23; 2 Tim. 1:10).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 5.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 5; Message 6, pp. 51–52; Luke 4:18, footnote 3; 4:43, footnote 1; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 65, pp. 689–691; *Truth Lessons*, Level 1, Volume 2, Lesson 18, pp. 90–91; Lesson 20.

Lesson 5—Working with the Father

OBJECTIVE: To show the young people that the Lord Jesus did nothing of or from Himself, but instead did the work, spoke the word, and sought the will of the Father.

SYNOPSIS: As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus lived by the Father and expressed the Father. He was absolutely one with the Father. Thus, in His ministry, the Lord always carried out the Father's work, spoke the Father's word, and did the Father's will. As the Son, He submitted to the Father in everything, and thus established the prototype of a life that fulfills God's eternal purpose. As those who have become the Father's sons today, we also can work with the Father, speak the Father's word, and carry out the Father's will.

CHAPTER(S): John 4–12.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

I. As the Son of God, Jesus lived by the Father and expressed the Father

The Lord told His disciples, "I live because of the Father" (John 6:57). His moment by moment living was dependent upon the Father. He was so absolutely one with the Father that His living was the Father's living; He lived the Father. "He did not express Himself. He only expressed the Father. He was the Son, yet He expressed the Father" (The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity, Chapter 12, p. 123). Thus, in His ministry the Lord Jesus carried out the Father's work, spoke the Father's word, and sought the Father's will.

II. In His ministry, the Lord carried out the Father's work—John 4:34b; 5:17

In His living and ministry, the Lord Jesus and the Father worked together as one. The Lord was not seeking merely to do something for the Father; His working was the Father's working. As the one who embodied God (Col. 2:9) and came from-with the Father (John 8:29), whatever the Lord did was the Father's work.

A. The Lord worked with the Father to bring people into God's Sabbath rest—John 5:2–21

In John 5, the Son worked with the Father to bring the impotent man into rest by healing and enlivening him. The Lord did this on the Sabbath, which God had established as a type of the true rest which God and His people enter into when His work in His economy is accomplished. "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' (John 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" (Life-study of John, Message 14, p. 172). As long as the Father's work was not finished, Jesus could not rest during the Sabbath. Throughout His ministry the Lord worked with the Father to dispense the divine life to man. The Sabbath day pointed to God's rest after completing His work of creation, but God's work was not finished with the completion of the old creation! God still had much to do before His purpose could be accomplished. Jesus came to carry out this work of the Father.

B. The Lord did no work apart from the Father's work—John 5:19

"...Jesus never did any work without the Father. He always worked with the Father (John 14:10b; 5:17, 19). To work with the Father requires an absolute denial of the self. Christ denied Himself to work with the Father" (God's New Testament Economy, Chapter 2, pp. 33–34). Jesus had no separate agenda apart from His Father's, and He had no "free time" to take care of something other than His Father's work. He only did what He saw His Father doing, doing nothing from Himself (John 5:19). The only thing that occupied Him was the Father's work (John 4:34).

C. The Lord worked in the Father's name—John 10:25

"To work in the name of the Father means it is not I that work but I work as the Father" (God's New Testament Economy, Chapter 2, p. 34). Because the Lord's work was one with the Father's work and was the Father's work, the Lord could say He worked in the name of the Father.

III. In His ministry, the Lord spoke the Father's word—John 7:16, 18; 12:49–50; 14:10

Much of the Son's work with the Father was carried out by His speaking. "While the Son was speaking, the Father was working. This is not two working on the same thing at the same time separately, but two working as one. When the Son spoke the word, the Father was doing the work. The Son's speaking was the Father's working" (The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity, Chapter 12, p. 122). "In John 14:10 and 11 the Lord Jesus says, 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from Myself; but the Father who abides in Me, He does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me.' Here we see the Father living and working in the Son" (The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John, Chapter 42, p. 396). The Lord's primary exercise in His ministry was not to cast out demons or heal the sick; His primary exercise in His ministry was to speak the Father's word into people.

A. The Lord spoke the Father's word to carry out God's economy for the producing of many sons—John 12:49–50; Rom. 8:14–30

"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" (Life-study of John, Message 39, p. 476). The life-giving words which the Lord spoke (John 6:63) accomplished the Father's desire to bring forth many sons to express Him for His glorification (John 15:8; Rom. 8:29–30). These many sons as God-men are the goal and issue of the Triune God's work.

B. The Lord spoke no words other than the Father's words

"The Son never spoke His own word. Whatever the Son spoke was the Father's speaking (John 14:24; 7:16–17; 12:49–50)" (God's New Testament Economy, Chapter 2, p. 34).

IV. In His ministry, the Lord carried out the Father's will—John 4:34a; 5:30; 6:38, 40

The Lord proclaimed that His food was to do the Father's will (John 4:34). He came down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of the Father who sent Him (John 6:38). Therefore, He never sought His own will, but only the will of the Father (John 5:30). The Lord Jesus did not carry out the will of the Father in an automatic way, like a robot. He chose to seek and do the will of the Father by the exercise of His own will. Although Jesus was the embodiment of God, He

still had to choose to do God's will. This is a mystery, yet if it were not so, He could never have become our pattern of obedience and submission to God (Phil. 2:5–8).

A. The Lord carried out the Father's will, which is to dispense Himself into a chosen people in order to gain many sons for a corporate expression—Eph. 1:5

The Father's will is to have many sons who express Him (Eph. 1:5) in His new creation. For this the only-begotten Son of God became a man, and for this He died and resurrected.

B. The Lord sought no will but the Father's will—John 6:38

"The Son put His will aside and took the Father's will, so He did the Father's will (John 5:30; 6:38). In John 6:38 the Lord says, 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me'" (God's New Testament Economy, Chapter 2, p. 34). The Lord was obedient to the will of the Father, regardless of what it required Him to pass through.

C. The Lord taking the Father's will resulted in His death on the cross—Matt. 26:42; Isa. 53:10

It was the Father's will that Christ die on the cross (Matt. 26:42). It pleased the Father to make Him our sin offering (Isa. 53:10). Therefore the Lord set His face to carry out this great task (Luke 9:51; Isa. 50:7). Christ was obedient to the Father's will even unto death (Phil. 2:8). Because of His perfect obedience, He has been highly exalted, and as a man He has been made Lord of all (Phil. 2:9–11).

D. In taking a place lower than the Father, the Lord created submission and true obedience—Heb. 5:7–9; Phil. 2:8; Rom. 5:19; Isa. 42:1–4

The Son's status in the Godhead was equal to that of the Father's, but the Son agreed to put Himself in a place of submission to the Father for the sake of carrying out the divine economy (Phil. 2:6–8). By taking the Father as His head (1 Cor. 11:3) and by accepting the Father's will in place of His own, the Son lived a life of perfect submission. This was something which had never been seen before in the universe, for all of God's creation, including the angels and man, had fallen into rebellion. "God's foreknowledge foresaw the rebellion of the angels and the failure of man. God's authority cannot be built upon the angels or upon the descendants of Adam. In the Godhead there was a harmonious decision that authority would be established first within the Godhead. From that time on, there was a distinction in operation of the Father and the Son. One day the Son willingly emptied Himself to become a created man as the representation of submission to authority" (Authority and Submission, Chapter 5, p. 144). "[S]ubmission is something created by the Son of God....The Lord humbled Himself, becoming obedient. The obedience in the Godhead is the most wonderful thing in the whole universe" (Authority and Submission, Chapter 5, p. 142). After living such a life of perfect obedience and submission as a man, Jesus was exalted by God to be Lord of all. Today, this life of submission and cooperation with God is available to us in the Spirit for our participation in the fulfillment of God's purpose, having been pioneered and perfected by the Lord Jesus in His ministry (Phil. 2:5).

**V. The Father's work today is being carried out by many sons as Christ's partners—
Heb. 1:9**

To do the work, speak the word, and carry out the will of someone else requires that we put our own will, work, and words aside. If we choose to carry out our own will, speak our own words, or do our own work instead of taking God's will, work, and words, we are in rebellion regardless of how good our intentions, our words, or our works are. We should realize that when we are not carrying out God's will, we are under Satan's authority and somehow involved with carrying out Satan's will. If we take God's will, work, and words, we fulfill the purpose of our existence and experience true joy (1 Pet. 1:8) as we express and live out God through the constant receiving of His life and nature. Jesus succeeded in pioneering this kind of life as a man, and His oneness with and submission to the Father are available to us today in our spirit.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Since God is the Creator, everything belongs to Him, and He has the right to use everything for the purpose He made it for. (It is good to be reminded that we are creatures who owe our existence to God!) Rebellion, however, (a strange and foreign thing!) came into God's creation through one of His creatures, Satan. This rebellion spread to other angels, and to creatures living on the earth, who eventually became the demons. (Imagine how frustrated you would feel if you designed a factory to produce something you desired and then all the machinery and workers decided to do something different.) Then God made man especially for His purpose to express and represent Him, and the situation seemed hopeful again. But man also rebelled and became independent from God. Therefore today the world is filled with people who are rebellious and unsubmitive to God. They live their lives with no real interest in knowing what God is after. (Have any of the young people met anyone at their schools who has decided to stand with God and to live for no one but God?) Yet God saw beforehand that His creation would not be able to cooperate with Him for His plan. Therefore, even in eternity past, the Son agreed to take a place of submission to the Father for the carrying out of the Father's will, or purpose. The Son held a place of equal status with the Father, but in order to carry out God's purpose, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave. He did not come to enjoy His own life or to carry out His own plans. He took the Father as His Head and only cared for what the Father desired. To carry out the Father's will was what He lived for. Thus, for the first time in the history of the universe, submission was fully seen in God's creation. Because of what Christ accomplished in submission to the Father, God's will was finally worked out. What a great thing! Today we have such a Christ living in us. He perfected obedience, and now He is working this obedience into us as well. The more we enjoy Him, the more we become the same as He is. We all become such sons to our Father, knowing God as the one who is everything to us, and allowing God's will to be worked out in us.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: The world today is full of envy, jealousy, evil intentions, and hatred, all motivated by the drive for self-glory. (Use a few examples to illustrate the world's situation in regard to such selfishness.) Our hideous self has its source in Satan, who being an angel, a creature of God, said in his heart, "I will ascend to heaven. Above the stars of God I will exalt my throne....I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13-15). Whereas Satan exalted himself above God, the Lord Jesus emptied Himself, not considering His being equal with God a treasure to be grasped. Whereas Satan sought self-glory and power, the Lord Jesus humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death—a humiliating death, the death of a cross (Phil. 2:6-8). The Lord lived because of the Father (John 6:57). His work was not by Himself, but with the Father, in the Father's name (John 5:17, 19, 30). His teaching and words were not His own but the Father's (John 7:16; 12:49-50; 14:10). He did not do His own will nor seek His own glory but the Father's (John 4:34a; 5:30; 6:38, 40; 7:18). With the Lord Jesus there was no self and no element of selfishness. His spirit was humble and

selfless. This is the real beauty and excellency as seen in the divine Trinity (see *Living in and with the Divine Trinity*, Chapter 5, pp. 45–46). Such a humble and selfless One died for you on the cross and suffered for your sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God (1 Pet. 3:18). (Use examples to expose the listener's selfishness, e.g., not sharing with siblings, gossiping about others to build up one's own reputation, asking "What's in it for me?," etc.) On the cross Christ terminated your old, self-seeking, fallen, satanic life in order to fill you with Himself as life, so that you might seek, not your own individual and temporary glory, but God's glory.

CRUCIAL MATTERS: An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 69, pp. 742–746; *Authority and Submission*, Chapter 5.

REFERENCES: *The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity*, Chapter 12, pp. 121–123; *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, Chapter 42, pp. 396, 400–401; *Christ Revealed in the New Testament*, Chapter 1, p. 13; *Authority and Submission*, Chapter 5; *The Wonderful Christ*, Chapter 8, p. 88–89; *The God-man Living*, Chapter 8, pp. 77–78; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 22, pp. 236–238; Message 69, pp. 742–746; *Life Messages*, Volume 1, Chapter 39, pp. 342–344; *God's New Testament Economy*, Chapter 2, pp. 33–34.

Lesson 6—Caring for Human Need—Forgiving Sinners

OBJECTIVE: To appreciate the tender care of the Lord's forgiveness.

SYNOPSIS: In His ministry, the Lord Jesus cared for the needs of fallen and lost human beings, who were oppressed by the burden of sin and all its by-products. Because He is God, and because He would die for man's sins, Jesus had both the authority and the ground to forgive sins. Through this aspect of His ministry, we are able to receive God's full salvation. We need to receive His forgiveness, love Him as the One who has forgiven our many sins, and be one with Him to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 9; Mark 2.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

I. Because of Adam's fall, all mankind came under the reign of sin—Rom. 5:12a, 21a

Many people think that most of the world's troubles are due to problems in our society, and that we are born as "blank slates" which can be shaped for good or evil, depending upon our environment. Some even believe that man is inherently good! They do not realize that people are born with a hidden power within them that will rule their lives. This hidden king is sin. From birth, man is inhabited and ruled by sin. Sin is inescapable and cannot be conquered by man's will. Sin rules over a person's behavior, affects his personality, and colors his relationships with others. Thus, people find they often cannot do the good things they wish to do, for sin is stronger than they are (Rom. 7:15–24). Sin is the real reason for mankind's miseries, including war, sickness, and death. All of mankind suffers under sin's reign.

A. For thousands of years, mankind dwelt in sin and darkness with nothing to look forward to but death and judgment—Matt. 4:16; Luke 1:79

As the human race grew, the number of sins increased, as did the possible ways to sin. (Consider how many sins are committed on earth in just one day! Even just one person every day commits a multitude of sins.) After four thousand years, mankind's accumulation of sin grew to be a great and heavy burden. The Lord entered a world that was full of people sitting in darkness, with no release from their burden in sight.

B. People were under the bondage and curse of sin and in the fear of death—Rom. 5:12, 21a; Heb. 2:15

Under the curse of sin, every bright promise had become dull. Instead of joy and hope, people experienced guilt and fear of judgment. No one could escape the death that resulted from their sinful condition. All entered death carrying their load of sins into eternity with them.

C. People were plagued by what issued from sin as its by-products—Psa. 51:3; Gal. 5:19–21; Matt. 4:24

Evil (murder, suicide, lying, prejudice, betrayal, etc.), guilt, sickness, aging, decay, death, and even the endless struggle to put food on the table—all have sin to blame for their existence. Sin is the root of all that curses mankind.

D. People faced God's judgment upon their sins—Rom. 3:19; Heb. 9:27

In addition to all that is mentioned above, all who are under sin's tyranny also come under God's condemnation. What a curse sin has brought upon humanity!

II. The Lord came to forgive people of their sins and loose them from its effects— 1 Tim. 1:15

When the Lord became a man, He took the name "Jesus," which signified He would save men from their sins (Matt. 1:21)! Hallelujah! What a Savior! Sin was reigning, but Christ as the God-man was One who had divine authority to forgive men of their sins so they might recover their proper relationship with God.

A. The Lord as the Physician healed sinners with His forgiveness—Matt. 9:2–13

The blind religious people felt they had no need of a Savior, for they considered themselves to be righteous. The Lord, however, came as a Physician to heal those who realized they needed the healing of their sin-sickness (such as the tax collector in Luke 18:10–14). In Matthew 9, when the paralytic was brought before Him, the Lord told him that his sins were forgiven. This shocked the religious people, but the Lord made it clear that because He was God as well as man, He had the authority on earth to forgive people's sins against God. This forgiveness produced the paralytic man's healing. What a joy it is to bring sinners to the Lord for such a wonderful inner healing!

B. The love of such a Savior constrains sinners to love Him—Luke 7:36–50; 1 Tim. 1:15

"God is the only one who can grant forgiveness of sins....Therefore, forgiveness is one of the divine attributes" (Life-study of Luke, Message 11, p. 90). The story of the woman who wet the Lord's feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment is a tender scene of divine forgiveness through the Lord's virtues of mercy and compassion. Because this woman had been forgiven much by this wonderful God-man Savior, she loved the Lord much. If the Lord opens our eyes to see how much we have been forgiven, we also will love the Lord in such a way. This woman's sins must have been a heavy load for her to carry. Then one day, this wonderful Person lifted that load. Every sinner who experiences the Lord's forgiveness, experiences the lifting of the load that burdened their conscience. Forgiven sinners experience a real liberation and a wonderful release. Such a salvation causes us to become so grateful to our Lord, even to the point that we are willing to pour out our entire being upon Him. We love Him because He gave Himself up to die in our place for our sins (2 Cor. 5:14). Our evil works caused us to become enemies of God (Col. 1:21), yet still He sought us and rescued us. What great compassion God had upon us to forgive us of our sins and to save us!

III. The Lord's salvation is based upon His redeeming death—Matt. 26:28

A. The forgiveness of men's sins requires the Lord's redeeming death on the cross—Heb. 9:22

"To forgive sins is a matter of authority on earth. Only this kingly Savior, who had been authorized by God and who would die to redeem sinners, had such authority (Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38)" (Life-study of Matthew, Message 26, p. 325). Jesus could forgive men's sins because He was the one who would die to redeem them from their sins. Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29), who John the apostle saw standing as having been slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Jesus took our sins off of us and carried them up in His own body onto the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). He took our place and was punished for our sins. Because of this, He as the Son of Man had authority on earth to forgive sins. It was

not unrighteous for Him to release people from their sins, for He Himself would pay the price for them.

B. The participation by men in God's life requires the Lord's redeeming death on the cross—Rom. 5:18b; 8:10b

Because our sins are forgiven through Christ's death, we can participate in God's life, which is the positive, organic aspect of our salvation. Not only are we released from our sins by Christ's ministry, we also enter into a new existence and a new realm by receiving another life, which is the processed Triune God Himself. Romans 5:18 tells us that we have justification unto life through Christ's righteous act of dying as the sinless sacrifice for our sins. Because of what He has accomplished, our sins are forgiven, and we have recovered the right to enjoy God as life! It is only by receiving the sin-rejecting, purpose-fulfilling divine life that we are enabled to "from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). These two sides—the judicial redemption and the organic salvation—together make up God's complete salvation.

IV. The forgiveness of sins is still a part of the Lord's ministry today—Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; 13:38

"Because of Him, our sins are gone, and we have God as everything to us. Now we are enjoying God as our life, our light, our everything. We are feasting with the Lord. This is the gospel, and this is also the way to carry out the gospel service" (Life-study of Mark, Message 8, pp. 76–77).

A. We need to be those who receive the abundance of the gift of righteousness so that we might reign in life—Rom. 5:17

Before we can carry the message of the Lord's wonderful salvation to others, we ourselves need to have the experience of having our sins forgiven (see Luke 4:18–19, footnote 1 of verse 19, and Life-study of Luke, Message 64, pp. 550–552). When we experience the release that makes us joyful Christians, we have a gospel to share with others. Therefore, we need to come to the Lord daily for His shining and cleansing. The more we are unloaded of our sins, the more we love the Lord, and the more we desire to share this salvation with those still under the burden and reign of sin. This would be quite impressive to illustrate to the young people. Any person who is under a burden is quite interested in hearing how someone else got help in that situation. (This is a principle many businesses use to preach the "gospel" about their product. If people in commercials can wholeheartedly recommend a dish detergent or a cranberry drink, how much more should we, who have discovered the most wonderful thing in the universe, speak about it to others with boldness and confidence! Too often we, who have discovered the most wonderful thing a human can know, are ashamed to speak to others about it. This makes it seem that our "product" is not truly worthy of consideration, yet we are the ones who really have something to shout about!) If our experience and view are healthy, the gospel will not seem like a dreaded duty, but rather a wonderful secret to share with others.

B. We need to be those who help others receive the Lord's forgiveness—Acts 13:38; 26:18

As the disciples and followers of the Lord who share in His ministry today, we should share the good news of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name (1 John 2:12). "[T]he first thing we must learn in our preaching of the gospel is to help others have their sins

forgiven. It is significant that the Lord did not say to the paralytic, 'I am sorry that you are sick. But I want you to know that this sickness comes from sin. Because you are paralyzed, you must have sinned in some way. You know what sins you have committed.'...We should follow the Lord to tell people that their sins are forgiven....This means that we should not tell people that they are sinful. Instead, we should tell them that only the Lord has the ability to forgive us our sins. We may go on to say, 'In our human life, all troubles and problems come from our sins. We need to have our sins forgiven, and only the Lord Jesus has the authority to do this'" (Life-study of Mark, Message 7, pp. 68–69). What a wonderful message this is! There is One who has the authority to forgive sins, and He does so freely for whomsoever will receive it by faith!

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Ask the young people what they think is the most troublesome problem facing the human race. They may say war, pollution, poverty, disease, etc., but guilt is what causes all people the most suffering inwardly. Hunger, sickness, and many other kinds of suffering are primarily physical and outward. Guilt is an inward problem from which no one can escape, a continual weight upon the consciences of all people. People burdened by guilt can never be happy. Money cannot ease or erase guilt, nor are good times a cure for it. All people carry this load, which grows heavier with each sin until they become inwardly bent over and bowed down under it. Illustrate this by placing things upon one of the young people and then increasing the load as he walks along, "sinning." Eventually, this person will not be able to stand up straight under his load. Ask the person if he would like some pizza, etc., to see if that would relieve him from his bent-over condition. Point out some wonderful sights going on above him which he cannot see. The more a person becomes bent over, the more he enters into darkness. Ask the young people what the person under the load of his sins needs. The answer should be two things: he needs the load removed, and he needs the removal of the thing which continually produces the load! He needs his sins to be forgiven, and he needs the sin-producing nature dealt with. This is what Jesus has done for us. His blood washes away our sins! Furthermore, He deals with our sin nature and gives us a new life with a new nature. At such a point it would be good to tell of the woman in Luke 7:36–50. Those who are loosed of the heavier load are more thankful, and those who are forgiven much, love the Lord much. We all have been forgiven of a vast number of sins. The more forgiveness we enjoy, the more we will love the Lord in our glorious, wonderful freedom (*Hymns*, #310).

GOSPEL APPLICATION: In order to experience the joy of God's salvation, fallen man needs to repent and believe into the One who is able to forgive sins. Sin is the real reason for all of man's miseries, including war, sickness, and death. All of mankind suffers under sin's reign (Rom. 5:12a, 21a). Who has never lied? Who has never uttered an idle word—for which an account must be rendered in the day of judgment (Matt. 12:36)? In John 8, when a woman was caught in the act of a terrible sin (committing adultery), self-righteous men brought her before the Lord and asked Him whether or not she should be condemned, and as the law says, stoned. The Lord then said to the crowd of people gathered there, both young and old, "He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Beginning from the oldest among them down to the youngest, they all began to leave, realizing that there is none without sin (Rom. 3:10). When the Lord alone was left, as the only sinless One qualified to condemn her, the Lord said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Just as the Lord is the only One who has the authority to condemn us, He also is the only One who has the authority to forgive us of our sins (John 8:11; Matt. 9:2, 5–6). The man whose transgression is forgiven is blessed (Psa. 32:1). Believe into Jesus Christ and receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life (John 3:15–16; Acts 10:43; Matt. 9:2).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Understanding that man fell and became sinful, corrupted, and subject to Satan and his world system (II.B.2.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Knowing, loving, and consecrating ourselves to the Lord based on His redemptive work on the cross because of His great love for us (III.C.4.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Luke*, Message 17.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 26, pp. 324–326; Message 27, pp. 327–333; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 7, pp. 62–69; Message 8; Message 17, p. 157; Message 21, pp. 192–193; Message 61, p. 521; *Life-study of Luke*, Message 11, pp. 90, 92–94; Message 13; Message 17; Message 52, pp. 454–456; Message 55, pp. 477–478; Message 64, pp. 550–552; Message 70, pp. 600–601; *Life-study of John*, Message 9, pp. 115–118; Message 19.

Lesson 7—Caring for Human Need—Healing the Sick

OBJECTIVE: To understand that because the Lord dealt with sin and imparted the divine life, He was able to heal those who were sick.

SYNOPSIS: Sickness is an issue of sin and is a sign of man's abnormal condition before God because of sin. Therefore, in His ministry, the Lord Jesus healed people of their sick condition both physically and spiritually, and restored them to a normal condition so that they might serve Him. Today, we need to experience Christ as the One who heals our sick spiritual condition that we could minister this healing to others as we partake of the divine life and experience the virtuous humanity of Christ.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew—John.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

In addition to preaching the gospel and teaching the truth, healing was a major part of Christ's earthly ministry. Christ healed people of their illnesses and restored their function so that they might serve God and follow Christ. Christ's manner of healing also indicates the manner in which our spiritual function needs to be restored so we may serve God in His economy.

I. In His ministry, the Lord Jesus healed people, restoring their function so that they might enjoy and serve God

When Christ began His ministry, He announced that He was anointed to release those in all kinds of bondage and to announce the good news of God's salvation (Luke 4:18). One kind of bondage which came about through the fall was physical sickness. Because of sin, man's body became damaged and susceptible to illness and death. In His ministry, Christ released people from the bondage of sin and the sickness that resulted from sin. In healing people and cleansing people of such diseases as leprosy (which made a person unclean and unable to stand in God's presence), Christ indicated that through His ministry, man's relationship with God would be restored; man would again be able to enjoy fellowship with God in Christ. Christ's ministry of healing was part of the great "jubilee" which Christ was accomplishing for man (see Life-study of Luke, Message 64). (This jubilee of Christ's ministry will be experienced in full during the coming age of the millennium. At that time, illness and sickness will be fully banished!)

II. The Lord healed people by forgiving their sins and imparting Himself into them as life and virtue

A. Christ's healing required forgiveness on God's side and faith on man's side

Any healing accomplished upon fallen people requires redemption, for sickness is an issue of sin and a sign of man's abnormal condition before God because of sin (see John 5:14).

1. Sin, the root of sickness, requires forgiveness on God's side—Mark 2:5

Because sickness is due to sin, sin must be dealt with before sickness can be truly taken away. As the One who bore our sins and sicknesses on the cross (Matt. 8:17), and as the One who is the embodiment of God Himself, Christ has the authority over any kind of sickness or oppression of the enemy. Thus, Christ had the authority on earth to forgive man's sins, as He did in the case of the paralytic man recorded in Matthew 9 and Mark 2.

2. The forgiveness and healing Christ offers require faith on man's side—Matt. 9:22, 28–29; Mark 2:5; 10:52; Luke 17:19

Although Christ could come to people as the Healer, it was through faith that the healing was received. Faith is the means by which we receive Christ. In many instances, the Lord told the healed people that their healing took place because of, or according to, their faith. The operation of Christ's life to heal us from sin and sin's by-products is based upon the operation of our faith.

B. The healing He ministered came in the form of life-supply—Mark 7:26–30

A Syrophoenician woman besought the Lord to heal her daughter of demon possession. The Lord replied that it was not good to throw the bread meant for the children to the little dogs. In saying this, the Lord implied that His healing ministry was a kind of bread to God's people. He also opened the way for this woman to grasp the opportunity to lay hold of this "bread," for He was no longer on the "table" (that is, in the holy land) where God's people were. Because of the Jews' rejection, He left the good land and became "crumbs under the table" to be found by such a Gentile "dog." "[I]n His gospel service He was not merely doing miracles. That was not the inner significance of His gospel service. The inner significance of this service is that He was distributing Himself as food....To experience a miracle without receiving the Lord as our inner life supply is vain....We need to realize that even when He is our Healer, the Lord Jesus is our bread" (Life-study of Mark, Message 22, pp. 200, 202–203). The Lord came to be life to man (John 6:33; 10:10), and one issue of His being life to man was man's healing.

C. Healing flowed out of Him through His human virtuous perfection—Mark 5:28–30

When a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years touched the hem of the Lord's garment, she was healed. The Lord sensed that something had gone out from Him into that seeking one. It did not go into any others who were pressing upon Him, just into the one who touched Him in faith. "The Lord had the inner sense that His virtue, His power, had gone out of Him and had been transfused into someone else....His garments signify His perfect behavior in His humanity, His human virtuous perfection. To touch His garments was actually to touch the Lord Himself in His humanity, in whom God was embodied (Col. 2:9). By such a touch His divine power was transfused into the touching one through the perfection of His humanity and became her healing. God, who dwells in unapproachable light, became touchable in Him through His humanity for her salvation and enjoyment" (Life-study of Mark, Message 17, pp. 156–157). This kind of healing is different than a simple miracle of divine power. This kind of healing issues from the virtue of the Lord's human life (see Life-study of Matthew, Message 44, p. 529).

III. We still need Christ's healing ministry today to heal us not only physically, but also spiritually, so that we might serve God

The kind of sickness which prevents us from serving God fully is not usually a physical one, but a spiritual one. Therefore, we especially need the Lord's healing of our sick spiritual condition. In order to seek a cure, however, we first have to recognize that we are sick and in need of a Physician (Matt. 9:12)! The Lord reveals in the Gospels that in many ways the disciples (who represent us) were sick and in need of His healing ministry.

A. Christ's healing of us in a general way enables us to begin to serve Christ

One day the Lord came to Peter's home, and Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever (Matt. 8:14). He healed her and she immediately arose and began to serve the Lord and His disciples. This indicates that we all have a general sickness which prevents us from rising up to serve the Lord. We need the Lord to heal us of this sickness which affects us in a general way (as represented by the fever, which affects the entire body). Once the Lord touches us, as when we were dynamically regenerated or when we are revived by Him, we receive healing and are able to rise up to serve the Lord. Praise the Lord! Furthermore, the Lord's healing touch also cleanses us, as it did the leper in Mark 1:40. Thus, by the Lord's healing we are spiritually healed, cleansed, and energized so that we might be qualified and strengthened to serve the Lord.

B. Christ's continued specific healing enables us to serve Christ in every way

After we are spiritually healed in a general way and begin to follow the Lord, we find that we still need the Lord's further healing of many specific organs and members before we can be fully used by the Lord. For instance, we find we are often unable to speak for the Lord when we should (as in a meeting or to a friend), so we are dumb. We also may realize that we receive little when the Word is being ministered, therefore we are deaf. Before we can be fully used by the Lord, we need His specific healing, particularly of our ears, eyes, and tongue!

1. The Lord's specific healing of organs often symbolized some need of healing among His disciples

The Lord's specific healing of organs often symbolized some need of healing among His disciples. The disciples, for instance, still indicated that they were blind when they became ambitious for position in His coming kingdom (Mark 10:35–45). The Lord healed blind Bartimaeus to indicate that they needed a healing of their blindness (Mark 10:46–52).

2. The Lord's specific healing of various organs often required both His particular application to the organs and man's cooperation

In Mark 7:32, a deaf and dumb man was brought to the Lord for healing. This healing involved the Lord's thrusting His hands into the man's ears, touching the man's tongue with His spittle, groaning, and commanding that the man's ears be opened. In Mark 8:23, a blind man was brought to the Lord, and the Lord spat on his eyes and laid His hands on him. The blind man began to have some sight, but the Lord had to lay hands on him again before His sight was fully restored. (Right after this, Peter received the vision that Christ was the Son of God.) In John 9:6–7, the Lord spat on the ground to make a kind of clay to put on the eyes of a blind man, and then told him to go wash the clay off at a particular pool. He received His sight after He obeyed the Lord. Such cases indicate that the Lord's healing of particular organs required further dealing by the Lord and an active cooperation on man's side. As we serve the Lord and follow Him, we will realize that we need the Lord's further dealing to heal our hearing, speaking, and seeing organs so that we may serve the Lord in the fullest way. May we give the Lord our full cooperation for this!

IV. Healing is still a part of Christ's ministry through His Body today

A. The Lord gives His disciples, as those who are carrying out the continuation of His ministry, authority to heal diseases—Matt. 10:1; Luke 9:2; Mark 16:14–18

In the book of Acts it is evident that the Lord's healing ministry was continued by the Lord's disciples (see Acts 3:2–8; 5:16; 8:6–7; 9:33–34; and 19:11–12). Today, we are still in the book of Acts, and the ministry of healing is still present among us today. We all, as those who have a part in the Lord's ministry, need to learn how to exercise the Lord's healing ministry towards others. "Today every fallen human being is sick. Many are sick physically, and all are sick spiritually. Because every fallen person is spiritually sick, we in the local churches must learn to preach the gospel and teach the truth like physicians. This means that in our teaching and preaching we should give people a heavenly prescription, a divine medicine for their healing. All the saints among us should learn how to preach the gospel and teach the truth in such a way that people are healed" (Life-study of Mark, Message 6, p. 55, see also Life-study of Matthew, Message 12, pp. 159–160).

B. The church, as the Lord's Body, possesses the virtuous heavenly humanity of Jesus Christ, from which flows physical and spiritual healing—Mark 6:56

If we would see others healed through us, we need to be those who live by the uplifted humanity of Christ. When people touched the Lord's garments, they were healed (Mark 6:56). "The garment of Jesus does not signify His divinity. Rather, it signifies the righteous deeds of His humanity. His humanity bore the mark of the blue ribbon, of being regulated by the heavenly ruling. This produced a virtue that was capable of healing the sick....If we, the church people, have the proper church life and live by Christ, we shall live out His uplifted humanity. In this kind of living there will be a virtue with the power to heal those around us" (Life-study of Matthew, Message 44, pp. 529–530).

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Sickness came to mankind because of Adam's sin. Because men are now born with sin, sickness troubles every human being. Sickness can attack any part of the body. A fever can make our entire body ache. Other illnesses attack just one part such as our eyes or ears, which might cause blindness or deafness. All such damage to the human body comes about because man has sin. Sin brings in sickness and defects which limit man's ability to fully and freely follow God. For instance, when someone may feel called by the Lord for some purpose, sickness may hinder him. This is the enemy operating through sin to hinder him from following the Lord. The Lord, however, died for the forgiveness of sins and to deal with sin, which is the cause of sickness. Because He was the One who came to die for man's sins, Christ could heal people, and He did. His ministry brought in a great release to many who were in physical suffering, enabling them to rise up to follow Him. The Lord also takes care of our health that we would be able to follow Him. Therefore, we should not consider that sickness in our life is a small thing. We should be before the Lord as to why we are sick. (We cannot judge others when they are sick since we do not know their situation, but we should always bind the enemy.) However, we should also realize that as we grow in life, the Lord might allow us to have weaknesses and illnesses so that we might learn to take Him as grace. Paul did not tell Timothy, his young coworker, to seek miraculous healing for his health problems (1 Tim. 5:23), and Paul himself suffered from some physical problem (2 Cor. 12:7). The limitation of sickness can be used by the Lord to keep us under the discipline of the divine life, for when we have no problems, we often become loose. The Lord knows exactly what we need, and He can even use something negative for our good. This kind of lesson can reinforce the realization that nothing happens to us by chance, not even our illnesses. Our physical defects and illnesses can cause us to gain Christ even more than when we are healthy. This is

why God still allows those whose sins are forgiven to experience such by-products of sin. Eventually, Paul could say that he would rather boast in his weaknesses, so that God's power might overshadow him (2 Cor 12:9). We need to pray for the Lord's shining when we become ill or weak. Then we will know whether to accept it as from the Lord, or to reject it as something from Satan.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Sickness is a result of sin; where sin is, there also is sickness. This is not only true of the physical realm (a few examples can be given showing the link between a sinful lifestyle and diseases, such as lung and liver cancer caused by smoking and drinking, diseases acquired through improper relationships, etc.), but also of the spiritual realm as well. Every sinner is stricken with a debilitating sickness that annuls their service to the Lord and drives them to serve sin as slaves, resulting in death (Rom. 6:6, 23). Sin, as a person, has a power over them that forces them to submit in obedience to his demands (Rom. 7:17). As a result, the expression is sickness. Our eyes need to be unveiled to the sickly condition of mankind today. But more than this, we need to no longer be ignorant of the source of the sickness—sin. Sin must be removed, sin must be dealt with, before one's proper health can be restored. Man has been trying in himself for centuries to rid himself of sin, but to no avail; philosophy, religion, culture, government—all are powerless against it. Man is in need of healing, but man cannot heal himself. The Lord Jesus, in His care for man, desires to come into you, not to condemn, but to forgive, save, and heal you (John 3:17; Luke 19:10; 10:33–34; Matt. 8:7). Do you want to be made well (John 5:6)? If you but ask, He is able and willing to heal (Mark 1:40–41; Mark 2:5–12). If you only confess, He is faithful and righteous to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 25, pp. 316–317; Message 26, pp. 324–326; Message 27, pp. 329–333; Message 29, pp. 354–356, 361; Message 32, pp. 401–403; Message 44, pp. 529–530; Message 46, p. 552; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 6, pp. 54–58; Message 7, pp. 62–69; Message 19, p. 177; Message 22; Message 23, pp. 205–209, 211–212; Message 26, p. 233; Message 33; Message 52, p. 447; Message 63, pp. 533–534; Message 65, p. 549.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 25, pp. 316–317; Message 26, pp. 324–326; Message 27, pp. 329–333; Message 29, pp. 354–356, 361; Message 32, pp. 401–403; Message 44, pp. 529–530; Message 46, p. 552; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 6, pp. 54–58; Message 7, pp. 62–69; Message 19, p. 177; Message 22; Message 23, pp. 205–209, 211–212; Message 26, p. 233; Message 33; Message 52, p. 447; Message 63, pp. 533–534; *Life-study of Luke*, Message 11, pp. 92–93; Message 12, p. 102; Message 13, pp. 107–110; Message 20, p. 169; Message 31, pp. 262–264; *Life-study of John*, Message 13; Message 14, pp. 168–171; Message 21; *Life-study of Acts*, Message 13, pp. 100–101; Message 14, pp. 112–113; 2 Timothy 4:20, footnote 2.

Lesson 8—Caring for Human Need—Casting Out Demons

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord Jesus in His ministry cast out demons, thereby delivering people from Satan's rebellion and usurpation.

SYNOPSIS: When the Lord came to the earth to carry out His service for sinners, He met many cases of demon possession. For a person to be possessed by a demon means that he has been usurped by Satan. Therefore, the Lord in His ministry not only forgave man's sins and healed man's sickness, but He also cast out demons to deliver man from Satan's usurpation and rebellion. Man today is usurped by Satan and desperately needs this aspect of the Lord's ministry. The Lord in His ministry on earth came to destroy the works of the devil by casting demons out of people. By this, He delivered people out of the kingdom of Satan and delivered them into the kingdom of God. He carried this out not by His own effort and strength, but by the Spirit of God, by prayer, and by exercising His divine authority. May we all open ourselves to the Lord to deliver us from all rebellion, insubordination, and usurpation and give the Lord full ground to occupy our entire being.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 8.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

When the Lord was on the earth, He came to the sinners to deliver them out of the kingdom of Satan and bring them into the kingdom of God. Satan's kingdom includes the fallen angels, the demons, and the God-created man whom Satan seduced and usurped. When the Lord came to the earth, He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). He did this by casting out demons from the Satan-usurped people. We may have never heard a message on this, but if we see the significance of what the Lord was doing when He cast demons out of people, we will value this part of His ministry. Apparently, demon possession has little to do with young people living in a civilized country. However, when we see that demon possession signifies Satan's usurpation of the man whom God created for Himself, we see that the Lord's ministry in this respect has everything to do with us. Everywhere, man is usurped by a possessing element of the enemy and needs deliverance into the kingdom of God.

I. The Lord, in His ministry, cast demons out of people—Matt. 8:16; Mark 1:23–28

Matthew 8:16a says, "And when evening fell, they brought to Him many who were demon possessed, and He cast out the spirits with a word." In the Gospels' record, we see many cases in which the Lord cast demons out of people (Matt. 8:28–34; Matt. 15:21–28; Mark 1:23–27; Mark 9:14–29). The demons, which are different from the fallen angels, are unclean spirits (Mark 1:23) and refer to the spirits of the living creatures who lived in the preadamite age and joined Satan in his rebellion against God. God judged these creatures with water, at which time they became disembodied spirits dwelling in the water with which they were judged. To this day, they still move as evil workers possessing man for Satan's kingdom. (See Life-study of Genesis, Message 2). The fallen angels work with Satan in the air and the demons move with Satan on the earth; both act evilly upon man for Satan's kingdom. The possession of people by demons, in particular, signifies Satan's usurpation of man, whom God created for His purpose. Case after case in the New Testament shows how the Lord cast the demons out from people who were held in bondage in Satan's kingdom. This aspect of the Lord's ministry delivered people out of the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God.

A. He cast out demons to deliver people out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God—Matt. 12:26; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13

The Bible clearly shows that Satan has a kingdom (Matt. 12:26, footnote 1; Mark 3:24, footnote 1). In his kingdom there are not only the fallen angels in the air that act evilly upon man (Eph. 2:2; 6:11–12), but there are the demons that move on the earth to possess man for Satan’s kingdom. The Lord cast demons out of the demon-possessed people in order to deliver them out of the bondage of Satan (Luke 13:16), out of Satan’s authority of darkness (Col. 1:13), and into the kingdom of God. In principle, demon possession signifies Satan’s usurpation of the man whom God created for Himself.

B. He cast out demons by the Spirit of God—Matt. 12:28

Matthew 12:28 says, “But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The Lord cast out demons not by His own power, strength, or energy, but by the power of the Holy Spirit with which He was anointed and by which He moved in His ministry. “The Spirit of God is the power of the kingdom of God. Where the Spirit of God is in power, there the kingdom of God is, and there the demons have no ground” (Matt. 12:28, footnote 1).

C. He cast out demons by praying—Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29

In Mark 9, the disciples were unable to cast a demon out of the son of a certain father. After the Lord rebuked the unclean spirit and ordered it to come out, the disciples asked the Lord why they were unable to cast the demon out. The Lord answered by saying, “This kind cannot come out by any means except prayer” (Mark 9:29). Before He cast out a demon, the Lord prayed. We must learn of the Lord to pray in secret to deliver others from the possessing element of the enemy.

D. He cast out demons by exercising His divine authority—Mark 1:27

In Mark 1:23–26, the Lord cast out a demon from a man who came into the synagogue. Those who observed this were amazed and said, “With authority He orders even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (Mark 1:27b). For His service, the Lord had divine authority to cast out demons. From the above four points we see that the Lord cast out demons to deliver people from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. He did this by the Spirit of God, by prayer, and by exercising His divine authority.

II. The Lord today delivers man from Satan’s usurpation and rebellion

The principle of demon possession is rebellion against God. The demons are in rebellion against God and work for Satan’s kingdom to usurp man away from God and His purpose. The Lord’s ministry to deliver man from demon possession released man from Satan’s usurpation and rebellion.

A. In every society, civilized and non-civilized, Satan uses certain means to usurp and occupy man

Apparently, demon possession does not take place in the highly cultured nation of the United States. Nevertheless, Satan is subtle and still has a way to possess people in the highly civilized countries just as He does in the uncivilized countries. People, even in the United States, are held captive in Satan’s kingdom (Mark 3:27) and are occupied by a possessing element of the enemy. For those in entertainment, Satan has one way of occupying people. For those in academics, Satan has another, intellectual way of occupying

people. The Lord in His ministry cast out demons by exercising His authority to order demons to leave (Mark 1:27). Today, through His faithful servants who preach the word with authority, the Lord still delivers people from the usurping element of the enemy so that they can be delivered into the kingdom of God. (As serving ones, it would be good to read *Life-study of Mark, Message 6, pp. 53–54* to see the need to pray and exercise the divine authority to release our young people from any occupying element of the enemy. Only by the teaching with authority can people be delivered from such an occupying element. It is also good to be aware of certain activities that do take place in the United States among young people that could give demons the ground to frustrate them, such as occult games, evil pictures, and idolatry.)

B. We need to allow the Lord Jesus to subdue all rebellion, insubordination, and usurpation within us, and we need to give Him all the ground in our being

The Lord can release us from every usurping element within our being. Even within ourselves we sometimes sense a resistance to the Lord's speaking and the Lord's moving. The Lord, in His ministry today, still wants to deliver us from all rebellion, insubordination, and usurpation. If we would allow the Lord to subdue all rebellion within us and have all the ground to occupy our being, we would enjoy a full release from every usurping element within us. Mark 16:9 and John 20:11–18 show that Mary the Magdalene, was a person who became the blessed recipient of this aspect of the Lord's ministry. After the Lord cast seven demons out of her, she became the Lord's loving follower and was the first to receive a revelation of Him after His resurrection (John 20:15–16). May we all, like her, be delivered from every usurping element into a life of being occupied wholly and completely with the Lord Himself.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: One particular story about the Lord casting out demons stands out in His ministry on the earth. When the Lord was crossing the sea in a boat in Matthew 8:23–34, a great tempest arose. The wind was due to the fallen angels in the air, and the waves that beat into the boat were due to the demons in the water. We know this because the Lord rebuked the wind and the sea. Rebukes are not given to lifeless things but to things with personality. Afterwards there was a great calm and the disciples said, "What kind of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matt. 8:27). Actually it was the fallen angels and the demons that obeyed the command of the Lord. Their resistance was because they knew the Lord was going to cast out demons on the other side. When the Lord had crossed the sea, He cast the demons out of two men and the demons went into the nearby hogs (unclean animals) which consequently rushed into and drowned in the sea. Here in this portion of the Word, we see a picture of the situation among mankind. Among human beings there is the stormy sea of rebellion, there is demon possession, and there is man's involvement in some form of unclean industry for the purpose of making a living. If we would allow the Lord with His divine authority to come into our every situation, we would find that the Lord would calm our stormy sea, deliver us from all usurpation and rebellion, and rescue us from any involvement in unclean activities. (See *Life-study of Matthew, Message 26, pp. 321–324; Life-study of Mark, Message 17, pp. 151–155, 158–159.*)

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Although cases of demon possession seem rare in civilized countries today, we need our eyes opened to see the subtle work of the enemy that we would realize what a great need there is to speak a freeing word of the gospel to so many dear young ones terribly suffering from demon possession. Such ones are living their life by the sea (the depth of sins and the very nest of demons), in theaters and dancing halls. They dwell in graveyards (the

dwelling place of the dead, full of darkness and death) without real freedom, where instead of controlling themselves, they are controlled by outside forces (such as movies, dancing, smoking, their temper, fashionable clothing, etc.). "The life of one who is demon-possessed is not subject to any other ruling, and is insane. Governmental laws, school regulations and home discipline cannot guard such a one. Even an iron chain cannot subdue him....Such a one bruises himself [and is without self control]....They shout and cry in an unreasonable way, and they cannot keep silent. They torture themselves and hurt their own bodies. They damage their own reputation, their position, and their family name" (*Gospel Outlines*, Subject 72, p. 146). In this light, the subtle work of the enemy in the attitude and activity of the age is exposed to the uttermost, and we can see how great is the need for so many young people to hear the demon-expelling word of the gospel. (See *Gospel Outlines*, Subject 72, pp. 145–148.)

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); Understanding that man fell and became sinful, corrupted, and subject to Satan and his world system (II.B.2.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 6, pp. 53–54; Message 12, pp. 111–114; Message 17, pp. 151–155, 158–159; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 26, pp. 321–324; Message 33, pp. 407–413.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Genesis*, Message 2, pp. 18–20; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 6, pp. 53–54; Message 12, pp. 111–114; Message 17, pp. 151–155, 158–159; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 26, pp. 321–324; Message 33, pp. 407–413; Mark 3:24, footnote 1; 3:27, footnote 1; 3:29, footnote 1.

Lesson 9—Caring for Human Need—Opening the Eyes of the Blind

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord Jesus in His ministry opened the eyes of those who were blind physically and spiritually.

SYNOPSIS: In His ministry, the Lord Jesus opened the eyes of the blind to recover their sight. He not only opened the eyes of the physically blind; He also opened the eyes of the spiritually blind. He is the light of the world who delivers man from darkness and restores his sight so that he can see spiritual things. In this lesson, we will study two cases in which the Lord uses spittle from His mouth to open the eyes of the blind. This spittle signifies the word that proceeds out of the Lord's mouth and that conveys the divine light of life. When we receive this word into us and are mingled with it, we receive an anointing by which our eyes, which were blinded by Satan, are restored to sight. How wonderful is the Lord's ministry in this aspect! He heals our blindness and, by His living word, opens our eyes to see the genuine spiritual things.

CHAPTER(S): Mark 8; John 9.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

Among all of the problems that plague man, blindness is among the most serious and most subtle. Why are many unbelievers unable to receive the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ? It is because the god of this age has blinded them (2 Cor. 4:4). For this reason, Christ in His ministry cared for man's need by opening his eyes so that he could see the spiritual things. Satan seeks to blind our eyes toward spiritual things, but Christ as the light of life can open our eyes so that we can see all things clearly. May the verses in this message help the young people treasure this aspect of the Lord's ministry and put in them an aspiration to spend time with the Lord in His Word so that He could recover their sight.

I. The Lord opened the eyes of those who were blind physically and spiritually— Luke 4:18

In Luke 4:18 the Lord said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim...recovery of sight to the blind." In His ministry on earth, the Lord opened the eyes of those who were blind physically and spiritually.

A. Physical blindness signifies the loss of spiritual sight for spiritual things

The cases of physical blindness in the Gospels were pictures that signified man's spiritual blindness. Man is spiritually blind to the things of God and has lost his inner sight to spiritual things. Several passages in the New Testament show the matter of spiritual blindness: the unbelievers are spiritually blind toward the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4); the Pharisees were spiritually blind (John 9:39-41); and the believers can become spiritually blind (2 Pet. 1:9; 1 John 2:11; Rev. 3:17). Because of man's spiritual blindness, the Lord came in His ministry to recover his sight so that he could see spiritual things.

B. Spiritual blindness comes from the shortage of the light of life—Acts 26:18; 1 John 2:11; John 8:12

Blindness comes from darkness, and darkness is a sign of sin and death. Paul was commissioned by the Lord in Acts 26:18 "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God." "The first item of the spiritual and divine blessings of the New Testament jubilee, which are the blessings of the gospel of God, is to

open the eyes of those who are fallen and turn them from darkness to light, that they may see the divine things in the spiritual realm. To see these things requires spiritual sight and divine light” (Acts 26:18, footnote 1).

C. Spiritual blindness is healed by Christ as the light of the world—John 8:12; 9:5

In the beginning of John’s Gospel it says, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men....This was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:4, 9). Then in John 8:12 the Lord said, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Blindness comes from the shortage of Christ as light who came to be the light of the world. He is the light, and those who follow Him shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

II. The Lord in two particular cases healed the eyes of the blind men by spittle from His mouth, signifying the Lord’s living word—Mark 8:22–26; John 9:6–7

There are two particular cases of the Lord’s opening the eyes of the physically blind by which we understand how the Lord opens the eyes of those who are spiritually blind (Mark 8:22–26; John 9:4–7). In both cases, the Lord used spittle from His mouth to open their eyes.

A. In Mark’s Gospel, the Lord led the blind man out of the village and spit on his eyes—Mark 8:22–26

In Mark, a blind man was brought to the Lord when He came to Bethsaida. The Lord then “took hold of the hand of the blind man and led him forth outside the village. And He spat on his eyes and laid His hands on him and asked him, Do you see anything?” (Mark 8:23). For the Lord to take the blind man out of the village may indicate that He “wanted the blind man to have a private and intimate time with Him so that He could infuse him with the element by which his sight could be recovered” (Mark 8:23, footnote 2). We all need such a time with the Lord. The spittle that came from His mouth (as also seen in the next case) signifies the Lord’s word which conveys the divine light of life for the recovery of man’s sight. After the Lord spat on his eyes, the blind man could see, but not that clearly. So, the Lord laid His hands on the blind man again, and his sight was fully restored. In like manner, in the initial stage of our spiritual recovery we may see things unclearly, as did this blind man. We thus need a further touch from the Lord so that we can see all things clearly.

B. In John’s Gospel, the Lord anointed the man’s eyes with clay mingled with spittle—John 9:6–7

John’s account gives the record of yet another blind man who was healed in a little different way. The difference in this story gives further explanation of how the Lord heals our blindness. In this case the Lord “spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed his eyes with the clay” (John 9:6). The clay refers to humanity (Rom. 9:21). We are clay. The spittle which “proceeds out through the mouth” of the Lord signifies the word (Matt. 4:4) which is spirit and life (John 6:63). John 9:6 says the Lord “made clay of the spittle.” For the Lord to make clay of the spittle means that He mingles His spittle with the clay; this means He mingles His living word with humanity. We are the clay and the spittle is the Lord’s word (which is Spirit and life). When the Lord’s word comes to us, we receive His essence and element into us and are mingled with it. “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...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" (Life-study of John, Message 21, pp. 253–254). After receiving the Lord in His Word, the anointing follows. It is by the anointing of the mingling of the Lord's words (which are Spirit and life) with our humanity that our eyes, which were blinded by Satan, can have sight.

III. The Lord desires to recover our spiritual sight so that we may see spiritual things— Rev. 3:17–18

A danger exists among young people in the church life who accumulate spiritual knowledge but do not have true spiritual sight. Some who are in this condition often have the feeling in the meetings that they have already heard everything before and are already knowledgeable of spiritual things. Such was the case with the Pharisees in John 9:39–41 and with the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17. These two groups of people had doctrinal knowledge but were actually blind and lacked "true spiritual insight in the genuine spiritual things" (Rev. 3:17, footnote 2). The Lord exhorted Laodicea to pay the price to buy eyesalve to anoint their eyes so that they might see. The eyesalve here is the anointing, life-giving Spirit (1 John 2:27; 1 Cor. 15:45). Once we receive the Spirit, we will have the real sight to see the preciousness of Christ and be attracted to Him (See Life-study of Revelation, Message 16, pp. 205–207). From this lesson we see that the practical way to receive the Spirit is to spend some private and intimate time with the Lord to receive His living word.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: When the Word is being spoken to a person, Satan as the god of this age, blinds his thoughts so that he cannot see the scenery of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). An example can help illustrate this. Take a ping-pong ball and cut it in half. On the inside of one half write "sports," and on the inside of the other write "bored." Then place the two halves gently over the eyes of one of the young brothers. Now his eyes are covered so that he cannot see anything of what is going on in front of him. All he can see and think of is "sports" and how "bored" he is. (Actually, he cannot see anything but darkness inside the two halves.) Then, in front of the young brother do some interesting things (e.g., wave a flag, eat a cookie, display a diamond ring). After everything is done, the brother, even though he was in the meeting, did not see a thing; instead he was preoccupied with sports and boredom. In like manner, Satan often blinds our thoughts from seeing the preciousness of Christ in the meetings. In every meeting we need to turn our heart to the Lord so that the veil could be removed. Then the "illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ" can shine into us (2 Cor. 3:16; 4:4, 6).

GOSPEL APPLICATION: "Although man's outward eyes can see, his inward eyes are blind. [He] does not know from where he came, nor where he is going...what life is all about, nor what is his relationship with God...The Lord is the light of the world. Only the Lord can dispel man's darkness; that is, only the Lord can resolve man's problem of blindness and cause man to regain his sight" (*Gospel Outlines*, Subject 106, p. 221). In John 9, there is the case of the healing of a man born blind. The healing of this man's blind condition was done in a very meaningful way. The Lord spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, anointed the eyes of the blind man, and "said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is interpreted, Sent). He went therefore and washed and came away seeing" (John 9:7). "The spittle signifies the words which

proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord, and clay signifies man who was made out of the dust of the ground. The words entering into man and mingling with man through the moving and anointing of the Holy Spirit enable man to see clearly" (*Gospel Outlines*, Subject 106, p. 221). Yet, before his eyes were opened, the blind man had to believe and obey the Lord's word to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. "His going and washing indicates that he obeyed the life-giving word of the Lord. So he received sight. If he had not gone to wash off the clay after having been anointed with it, the clay would have blinded him even more. Our obedience to the Lord's anointing cleanses us and brings us sight" (John 9:7, footnote 3). "The Lord not only healed the blind person so that he could see, but also led him to realize that the Lord was the Son of God....[T]he real eye opening is to realize that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (*Gospel Outlines*, Subject 106, p. 221).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the historical progression of events in the Bible (I.C.); Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: John 9:6, footnote 1; Mark 8:22, footnote 1; Mark 8:23, footnotes 2–3.

REFERENCES: John 9:6, footnote 1; *Life-study of John*, Message 21, pp. 245–254; *Life-study of Revelation*, Message 16, pp. 205–207; Luke 4:18, footnotes 5–6; Mark 8:22, footnote 1; Mark 8:23, footnotes 2–3; Mark 8:24, footnote 1; Revelation 3:17, footnote 2; *Gospel Outlines*, Subject 106, p. 221.

Lesson 10—Caring for Human Need—Raising the Dead

OBJECTIVE: To understand that in His ministry Christ demonstrated the fact that He is the resurrection and the life by raising the dead.

SYNOPSIS: On certain occasions the Lord Jesus performed the great miracle of raising the dead. The dead signify those who are dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5) and thus unable to contact God. After being resurrected they can fellowship with God by means of their regenerated spirit. In John 11:25 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Because Christ is resurrection, whenever He is present, resurrection is there. Today, our Christ is the life-giving One who wants not only to heal us but also to give us life, to resurrect us from our dead condition.

CHAPTER(S): Mark 5, Luke 7, John 11.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

I. In His earthly ministry, Jesus was able to give life to the dead

- A. In Capernaum, Christ raised from the dead the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue—Mark 5:22–43; Matt. 9:18–26
- B. In Nain, Christ raised from the dead the only son of a widow—Luke 7:11–17
- C. Near Bethany, Christ raised from the dead Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary—John 11:11–44

II. The dead signify those who are dead in sins and unable to contact God—Eph. 2:1

- A. Death came to man and reigns over man because of sin—Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12, 17
- B. Man experiences death first spiritually and then physically—Gen. 2:17; Matt. 8:22; Eph. 2:1

1. Spiritual death means separation from God, who is Spirit

The Lord said concerning the tree of knowledge, "On the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Adam, however, did not physically die on the day he disobeyed God, for the death the Lord spoke of was first a spiritual death. On the day Adam ate of the tree of knowledge, his spirit became dead. He had enjoyed continual fellowship with God up to that time, but after his disobedience, he lost the ability to know God through his spirit; in other words, he became dead towards God. (The meaning of death is to lose communication with something, to lose contact with a realm or a person. Man lost contact with God through Adam's fall.) What a great tragedy! Because of sin, God had to separate Himself from man, and man no longer was able to know God by his spirit. Thus the inward part of man became dark as man's "receiver" (his spirit) went "dead."

2. Physical death means separation from the physical body

Eventually, all men die physically, for death passed on to all men due to Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12). Although Adam lived 930 years, eventually he succumbed to death and lost his place in the physical world. All his descendants suffer the same fate.

C. After death comes judgment—Heb. 9:27

After a person dies, God's judgment follows. Physical death is not the end. (Therefore to commit suicide is not to "end it all.") Most people realize this, and therefore fear death,

knowing they will have to “meet their Maker” and give an account to Him for the things they did while living in their bodies (John 5:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:10). Eventually, those who die and come under God’s condemnation will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity, a destiny which is called “the second death” (Rev. 20:14).

D. All men are oppressed by death and are held in its slavery—Heb. 2:15

Due to the above points, all men are in bondage to death and afraid of death. The fear of death is like a ball and chain which every person unconsciously drags around with him day after day. Even though they are not yet dead, people are under the shadow of death and thus cannot fully enjoy life while they possess it.

III. Today, our Christ is the life-giving One who wants not only to heal us but also to give us life, to resurrect us from our dead condition—John 10:10b

A. Jesus came to people sitting in the shadow of death as the resurrection and the life—Matt. 4:16; John 11:25

1. As the embodiment of God, Jesus Christ possesses the uncreated and indestructible divine life—Heb. 7:16; Acts 2:24

Although Jesus was a man who possessed a human life, He was also God and possessed the unique, eternal, and uncreated life of God. God’s life is the life that is really life (1 Tim. 6:19)! Death, of course, has no power over God; but God has the power over death to bring dead people back to life.

2. As the Accomplisher of God’s economy, Jesus came that man might receive God as life—John 10:10b

People who have died have lost the opportunity to receive Christ as their life! Therefore physical death is an enemy to God (1 Cor. 15:26), for it prevents men from participating in His economy. In fact, God hates death more than He hates sin. The cases where Jesus brought people back to life depict the power of God and typify the application of the divine life to our dead spiritual situation.

B. Those who are dead and hear the voice of the Son of God shall live—John 5:25

Christ has the ability to raise the dead by His word. In each case where He raised someone from the dead in the Gospels, He did so by His word of command. The dead in John 5:25 signify not those who are physically dead, but those who are dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 5). When the spiritually dead ones hear the voice of the Son of God and respond, they receive the divine life! When the gospel comes to a sinner, that gospel needs to become the word of life to him. By the Son’s words of life, our spirit becomes enlivened through regeneration, and we are again able to freely communicate with God! This is really to be made alive. Those who become enlivened by God’s life can also testify that, “Heaven above is softer blue, / Earth around is sweeter green; / Something lives in every hue / Christless eyes have never seen” (Hymns, #284). The person who becomes enlivened by God’s own life becomes very alive!

D. Today we must enjoy Christ as the resurrection in order to continually be in the experience of life—John 11:25

Because Christ is resurrection and the life, when we enjoy Him we are resurrected out of any death in our being. Today, our Christ is the life-giving One who wants not only heal

us but also to give us life and resurrect us out of our dead condition. We should not tolerate death any longer! It is true that our outer man is decaying and dying, but our inner man, which is a part of the new creation in resurrection, is being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

IV. The result of Christ's ministry will be the New Jerusalem, where there will be no more death—Rev. 20:14

As the believers who are enlivened by the divine life, we can rejoice in the face of death and say, "Where, O death, is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55). "Death has been swallowed up unto victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). In the New Jerusalem, God as life will be fully enjoyed by all of His chosen and redeemed ones. The shadow of death will be no more, and only God's life, with all its richness (represented by jasper in Revelation 4:3 [see footnote 1] and 21:11), will be expressed.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: The younger a person is, the less he feels the shadow of death upon him. The older a person becomes, the more conscious he becomes of the matter of death. His body slows down and he begins to realize that eventually one day death will claim him. How different things would be if people did not die! (In a sense, God uses death to keep people from living a worse and worse life of sin.) Young people, however, experience death all the time in the form of depression, oppression, and darkness. Give many examples of this experience of death and help the young people realize that the sense of death is a healthy sense. The sense of death should cause us to turn from death to life. If we have no sensation concerning the things which bring in death, we are in a serious state. When death comes in, we must realize our need to turn to God, who is the source of life. Since we have Christ who is the resurrection life living in us, we can always be in life! We never need to abide in death. We should learn to hate death even as God does.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Without God's life, all men are spiritually dead and are in need of hearing the Lord's life-giving word. The voice of the gospel today is the voice of the Lord, able to give life to those who hear, release them from the pit of death's tomb, and free them from the bondage of their grave clothes (John 11:43–44; 5:25). Announce the good news of the Lord bringing life to the dead through the preaching of the gospel. "Today as you hear the gospel, you have also heard the words of the Lord, and you live. Because you are living, you will surely come out of the movie theaters and other sinful pits [and be freed from bondage]...Eating, drinking,...and gambling are all bondages. They cause you to be unable to move an inch. When you receive life, you will be freed from the bondage" (*Gospel Outlines*, Subject 107, p. 223). In this way, the content of this lesson can be effectively presented as the gospel. (For further help and an example of applying this lesson to the preaching of the gospel, see *Gospel Outlines*, Subject 107, pp. 222–224.)

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 17, pp. 155–159.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Genesis*, Message 18, pp. 239–240, 242; Message 21, pp. 275–276; *Life-study of Numbers*, Message 9; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 17, pp. 155–159; *Life-study of Luke*, Message 16, pp. 135–138; *Life-study of John*, Message 23, pp. 273–276, 282–284; Message 24; *Life-study of Romans*, Message 6, pp. 71–73; Message 10, pp. 116–125; Message 16, pp. 195–199; *The Knowledge of Life*, Chapter 1; *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Volume 1, Chapter 1, pp. 11–13; *Gospel Outlines*, Subject 107, pp. 222–223.

Lesson 11—The Prayers of Christ (1)

OBJECTIVE: The Lord Jesus was a man of prayer who, in oneness with the Father, prayed for God's will to be done on earth.

SYNOPSIS: In His God-man living, the Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. His prayers were not those of a common man praying common prayers, nor were they the prayers of a religious man praying in a religious way. Rather, His prayers were the prayers of a God-man who prayed to the mysterious God. As a man of prayer, He was one with God, He lived always in the presence of God, and He trusted in God. Furthermore, Satan, the ruler of the world, had no ground in Him (so His prayers were never impure or colored by hidden desires or motives). In His prayers He was altogether one with God and concerned for God's will and God's kingdom. We need to learn from Him to pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as it is in the heavens. This is to pray for the heavenly ruling, the kingdom of the heavens, to be carried out on earth.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 6.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

I. In His God-man living, the Lord Jesus was a man of prayer

Because Jesus was one with God (John 10:30), He did not live as a common man, nor even as a religious man. He lived and walked in the physical realm as a man in the flesh, but His living and work were altogether in another realm. Although He was human, He lived not by His human life, but by the divine life.

A. His prayers were not those of a common man praying common prayers

B. His prayers were not the prayers of a religious man praying in a religious way

C. Rather, His prayers were the prayers of a God-man who prayed to the mysterious God

Although the Lord Jesus was physically a man, He lived a life that was one with the invisible God, hence He lived a life that was mystical, a life mysterious to those around Him. As such a person, Jesus did not pray according to common, human, or religious concepts. Since He lived in such a divine, mystical realm, His prayer was also in the divine, mystical realm. A number of situations recorded in the Gospels illustrate this.

II. As a man of prayer, the Lord Jesus was one with God and prayed for God's will to be done on earth

As a man of prayer, the Lord Jesus was one with God. He lived always in the presence of God, and He trusted in God. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus prayed for God's will to be done on earth. Thus Satan, the ruler of the world, had no ground in Him, so that His prayers were never impure or colored by hidden desires or motives. In His prayers, the Lord Jesus was altogether one with God and concerned for God's will and God's kingdom.

**A. His entrance into His ministry was based upon a period of prayer and fasting—
Matt. 3:13—4:11**

The first thing that Jesus did at the initiation of His ministry was to go into the desert and fast. This was because the unseen Spirit led Him there. Although the Bible does not mention that He prayed, according to common practice fasting is always accompanied by prayer (Matt. 6:5, 16; 17:21; Acts 13:2-3). The fact that the Lord would not begin His

ministry without forty days of fasting and prayer indicates that He was absolutely one with God. It is significant that many times we are told that Jesus went alone to a mountain or desert to pray. This indicated that He was a person who was wholly dependent upon God for His life and move. The fact that Satan could not move Him away from His stand as a man dependent on God after the forty days and nights of fasting indicated that Jesus was determined to carry out His human existence entirely dependent on God.

B. Jesus prayed all night before choosing the twelve apostles—Luke 6:12–16; Matt. 10:1–4

Because Jesus was one with God and cared absolutely for God's will to be done on earth, He perceived situations around Him as God perceived them, and He reacted to them by prayer rather than according to His own ability as a man in the flesh. Undoubtedly Jesus had great ability as a man, but He rejected His natural human life in order to live as a man of prayer one with God. As such, He saw the real situation around Him and realized there was a need to appoint some workers to go forth with the gospel. He did not evaluate others for this task as other men would have. Perhaps we would have considered the resumes of all those who were following Jesus and sought to put together a team of workers according to their individual strengths and specialties. But Jesus did not do this. Instead, He prayed all night to know which of His disciples He would appoint as apostles.

C. Even while suffering on the cross His prayer was divine and mystical, because He was one with God and prayed for God's will on the earth

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, He prayed for the forgiveness of His persecutors. As human beings, we have no ability to forgive others for what they do to us. This is true for small offenses as well as big ones. In our natural life, we store up offenses; we do not forgive them. What the people did to Jesus was the greatest sin. They sentenced Him to death even though He was totally innocent. The Lord had every right to demand vengeance from God. (Here the speaking of Abel's blood and Jesus' blood could be compared—see Heb. 12:24 and footnote 3.) Only a man living in the divine and mystical realm can truly forgive others and seek their forgiveness. "To pray for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him was not an easy thing, but He did it in His humanity with the divine power. This is a divine fact performed in a human life—yet not the physical human life, but the mystical human life—by the divine power of the eternal Spirit" (The God-man Living, Message 17, p. 160).

III. We need to learn of the Lord Jesus to pray for the Father's will to be done on earth—Matt. 6:5–15

Jesus taught His disciples to pray as He did for the Father's will to be done on earth as it is in the heavens. This is to pray for the heavenly ruling, the kingdom of the heavens, to be carried out on earth. Jesus' teaching on prayer indicated that we also have to be men of prayer living one with God as He did. He told His disciples (our representatives) to pray for their persecutors (Matt. 5:44b). Who could do this by their natural ability? In ourselves we would always hate those who persecute us. He also told them to pray in secret to their heavenly Father instead of praying publicly to receive other men's recognition (Matt. 6:5–6). In His supreme teaching in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, Jesus placed before His disciples a standard of living that was impossible for them to attain to in their natural life. The only possible way for someone to fulfill His teaching would be for them to live as Jesus did, by taking God as their source, trusting in

God, and living one with God as men of prayer. This is further illustrated in the Lord's teaching on prayer in Matthew 6.

A. He taught them to pray that the Father's name be sanctified, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth—Matt. 6:9–10

The first thing the Lord teaches us concerning prayer indicates that when we are one with God, we will become burdened to pray for the interests of our Father and His kingdom. We might think that to be one with God means all will be joy and bliss and release from burden. In fact, once we begin to touch the Lord and our eyes are opened by Him to see the real situation, we will be burdened to fight for the fulfillment of God's move in this age. The more we see the goal of God's economy, the more we will be burdened to fight for it. That is why in this pattern of prayer, the Lord begins by praying in a fighting way. He saw the real situation because He was a man of prayer who was one with God. The Father's name was not being sanctified on the earth, and the Father's kingdom had still not come to the earth. The more we, as the sons of our Father, live in the same way, the more we will pray in this way until His kingdom is established on the earth.

B. He taught them to pray for their daily needs—Matt. 6:11

The second thing that the Lord illustrated in this prayer-pattern was a complete trust upon God for daily physical necessities. Only a person who was one with God and fully trusting in God could be free from the anxiety other people experience over such things as food, health, shelter, etc. (cf. Matt. 6:31). This kind of trust in the Lord for all the things needed for our living truly makes us mysterious to those around us, for we are living a life which cannot be explained or understood.

C. He taught them to pray for God's forgiveness as they also forgave others—Matt. 6:12, 14–15

Every point in this prayer indicates that we must be persons living in full dependence on God. This prayer itself is in the divine and mystical realm and brings us into this realm. Everyone wants their own debts forgiven, but who can forgive others? This prayer also causes us to realize that we are debtors to others due to our failures, shortcomings, and mistakes. If we have this kind of attitude, we will forgive others in the Lord, which surely makes us mysterious people to those around us. (In verses 14 and 15, the Lord reveals that if we do not forgive others' offenses, the Lord will not forgive our offenses, and therefore our prayer will be frustrated.)

D. He taught them to pray to be kept from temptation—Matt. 6:13

The fourth major point in the Lord's prayer reveals that we need to depend upon the Lord to keep us from the evil one's work. Many people strive to overcome temptation, while others just give in. Jesus indicated that we should realize that we are helpless and unable to fight temptation on our own. Such an attitude also makes us mysterious persons to those around us. Instead of being confident in ourselves, our testimony is that we need the Lord. This is not a shame to us; rather, it is our boast. We are dependent people, not independent people. We need God. The purpose of our existence is fulfilled in God. It is not a glory to overcome temptation by our own strength apart from God. Such an overcoming is not a success. God wants to be the One to keep us from temptation. For this, we need to be persons living a dependent life by keeping ourselves in God through prayer.

E. Through our prayer, we acknowledge God as God and gain Him as our life supply

Such a prayer acknowledges that God is the unique One in the universe; the One to whom all things are due. To seek God in this way of prayer is to honor God by giving Him His rightful place in our lives. When God has people praying on the earth in this way, His kingdom is being established, His power is being exhibited, and His glory is being expressed on the earth. Thus, this prayer results in the advance of God's kingdom on earth, for such prayer not only gives God the cooperation He needs in order to move on the earth; it also causes us to grow in life through our contacting Him.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: God is invisible, and many people claim this is a reason not to believe in Him. "Show us God," they say, "and we will believe in Him." The young people need to realize that they can manifest the invisible and mysterious God to others through their living. In order to make the invisible God known to others, however, we need to enjoy Him. Since He is invisible, how do we contact Him? By our human spirit. By means of our spirit we can contact, receive, and enjoy our God. This is what prayer is—to contact God by means of our spirit. When we pray we do not have to come up with anything from our mind or say something according to some ritual. We simply need to contact God by calling on the Lord's name and by just speaking to Him about whatever is in our heart. When we contact God in this way, we are energized and directed by an invisible source, making us persons who seem mysterious to those around us. By means of this invisible source (God), we can forgive others, endure persecutions, and live in a way that others cannot. When others see us living this way, they are led to wonder about what it is that makes us so different. Then when we talk to others about God, they will listen. This is to live the same kind of life that Jesus lived. We can experience the divine, mystical realm just as Jesus did and live and move by our mysterious, invisible God.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: "The real significance of prayer is to contact God in our spirit and to absorb God Himself. Prayer is the contact of the human spirit with the Spirit of God, during which man inhales God into himself. Therefore, the emphasis of prayer lies not in asking God for things but in contacting and absorbing God" (*Life Lessons*, Volume 1, Lesson 4, p. 24). Every day, millions of religious people utter millions of religious prayers. Some of these prayers may be honorable, selfless, and even somewhat in line with what the Lord may want to carry out on earth. But how many have the view that the real significance of prayer is to contact and absorb God in their spirit? Today, in this meeting, the Lord is desiring your prayer. What is being presented to you is by no means a religious practice, but a simple way to receive the Lord. God is Spirit, and He created a human spirit within you with the capability of contacting and absorbing Him. This human spirit is the deepest part within you that has been searching for something real and all the time knowing that the answer lies only in finding God. Tonight, the outward speaking is matching the inward voice. It is time for you to pray, not merely to converse with the Lord, but to contact Him with your spirit that you might receive and absorb Him.

CRUCIAL MATTERS: An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Praying to fellowship with the Lord and petitioning for our own and others' needs (III.E.6.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The God-man Living*, Messages 10–11.

REFERENCES: *The God-man Living*, Messages 10–17; *Lessons on Prayer*, Chapters 1–3; *The Prayer Ministry of the Church*, Chapters 1–3 (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Volume 22); *Life-study of Luke*, Message 14, pp. 117–118; Message 40, pp. 347–352; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 21, pp. 264–269; Message 44, p. 522.

Lesson 12—The Prayers of Christ (2)

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord Jesus trained His disciples to learn from Him as a man of prayer in His performing of the miracle of feeding five thousand people.

SYNOPSIS: In performing the miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, the Lord Jesus trained His disciples. Before performing this miracle He took the loaves and the fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed them. This indicates several things: that He was one with the Father and trusted in Him; that He did nothing from Himself; that He did not seek His own will but the will of the Father; and that He did not seek His own glory but the glory of the Father. As the sent One, the Lord realized that the source of the blessing was not with Him, but with the Father, the sending One. After He performed the miracle, He went up to a mountain to be alone with the Father in prayer. From this we need to learn of the Lord (1) to always honor God as our unique source and (2) to spend time alone with the Lord in prayer, enjoying intimate fellowship with Him.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 14.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

In Matthew 11:29, the Lord said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me..." Here, the Lord told His disciples to learn from Him and take Him as their pattern. As the disciples lived and moved with the Lord, they were observing Him and learning from Him. One thing they observed about Him was how He lived as a man of prayer. In Matthew 14, the Lord fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Many read this account and are amazed at the Lord's ability to perform such a miracle. In this lesson, however, we want to focus not on the miracle He performed but on the lesson that He taught His disciples. What the Lord did in feeding the five thousand was truly amazing, but what ministers life to us in this portion of the Word is the lesson that He teaches us regarding Himself as a man of prayer.

I. In performing the miracle of feeding five thousand people, the Lord trained His disciples to learn from Him as a man of prayer—Matt. 14:19

In this account of feeding five thousand people, the Lord taught His disciples through what He did before and after performing the miracle. Before the miracle, the Lord looked up to the heavens and blessed the five loaves and two fish. After the miracle, the Lord went to the mountain privately to pray to the Father. Both of these actions presented a pattern for the disciples and trained them to live as men of prayer.

A. Before performing the miracle, the Lord looked up to heaven (to His Father in the heavens) and blessed the five loaves and two fish, indicating that:

Matthew 14:19 says, "And after commanding the crowds to recline on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples to the crowds." The Lord's looking up to heaven while blessing the loaves and fish was His looking up to the Father. By doing this, the Lord indicated that the source of the blessing was not Him but the Father. The Father was the Sender and the Lord was the sent One. As the sent One, the Lord realized that the source of the blessing was not with Him, but with the Father, the sending One. By this one action of looking up to heaven the Lord showed the following four things:

1. He was one with the Father and trusted in Him—John 10:30

The Lord's looking up to the Father indicated that He was one with the Father and trusted in Him. From this we learn that the blessing comes not in trusting what we can do, but in trusting the Lord and being one with Him.

2. He did nothing from Himself—John 5:19

The Lord's looking up to the Father also indicates that He would do nothing from Himself. Although the universe was created through Him, He would do nothing of Himself. This is unlike people of today who like to display what they know and can do in order to attract people's attention.

3. He did not seek His own will but the will of the Father—John 5:30b

In John 5:30 the Lord said, "I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me." The Lord's looking up to the Father indicated that what He was doing was not a seeking of His own will but the will of the Father. He did not seek His own purpose and intention but sought the Father's purpose and intention.

4. He did not seek His own glory but the glory of the Father—John 7:18

The Lord also did not seek His own glory but the glory of the Father. We see that the Lord, by looking up to the Father in heaven, was a pattern to the disciples for them to learn from Him. By observing the Lord's looking up to the Father, we learn a lesson. This lesson is to honor God as our unique source. The Lord honored the Father as His source and thus was one with Him, trusted in Him, did nothing from Himself, did not seek His own will, and did not seek His own glory.

B. After performing the miracle, He went up to the mountain to be alone with the Father in prayer—Matt. 14:22-23

Matthew 14:22-23 say, "And immediately He compelled the disciples to step into the boat and to go before Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. And after He sent the crowds away, He went up to the mountain privately to pray. And when night fell, He was there alone." Before performing the miracle of feeding five thousand people, the Lord looked up to heaven to show that the source of the blessing was the Father. After performing the miracle, the Lord sent His disciples and the crowds away and went up to the mountain privately to pray. Rather than remaining in the enjoyment of His success in performing the miracle, the Lord went away to be alone with the Father. The Lord's going to the mountain privately indicates that He did not let anyone know what He was doing, otherwise others would have followed Him. He went to be alone with the Father to pray to Him and have intimate fellowship with Him. This is a lesson we all should learn. We too should spend time alone with the Father away from all the crowds and have intimate fellowship with Him.

II. The Lord as a man of prayer is a pattern to us, teaching us to:

The Lord as a man of prayer taught His disciples to learn from Him. By the Lord's looking up to heaven, we learn, as young people, to take God as our unique source and trust in no other source but Him. By the Lord's going to the mountain privately to pray, we learn to spend time alone with the Father to have an intimate time with Him.

A. Honor God as our unique source

A good prayer to pray in the morning is, "Father, I take you as my source and receive from Your hand whatever You have for me today. I want whatever is from You. You are my unique source." Hymn #595, verse 2, says, "There is always something over, / When we, from the Father's hand, / Take our portion with thanksgiving, / Praising for the things He planned." The Lord took the Father as His source and, by so doing, set up a pattern for us to follow. We also can take the Father as our unique source. We do not trust in ourselves or our ability; rather, we trust in Him as our source. We do not seek our will and our glory; rather, we seek His will and care for His glory. He is the source of our family life, our school life, our future life, our Christian life, and our church life. How restful we feel when we, from our Father's hand, take our portion with thanksgiving, praising for the things He planned.

**B. Spend time alone with Him in prayer, enjoying intimate fellowship with Him—
Matt. 14:23; 6:6; Mark 1:35**

"To pray with others is good, but often we need to pray by ourselves. When we pray with others, we cannot enjoy the Lord as deeply as when we pray to the Lord privately. Even the Lord Jesus told us that when we pray we should shut our door privately and pray secretly to the Father who sees in secret (Matt. 6:6). Then we have the sensation of how intimate He is to us and how close we are to Him. We have to learn to leave the crowds, our family, our friends, and the saints in the church to go to a higher level on a 'high mountain.' We have to go higher, far away from the earthly things on a lower level. We need to get to a higher level, separated from the crowd, to be with the Father privately and secretly to have intimate fellowship with Him. This is the significance of being on the mountain in prayer" (The God-man Living, Message 14, p. 129). When we go to the Lord privately in prayer, we, as young people, do not need to feel that we have to spend a lot of time. Even if we spend five minutes with the Lord after school to sing, pray, and tell the Lord that we love Him, we will have the sense of being washed from the day and of coming into sweet fellowship with the Lord. As we spend these private times with the Lord, our relationship with the Lord becomes more intimate. In this way, we are brought into a life of fellowship with Him.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Many young people are familiar with the matter of prayer since they observe their parents praying. Some young people pray at least once during the week (either in a meeting, at meal time, or before bed). By speaking a simple word on what prayer is and the benefits of prayer, we can lead them more solidly into an appreciation and practice of prayer. *Life Lessons*, Lesson 4, gives some very helpful points regarding prayer: 1) The *significance* of prayer lies not in merely asking God for things but in contacting the Spirit with our spirit during which we inhale God into us. Prayer is spiritual breathing and is as important to a believer as breathing is to a newborn babe. 2) The *faculty* of prayer is our spirit (John 4:24; Eph. 6:18). 3) The *means* of prayer is by the Lord's blood and in the Lord's name (Heb. 10:19; John 15:16). 4) The *hindrance* of prayer is condemnation in our conscience (Heb. 10:22). 5) The *benefits* of prayer are that prayer guards us from temptation (Matt. 26:41), brings us mercy and grace for timely help (Heb. 4:16), and brings us peace to guard our heart from anxiety (Phil. 4:6–7). (Please see *Life Lessons*, Lesson 4.) We can pray at any time, in any place, and in many ways to the Lord to contact Him and inhale Him into us.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Man, as the center of God's creation, was created to possess and live by God as life. God, as man's loving Creator, desired to be everything to man, longing that man would be wholly dependent on Him in all things. He desired to fully meet every need of man, to be his provision, protection, and even his pleasure. However, God wanted man to choose to live such a dependent life, to choose to trust the heart of his Creator for his every need. So God placed man in the midst of the garden of Eden, where man had a choice between two trees, with two different principles: the tree of life with the principle of dependence on God and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the principle of independence from God. Unfortunately, man fell and became independent of God. From the time Adam disobeyed God and partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the course was set that nearly all of human history was to follow. But two thousand years ago, God became a man named Jesus. As a genuine man, He realized He needed God as His source and supply, so He lived a life of prayer. Prayer is God's ordained way for man to live a life dependent on God. Prayer means "I can't make it; I need the Lord." Just as Jesus, the perfect man with the highest humanity, realized His need of God, we too must realize our need for God. Actually, to continue to struggle through our lives independent of God is to live rebelliously according to the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which God commanded man not to partake (Gen. 2:16–17). The leader on the course of independence from God is Satan. His destination is the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). All those insisting on taking the same way will arrive at the same destination (Rev. 20:15). Today two ways are being presented before you: the way of life and the way of death (Jer. 21:8). Change your course today! Chose life and live (Deut. 30:19)! Repent of your independence and chose rather to live a life of sweet dependence on the Lord. To do so you must pray, confessing your need of Him to rescue you from the path of destruction and lead you on the path of life which is full of joy and pleasure for evermore (Psa. 16:11).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Knowing the important events in the Bible (I.B.); An understanding of the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.); Praying to fellowship with the Lord and petitioning for our own and others' needs (III.E.6.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The God-man Living*, Message 14.

REFERENCES: *The God-man Living*, Message 14; *Life Lessons*, Lesson 4.

Lesson 13—Christ's Teaching concerning the Kingdom

OBJECTIVE: To help the young people realize that as those who have been born of God to enter into the kingdom of God, we need to learn of the Lord how to live in the kingdom of God.

SYNOPSIS: As those who have believed into Christ and received Him, we have been born of God to be His children, having the divine life and the divine nature. Because we have been born of water and of the Spirit, we have entered into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a divine realm, not only of the divine dominion but also of the divine species, in which are all the divine things. Now we need to learn from the Lord's teaching concerning the kingdom how to live in this divine realm. In particular, we need to learn to be poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:6), to be merciful (Matt. 5:7), to be pure in heart (Matt. 5:8), to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), to seek God's kingdom first (Matt. 6:33), and to do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). We need to help the young people realize that, as children of God, they have received a kingly life to live in the reality of the kingdom. We need to help them realize that outwardly we may appear the same as others, but inwardly we are living in another realm, the realm of the divine dominion and the divine species.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 5, John 3.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

The kingdom of God is a divine realm in which are all the divine things. By our regeneration, we have been born with the life of God to be the species of God. By this divine birth we entered into the kingdom of God as the divine realm of the divine species. By our regeneration, we also received the Lord Jesus into our spirit to dwell in us as our King. In this way, we have been brought into the kingdom of God also as a realm of the divine dominion. As believers, we need to learn how to live in this divine realm of the kingdom of God.

I. **By our divine birth we have entered into the kingdom of God as the divine realm of the divine species—John 3:3–6**

In John 3, the Lord Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about needing to be born anew to enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The kingdom of God is a divine realm of the divine species. To enter into any kingdom requires that we have a certain kind of life. A dog can never enter into the cat kingdom, because a dog does not have the cat's life. However, should a dog be born again with the feline life, it would spontaneously be in the cat kingdom. To enter into the kingdom of God, we have to receive the divine life. To be "born anew" in John 3:3 is a matter of receiving the divine life. Only the divine life can realize the divine things in the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that no matter how many times he would be born of his mother again (who is flesh), he still would only be flesh (John 3:4–6). However, we have been born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5) to be begotten of God. Hence, we have entered into the kingdom of God.

A. **We have been born of God to become children of God, the species of God—John 1:12–13; 1 John 3:1**

As those who have believed into Christ and received Him, we have been born of God to be His children, having the divine life and the divine nature. To enter into the kingdom of God is to be born of God with the divine life and nature. Because we have been born of water and of the Spirit, we have entered into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). First John 3:1 says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and we are." We have been genuinely begotten of God, with His life, His

nature, and even His genes (cf. 1 John 3:9). Thus, we can be called the species of God—we are God's kind (cf. Gen. 1:26a, 27). This is our entrance into the kingdom of God.

B. We have the divine life and divine nature—John 3:36a; 1 John 5:11, 13; 2 Pet. 1:4

John 3:36a says that “He who believes into the Son has eternal life.” This eternal life is the very life of God Himself. We received the divine, eternal life by believing into Christ, for this life is in Him (1 John 5:11, 13). To be regenerated, to be born anew, is to receive the divine life in addition to our human life. In this way, we enter into the kingdom of God. Not only so, but we have also become partakers of God's very divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4)!

C. As such, we have entered into a divine realm of the divine species, in which are all the divine things—John 3:5b

Since we have been born of God with the divine life and the divine nature, surely we have entered into the kingdom of God. This kingdom is a divine realm, not only of the divine dominion but also of the divine species, in which are all the divine things. We have the divine life that can realize, experience, and enjoy all the divine things!

II. The kingdom of God is also a realm of the divine dominion—Matt. 5–7; Rom. 14:17

The kingdom of God is firstly a divine realm constituted of the divine life. However, the kingdom of God is also a realm of the divine dominion. Every species is governed by the kind of life it possesses. A dog barks because it has the canine life. You do not have to teach a dog to bark; neither can you stop it from barking very easily. Furthermore, you cannot teach a dog to meow. But if a dog were to receive and live by the feline life, it would spontaneously begin to meow. God's intention in giving us His life and bringing us into the kingdom of God is that we would live by this life under its regulation. The kingdom of God is the reign of God.

A. When we believed into Christ, we received Him not only as our Savior and our life, but also as our King—Christ has brought the kingdom of God into our spirit—Matt. 5:3; Col. 3:15; 1 Pet. 3:15

When we believed into Christ, He came into us, not only as the divine life to regenerate us, and not only as our Savior to live in us, but also as our King to reign in us. Christ Himself is the kingdom of God that we have received (Luke 17:21). Matthew 5:3 says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.” To be poor in spirit is to humble ourselves to repent and to empty ourselves of everything else so that we can receive Christ. As soon as we receive Christ, we have the kingdom of the heavens. Today, we have the kingdom of the heavens in our spirit!

B. To enter into the kingdom of the heavens is to live in the reality of the kingdom of God by being under the ruling of the divine life within us—Matt. 5:20

After receiving Christ as the kingdom life into our spirit, we still may not live according to that life. Hence, the Lord Jesus taught us in Matthew chapters 5–7 how to live according to that life. We have the kingdom of the heavens in our spirit (Matt. 5:3), but the Lord still speaks about entering into the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:20). This is to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today so that we can receive the kingdom as our reward at Christ's coming back (Matt. 7:21–22). To live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens requires us to live a righteous life under the ruling of the divine life within us (Matt. 5:20). “To enter into the kingdom of God requires regeneration as a new beginning of our life (John 3:3, 5), but to enter into the kingdom of the heavens demands surpassing

righteousness in our living after regeneration. To enter into the kingdom of the heavens means to live in its reality today and to participate in its manifestation in the future" (Life-study of Matthew, Message 17, p. 217). The only way to have righteousness is to be ruled by the divine life (cf. Rom. 5:17).

C. As children of God, we have received a kingly life to live in the reality of the kingdom—Rom. 5:17

As children of God, we have received a kingly life to live in the reality of the kingdom. Outwardly we may seem the same as others, but inwardly we are living in another realm, the realm of the divine dominion and the divine species. Now we need to learn from the Lord's teaching concerning the kingdom how to live in this divine realm.

III. We need to learn of the Lord's teaching how to live the kingdom life in this divine realm—Matt. 5-7

Matthew 5-7 gives the Lord's teaching concerning how to live in the kingdom of the heavens, in the divine realm. Specifically, the Lord taught us that in order to live the kingdom life, we must be poor in spirit, hunger and thirst for righteousness, be merciful, be pure in heart, be peacemakers, trust in God for all our needs, and do the will of our heavenly Father. Such a life in the reality of the kingdom of God is expressed in a perfect living according to the perfect life of the heavenly Father (Matt. 5:48).

A. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens—Matt. 5:3

The first aspect of the kingdom of the heavens covered in Matthew 5 is related to our spirit. To live the kingdom life, we must be poor in spirit. When we open to the Lord from the depths of our being, i.e., from our spirit, and unload ourselves of all our concepts, the Lord Jesus as the life-giving Spirit will enter into our spirit through our repentant mind to be our King with the kingdom of the heavens. We need to open to the Lord all the time in this way.

B. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied—Matt. 5:6, 20

To enter into the kingdom of the heavens is a matter of having the surpassing righteousness of God (Matt. 5:20; Rom. 14:17) according to the highest standard of perfection (Matt. 5:48) described in Matthew chapters 5-7. We must realize that there is no way for us to live this kind of righteous life in ourselves (cf. Phil. 3:9). To live such a righteous life, we must live by another life, by the divine life of God. The righteousness mentioned in Matthew 5:6 is simply Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. Rom. 5:17). Because He is righteousness, we must seek after Him. We should even pray, "Lord, make me hungry and thirsty for You." If we hunger and thirst after Christ, seeking to gain Him (Phil. 3:8-9), then surely we will be satisfied.

C. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy—Matt. 5:7

"For the kingdom of the heavens, we need to be not only righteous, but also merciful. To receive mercy is to get better than we deserve. If we are merciful to others, the Lord will grant us mercy (2 Tim. 1:16, 18), especially at His judgment seat (James 2:12-13)...We must be righteous in dealing with ourselves...Toward others, however, we must be merciful. If we are diligent to seek the surpassing righteousness, we shall eventually

become merciful toward others” (Life-study of Matthew, Message 14, p. 184). This is because in our seeking after righteousness, we discover how weak our natural man is. If we do not realize the pitiful condition of our natural man, we would never show mercy to others, but would condemn them. However, in our seeking after righteousness, we realize how weak we are and how many mistakes we have made. Thus, we are merciful toward others.

D. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God—Matt. 5:8

Righteousness is toward ourselves; mercy is toward others; and purity in heart is toward God. If we would seek the surpassing righteousness by being strict with ourselves, and would be merciful toward others, forgiving them and giving them more than they deserve, then we can also be pure in heart toward God. Toward God we must be pure in heart, seeking nothing other than Him. The reward for our being pure in heart is to see God. God Himself is our reward; no reward is greater than Him.

E. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God—Matt. 5:9

Many people understand this verse in a natural way. However, to be peacemakers does not mean to be political. To be political is falsehood and hypocrisy. We must be absolutely righteous and strict with ourselves, but still be merciful toward others. Furthermore, we must be pure in heart toward God, seeking only Him. If we are such persons, spontaneously we will be peacemakers. Instead of fighting with people, we will be at peace with all those around us.

F. Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, and do not be anxious about or preoccupied with material needs, trusting the Father to meet all our needs—Matt. 6:33–34

The Father will meet all the material needs of those who seek God’s kingdom first and are not anxious about or preoccupied with material needs. Seeking first the kingdom of God touches the very depths of our being. Those who are seeking first the kingdom of God must not have any attachment to the worldly, material things. We can only be pure in this way if we are living by the divine life.

G. Those who do the will of the heavenly Father will enter into the kingdom of the heavens—Matt. 7:21

We, the kingdom people, are not here just for living a righteous life. Rather, we are here for doing the will of the heavenly Father. We have a heavenly Father, and we are His children. To live a life of the surpassing righteousness requires us to live by His life. However, here it is not a matter of the Father’s life, but the Father’s will. Our Father has a will to accomplish, but we can only accomplish it by His life. We have received His life so that we may do His will.

H. A life in the reality of the kingdom of God is expressed in a perfect living according to the perfect life of the heavenly Father—Matt. 5:48

The Gospel of Matthew presents the highest requirements of the kingdom, the surpassing righteousness that we need in order to be in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The Gospel of John presents the divine life that enables us to have such a living. Without the divine life, we can never have such a living as described by the Lord in Matthew. However, we need the teaching in Matthew to help us to really live by the divine life, to live in the

reality of the kingdom of God. The requirement of the kingdom is nothing less than perfection: "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Such a perfect living expresses the perfect life of the heavenly Father.

IV. A life in the reality of the kingdom of God can only be lived by the divine life of the heavenly Father—Matt. 5:48

The kingdom of the heavens has the highest demand (Matt. 5:48), and this highest demand of the kingdom of the heavens can only be met by the divine life of the heavenly Father as our highest supply. The demand in Matthew 5:48 is that we "be perfect" but the verse also indicates the way to meet that demand. We are children of our heavenly Father! This means that we have His divine life! As we seek to live a life with the surpassing righteousness, we will realize more and more our need to live by the divine life. As we practice living by this divine life, we will enter more and more into the reality of the kingdom of God.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: To be in any living kingdom is a matter of being born with that kingdom's life. Just as a dog enters into the dog kingdom by being born with the canine life, we enter into God's kingdom by being born with the divine life. Hence, we must learn that to fulfill the requirements of God's kingdom is not merely a matter of our effort. It is a matter of cultivating the divine life within us. This is why our morning revival is so crucial. If we do not feed the divine life, it cannot grow. Every morning we need to spend a few minutes with the Lord so that the divine life within us can be watered and grow. Then, the requirements of the kingdom of God will spontaneously begin to be fulfilled in us. This is a process that takes time, but His life is able to work it out if we are faithful to cultivate and live by His life.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: God's desire from eternity past has been to have many sons. Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us He chose us before the foundation of the world and predestinated us "unto sonship." God's marking us out beforehand was to predestinate us unto sonship. We were predestinated to be sons of God even before we were created. Hence, as God's creatures we need to be regenerated by Him that we may participate in His life to be His sons. Sonship implies having not only the life but also the position of a son. God's marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit Him. By becoming sons of God, we enter into the kingdom of God. To be a part of the animal kingdom, you must be born an animal with the animal life. To be a part of the human kingdom, you must be a human with the human life. In the same way, to enter into the kingdom of God, you must be born of God with the divine life. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter 3. John 3:3 says, "Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Then in verse five the Lord continues, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 1:12 says "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name." This verse shows us how to be born of God—we must receive Him by believing into Him. Receive Him today! Believe into Him and be born anew to enter into the kingdom of God.

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Living a life under Christ's kingship to reign in life over all things (III.H.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Matthew*, Messages 14-15, 19-20; Message 24, pp. 302-304.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Matthew*, Messages 13-15, 17-20, 22, 24; *Life-study of John*, Messages 8-9; *The Vital Groups*, Message 1; *Crystallization-study of the Complete Salvation of God in Romans*, Messages 4-6.

Lesson 14—Christ’s Teaching concerning Our Living in the Church Life

OBJECTIVE: To show how the Lord, in His teaching concerning the church life, teaches us to forgive one another, to serve one another, and to shepherd one another.

SYNOPSIS: Much of the Lord’s teaching in the four Gospels concerns our living together in the church life. In this lesson we will focus on three matters: the church life as a forgiving life, a serving life, and a shepherding life. In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus gave a serious word about our need to forgive one another in the church life. We need to realize that the Lord has had mercy on us and has forgiven us of so many things, and thus we also should have mercy on one another, forgiving one another from our hearts (Matt. 18:35). In Matthew 20:20–28, the Lord taught us about serving others. Instead of trying to be great and to exercise authority over others in the church life, we need to serve one another in humility and love. In John 21:15–17, the Lord spoke about shepherding in the church life. Shepherding is to take all-inclusive, tender care of the flock. In the church life we should practice shepherding in mutuality, that is, shepherding one another in love. To do this, we need to cherish one another with Christ’s humanity and nourish one another with His divinity.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 18.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

“The Christian life has two aspects: the aspect of the individual Christian life and the aspect of the corporate Christian life. The divine dispensing is first for our individual Christian life and then for the corporate Christian life. The individual Christian life is a personal matter, but the corporate Christian life is a church matter” (The Conclusion of the New Testament, Message 160, p. 1739).

I. The Lord taught concerning our living in the church life—Matt. 18

Much of the Lord’s teaching in the four Gospels concerns our living together in the church life. After we receive the Lord, the Lord does not desire that we live an independent life in an individual way. He wants us to live the corporate church life. Therefore He spoke many things to His disciples concerning living such a corporate life.

II. The church life is a forgiving life, a serving life, and a shepherding life—Matt. 18:15–35; 20:20–28; John 21:15–17

The church is not a social organization formed by bringing individuals together and calling them the church. Rather, the church is the organic Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23) produced by the outflow of the life of Christ. As young believers who have received this life, we are now members of this Body and are living the church life. Yet, someone may ask, “What is the church life?” According to the Lord’s teaching in the Gospels, the church life is a forgiving life, a serving life, and a shepherding life.

A. The church life is a forgiving life—Matt. 18:15–35

“In the church life the believers forgive one another. Peter asked the Lord, ‘How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?’ (Matt. 18:21). The Lord replied, ‘I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven’ (v. 22) and then He gave a parable as an illustration (vv. 23–35). Matthew 18:35 says, ‘So also shall My heavenly Father do to you if you do not forgive each one his brother from your hearts.’ If we do not forgive the brother who sins against us, we shall be disciplined by the Lord

until we forgive him from our heart. Then the Lord will forgive us. If we do not practice the way of repentance and forgiveness, the longer we stay in the church life, the more offenses there will be. Eventually, the accumulation of offenses will cause us to forfeit the church life. May the Lord grant us the grace we need. If you offend someone, you need to go to that one and repent. If someone offends you, you need to look to the Lord for grace to forgive that one from your heart. And once you have forgiven an offense, you should forget it and never mention it again. If we do this, we shall maintain a proper church life" (The Conclusion of the New Testament, Message 163, p. 1771).

1. The Lord had mercy on us and forgave us of so many things—Matt. 18:24, 27

The Lord's parable in Matthew shows the extent to which He had mercy on us. We owed him a large debt (implying sins that we have accumulated after we were saved). When we confessed and repented, the Lord forgave us the large debt which we ourselves could never pay. Having received such mercy from the Lord, we should have mercy on our fellow brothers and forgive them from our heart.

2. We should have mercy on others and forgive them from our hearts—Matt. 18:35; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13

In order to forgive others from our heart, we need to take the Lord as life. "The forgiving Lord is our life and lives within us; forgiving is a virtue of His life. When we take Him as our life and person and live by Him, our forgiving of others will be spontaneous—it will become a virtue of our Christian life" (Col. 3:13, footnote 2).

B. The church life is a serving life—Matt. 20:20–28

The church life is also a serving life in which we serve one another. This is contrary to our "natural, self-seeking mind" (Matt. 20:26, footnote 1). We often like to be first and hold a position of prominence over others. The disciples in Matthew 20:20–24 and Luke 22:24 did not have a serving attitude but contended among themselves as to who was the greatest. Rivalry and ambition damage the church life. For this reason, the Lord taught the disciples not to be ambitious but to serve others as their slaves.

1. We should not try to be great and exercise authority over others—Matt. 20:25–26

In the world, the ones who are great are the rulers who exercise authority over others (Matt. 20:25). But in the church, this is not so. The Lord taught that in the church, "whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26).

2. We should serve one another in humility and love—Matt. 20:26–28; Gal. 5:13b

We should not be ambitious to be someone great in the church life. We should simply serve the saints as their slaves in humility and love. Just as the Lord came not to be served but to serve, we also should have the same mind to serve one another (Matt. 20:28; Phil. 2:3–5).

C. The church life is a shepherding life—John 21:15–17

In John 21:15–17, at the end of John's Gospel of life, the Lord spoke about shepherding in the church life. The Lord shepherded people during His earthly ministry (Matt. 9:36) and

is still shepherding the church in His heavenly ministry. In John 21:17, the Lord taught Peter to also shepherd (John 21:17). Shepherding is to take all-inclusive, tender care of the flock. In the church life we should practice shepherding in mutuality, that is, shepherding one another in love.

1. **We should cherish one another with Christ's humanity—Eph. 5:29; 1 Thes. 2:7**

"To cherish people is to make them happy, to comfort them, to make them feel that you are pleasant to them, easy to be contacted in everything and in every way" (The Vital Groups, Message 10, p. 97). When we shepherd others, we should cherish them to make them happy. When a mother feeds a baby, she warmly and cheerfully holds the baby. This makes the baby feel happy, comfortable, and willing to receive the food. In John 8, the Lord, in His humanity, cherished the sinful adulterous woman by not condemning her. That was a comfort to the woman to prepare the way for the Lord to nourish her.

2. **We should nourish one another with Christ's divinity—Eph. 5:29; John 21:15, 17**

"To nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry in three stages. When we speak to people about Christ, we should not speak to them in an incomprehensible way in a kind of language which they do not understand. We have to find a way to present the all-inclusive Christ to everyone" (The Vital Groups, Message 11, p. 103). After cherishing people we must go on to nourish them. The Lord first cherished the sinful woman by sending away all the Pharisees and by not condemning her. Then, in His divinity, He nourished her to free her from sin and enabled her to "sin no more" (John 8:11, 24, 34–36). The Lord as the I Am set her free by His divine life. When we cherish others to make them happy and nourish them by speaking something of the truth to them, we shepherd them.

III. In the church life, we need to forgive, serve, and shepherd people

If our living of the church life is a forgiving life, serving life, and shepherding life, we will enjoy a church life that harbors no offenses, seeks no position, and cares for the saints for their progress and joy of the faith. This makes the church life very enjoyable.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: The most simple definition of the church is "the assembly." As the assembly, the church is the gathering of all the called-out ones. *The Church: A Lesson Book*, gives a description of the church as the assembly of the called-out ones (Lesson 3, pp. 27–30). The church is not a physical building but a gathering of all those who have been called out of the world to God Himself for the fulfillment of His purpose. We are the church! Yet, since the church is the gathering of different people who have God's life, there are often offenses. Coming together with others is wonderful, but this togetherness often brings out our differences which may issue in unpleasant feelings. Knowing this, the Lord in Matthew 18 spoke regarding the matter of forgiveness. When we offend others, we must seek their forgiveness. When others offend us, we must forgive them and forget their wrongdoing. Whenever we forgive others we experience the real church life.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: In today's society it is hard to find a genuine and loving person who is pure in motive, forgiving in relationships, and caring for others. Second Timothy 3:1–4 describes our current society when it says, "But know this, that in the last days difficult times

will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, not lovers of good, traitors, reckless, blinded with pride, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." These verses describe a society that is not genuine and loving. (Here, you may even feel to speak a personal and convicting word, asking them "How about you?" in regards to each of the previously mentioned characteristics.) How can you be delivered from such a deplorable condition? The only answer is to receive the Lord as your life and be baptized to become a member of His Body—the church. The proper church life is a healing hospital to care for the weak and wounded ones, a divine school to strengthen and nourish you with the life-giving word of God, and a loving home to care for you as you grow, day by day, unto maturity in the divine life. The love and care found in the wonderful church life is diametrically opposed to all the self-seeking found in today's society, where everyone is only watching out for himself as "number one." Praise the Lord for giving us Himself as our life and the church as our living! Believe today and be baptized to become a son of God in life and a member of the Body of Christ—the church!

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Practicing an active, corporate church life (III.F.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 163, pp. 1771–1773; *The Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*, Message 13.

REFERENCES: Colossians 3:13, footnote 2; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 52; Message 55, pp. 652–656; Matthew 20:26, footnote 1; *The Church, A Lesson Book*, Lesson 3, pp. 27–30; *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Volume 15, pp. 206–210; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 160; Message 163, pp. 1771–1773; *The Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*, Message 13; *The Vital Groups*, Messages 6–7, 10–11.

Lesson 15—Christ’s Teaching in Parables (1)

OBJECTIVE: To see the Triune God’s loving care and operation in saving sinners.

SYNOPSIS: In this lesson we will cover four major parables in the Gospel of Luke—the parables of the shepherd and lost sheep, the woman and the lost coin, the father and the prodigal son in Luke 15, and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. The three parables in Luke 15 unveil the saving love and operation of the Triune God to save sinners. These parables reveal the operation of the Triune God in saving lost people and in bringing them into Himself through Himself. In Luke 10:25–37 the Lord Jesus portrays Himself as the good Samaritan. This parable shows in a detailed way how the Lord cares for the dying one. Through these parables we see both our need and God’s salvation in Christ, our Savior.

CHAPTER(S): Luke 10, 15.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

This and the following lesson will address some of the parables the Lord used in His teaching. This particular lesson covers the parables of Luke 15, which portray the Triune God seeking lost sinners (shown in the parables of the shepherd and the lost sheep; the woman and the lost coin; and the father and the prodigal son), and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. The next lesson will cover parables from Matthew, including the parable of the sower and the four kinds of ground, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the ten virgins.

I. The Lord used parables in His teaching to reveal the truths to some and hide them from others—Matt. 13:10–17; Luke 8:10

*It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, so the Lord often used parables (stories that convey something of spiritual significance) in His teaching. The Lord, however, also told His disciples that He spoke in parables so that those listening would **not** understand! These stories, which can make the truth clear to some and obscure it from others, were the product of the Lord’s divine wisdom and knowledge. Therefore we need to ask the Lord for a spirit of wisdom and understanding when coming to study the parables, for the Lord’s parables cannot be understood by the natural mind. “Only the enlightened mind of a submissive heart can understand these mysteries” (Matt. 13:11, footnote 1). We should be like the Lord’s disciples and come to Him to receive the revelation contained in these precious portions of the Word.*

II. In Luke 15, the Triune God is seen seeking and saving the lost sinner in three parables—Luke 15:1–32

The Lord gave this three-fold parable in response to the accusation that He welcomed sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:1–2). In these parables, the Lord reveals that the entire Triune God is involved in seeking and saving the lost sinner. The order of the parables is significant: first the Son is shown in His seeking, then the Spirit, and then the Father receives the result of the seeking of the Son and the Spirit. This matches the order of the Bible as well as our experience. In the Gospels, Jesus came to seek the sinners and to die for them. Following this, from Acts onward, the Spirit began to work within men for their salvation and repentance, based upon Christ’s work of redemption. Thus, many sinners have been “found” and have come forward to God the Father through the Spirit, based upon Christ’s redemption (Eph. 2:18).

A. In the parable of the shepherd and the lost sheep, the Son is shown seeking the sinner by coming into the world and dying for him—Luke 15:3–7

In John, the Lord reveals to us that He is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11). This parable in Luke indicates He laid aside His glory to become a man among men in the world, and then He bore us all to the cross with Him and brought us into His death and resurrection, redeeming us. This is how we who were lost became "found" (Luke 15:6). It moves us when we consider the lengths to which the Lord had to go in order to rescue us. He did not simply grow up as a man and die for the mass of humanity; He grew up and died with each one of us in view. To Him we are each that lost sheep. He could never be at rest if even one of His lost sheep were not "found." The following are the keys to understanding this parable.

1. The wilderness in which the sheep was lost signifies the world—Luke 15:4

The lost sheep wandered off into the wilderness, which signifies the world. Surely the world is a vast wilderness, full of lost and wandering ones! In order to find us, the Lord had to come into the world (John 1:9) and live as a man among men.

2. Being borne upon the shepherd's shoulders signifies the Lord's saving strength—Luke 15:5

The Lord bore us out of the wilderness and brought us into His flock by dying on the cross for us. Now we and He can rejoice together with all the saved ones! As a helpless lost sheep, we had no ability to save ourselves. It was our strong and loving Shepherd who bore us on His own shoulders and carried out our salvation.

B. In the parable of the woman and the lost coin, the Spirit is shown working within the sinner by shining and sweeping so that he might repent and return to God—Luke 15:8–10

Since the shepherd clearly refers to God the Son, and the father in the third parable clearly denotes God the Father, the woman in the second parable must refer to God the Spirit. This is confirmed by the following aspects of this parable.

1. The house signifies the sinner, indicating that the work of the Spirit is an inward, subjective work—Luke 15:8; 1 Pet. 1:2

Although Christ's redemptive work has been accomplished, the work of the Spirit is still needed to cause us to repent and return to God in order to receive His full salvation. "The fact that the Spirit's finding us takes place within the 'house' of our being reveals that we were lost in ourselves. We were lost in our mind, will, and emotion....Christ died on the cross to bring us back from the wilderness of the world, yet we remain lost in ourselves. Therefore, the Spirit finds us in ourselves....This repentance resulting from the enlightening of the Spirit is altogether an inward matter. No human being and no angel is able to do such a subjective work in us. This can be done only by the penetrating Spirit, for the Spirit is able to penetrate the depths of our being to enlighten us and expose us. Then we realize how foolish we are, we repent, and we decide to come back to the Father" (Life-study of Luke, Message 35, p. 299).

2. The woman sweeps using a lamp, which signifies the Word of God—Luke 15:8; Psa. 119:105, 130

The lamp used by the Spirit is the Word of God. The Spirit applies the Word to our hearts and uses it to "sweep" within us, exposing us and energizing us, causing us

to return to God. This is portrayed in the experience of the prodigal son in the following parable. It was this hidden, inward shining and sweeping that eventually caused him to awaken to his real situation and decide to return to the father.

C. In the parable of the father and the prodigal son, the Father is seen receiving the returning sinner to Himself and applying to him His complete salvation—Luke 15:11–32

The result of the Son's and Spirit's seeking and finding is the sinner's returning to the Father ("He was lost and has been found"—Luke 15:32b). The Lord grouped these parables together to show different aspects of a sinner's experience of the Triune God in his salvation. In this final parable, the returning sinner is received by the Father and enjoys God's complete salvation. Bring out the following points from this parable:

- 1. The son ended up in "a distant country" and squandered everything given to him, eventually ending up in an impoverished and destitute situation in which he was deeply mired in filth and uncleanness—Luke 15:13–16**
- 2. The son awakened to realize that his father would receive him if he returned—Luke 15:17–19**

This was the result of the seeking of the Lord as the shepherd and seeking of the Spirit as the woman in the previous parables.

- 3. The father was expectantly watching and waiting for the son who had been so long lost and dead to him—Luke 15:20, 24**

The father saw the returning one while he was still a long way off, indicating that the father had been longing and watching for his son's return. When we come to the Father in repentance, He rushes to meet us! What a tender scene this is. Before the son can act out his penitence, his father embraces him and weeps upon his neck. Before the son can get out his feeble proposal, the father is speaking out his intentions for him. The son surely was overwhelmed with his father's reception. What a Savior God we have! What love He holds for us! It is not in His heart to judge or condemn us; His desire is that we would enjoy His full salvation in love.

- 4. The father had the best robe put upon the returning one, along with a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, and then killed the fatted calf and held a feast for him—Luke 15:22–23**

The best robe represents Christ as our righteousness, the ring represents the sealing Spirit, and the sandals represent the power to be separated from the dirty world we were once mired in. All of these matters make up the outward aspect of our salvation. After these items were put on, the son looked like his father outwardly, but inwardly he still needed to have his hunger satisfied and to be reconstituted after partaking of the world (it is not directly stated that the son ate the food that the pigs ate, but surely as sinners we have "eaten" many unclean things in the world). The father then caused his son to feast on the fatted calf (representing Christ as our life supply). This signifies the inward aspect of God's salvation. "After coming back to his father, the prodigal son enjoyed all the riches of God's provision in His salvation. He enjoyed Christ as his outward righteousness, he enjoyed the Spirit as the seal indicating that he belongs to the Father and that the Father and all His wealth

belongs to him, he enjoyed the power of God's salvation separating him from the world, and he also enjoyed the inner Christ, the Christ who is his life and life supply. Therefore, he could become a very happy person. With his father he could eat and be merry. What a pleasant picture this is!" (Life-study of Luke, Message 35, p. 302).

5. The father welcomed his reborn son into his house—Luke 15:25

This one who was dead and lived again came to live in his father's house. The father's house here signifies the church (see John 14:2 and footnotes).

III. In the parable of the good Samaritan, the Lord is our unesteemed "neighbor" who finds us wounded and naked on a downward path, binds our wounds, clothes us, and brings us to the church, supplying it for our care—Luke 10:25–37

In Luke 10, the Lord's seeking and saving sinners is depicted in the parable of the good Samaritan. In this parable, the Lord is responding to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The proud young lawyer who asked this question had asked another question before it concerning the law, and the Lord wanted to help him realize that because of his misguided application of the law, he was the one who needed a good Neighbor to take care of him, for he was in no shape to be such a neighbor himself. "The self-justified lawyer thought that he could love another as his neighbor [Luke 10:29]. Under the blindness of self-justification, he did not know that he himself needed a neighbor, the [Savior], to love him....The Savior intended to unveil to him through this story that he was condemned to death under the law, unable to take care of himself, needless to say love others, and that the [Savior] was the one who would love him and render him full salvation" (Life-study of Luke, Message 25, pp. 216–217).

A. The "certain man" signified the lawyer who, in spite of his law-keeping, was on a downward course from Jerusalem to Jericho—Luke 10:25–30

Jerusalem represents the place of blessing in God's economy, and Jericho represents a place of curse. This lawyer, though he felt he was improving himself through his efforts to keep the law, was actually falling lower and lower, towards Jericho. The more someone tries to keep the law in order to gain God's blessing, the more he will come under God's curse. The Lord never intended that man keep the law by his own ability. The law was given to cause people to realize their need for a Savior to die for them and to supply them the way to live such a life.

B. The robbers signified the legalistic teachers of the law who used the law to beat and injure those who tried to obey it—Matt. 23:3–4, 15; Rom. 7:8–11

In spite of man's inability to keep the law, some teachers of the law still did their best to force people into doing the impossible, even making additional laws for the people to keep. These legalistic teachers oppressed people to the degree that they would not even allow healing on the Sabbath! All those who try to satisfy God through the law come under the influence of such teachers, and end up wounded and bleeding under a system which only places demands upon men without granting any supply. These legalistic teachers made the load of the law heavier, and condemned and punished those who could not meet their impossible demands (demands which they themselves could not keep). Such hypocrites are truly robbers, stealing away people's hope of ever reaching God, and causing damage to their conscience. (In this parable, a priest and a Levite, servants of the law, passed the man by, for they were unable and unwilling to render the injured one any help.)

- C. The Lord was signified by the despised Samaritan who came down to the place where the wounded victim lay to save him—Luke 10:33–34; John 8:48**

The Samaritans were a people despised by the Jews. "This Samaritan signifies the [Savior], who was apparently a layman of low estate, despised and slandered as a low and mean Samaritan (John 8:48; 4:9) by the self-exalted and self-justified Pharisees, including the one to whom the Lord was talking in Luke 10:25 and 29. Such a [Savior], in His lost-one-seeking and sinner-saving ministry journey (19:10), came down to the place where the wounded victim of the Judaizing robbers was in his miserable and dying condition" (Life-study of Luke, Message 25, p. 215). The Samaritan bound up his wounds and poured oil and wine on them, signifying how the Lord ministers the Holy Spirit and the divine life to those He rescues in His salvation (see Matt. 9:17, footnote 1 and John 2:9, footnote 1).

- D. The Samaritan delivered the saved one to the inn, which represents the church, and supplied the inn for the continued care of the saved one—Luke 10:34–35**

"The Samaritan brought the man to an inn and took care of him. This indicates that He brought him to the church and took care of him through the church" (Life-study of Luke, Message 25, p. 216). In the previous parables, the sinner came to the Father and the Father's house seemingly on his own. Here the proud law-keeper had to be carried as a helpless patient by the Lord's donkey-ambulance to a place where he could be taken care of. The Lord has given grace to the church for each one of us (signified by the money paid by the Samaritan to the inn for the care of the injured one). The church where we are has specific grace for us, therefore the saints where we are can supply us according to our particular needs, regardless how poor or serious our condition is.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Highlight the Lord's compassion and His heart of love in seeking and saving the sinners in these parables. If the Lord had not found us, we would still be wandering about in the world just like a little child wandering about, separated from his parents. Without our even knowing it, the Lord came and died for us, and thus was the qualified One to bring us back on His shoulders, for it was His joy to die for us so that we could be brought back to Him, our God (Heb. 12:2). As the Spirit today, He is applying what He has accomplished to so many who are lost, prompting them to respond and "find" their salvation. Many people say they found the Lord when they got saved, but their finding of the Lord was really the result of the Spirit's shining and His hidden work in their hearts. The result of the Son and the Spirit's seeking work is that we run to God as our Father, and He receives us and applies more Christ to us for our outward covering and inward enjoyment. In the parable of the good Samaritan, focus on the Samaritan's binding up the wounds by pouring in the oil and wine, and his delivering the wounded one to the inn, the church. All these points are not only applicable to those who wandered in the world before they were saved, but also to each one of us who have ever come forward to Christ for salvation, whether for the first time, or at a time of repentance after salvation.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: This lesson itself is a gospel message and can be presented as such. All those away from God and lost in the world are longing for satisfaction while eating the carob pods of temporal earthly enjoyment that leave them continuously empty and never satisfied. They need to be told of the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the seeking and saving Spirit of our Savior Christ. Announce the good news to the lost that they have been found by the Lord on the cross as the good Shepherd. The Lord did not just give Himself to die for the world in a general sense (John 3:16), but He also gave Himself specifically for each one of us in a very personal way (Gal. 2:20). As the good Shepherd He left the ninety-nine sheep to

go out, onto the cross, and find you as the one! Yet God's work of salvation was not just something done outwardly two thousand years ago. He is still operating, even now as the fine seeking woman who, using the light of the word, is inwardly working within you right now to bring you to repentance (Luke 15:8). As the waiting and watching Father, He is longing for your return, not to punish you, but to kiss you affectionately, clothe you with Christ as the God-satisfying righteousness (the best robe), seal you with the Spirit (the ring), lift you up by the power of His salvation to separate you from the dirty earth (the sandals), and give you to feast on the rich Christ for your enjoyment and inward salvation (the fattened calf) (Luke 15:20–23). There's nothing you can do to save yourself; just as that "certain man" going down to Jericho, you are in need. The more you try to do good and behave yourself according to religious teachings, the more you find yourself beaten by them and left half dead (Luke 10:30). Yet the Lord is full of compassion, longing to heal you (bind up your wounds), give you Himself as the Holy Spirit and the divine life (pouring oil and wine upon your wounds), carry you by a lowly means in a lowly way (placing you on his donkey), and bring you to the church to take care of you (the inn) (Luke 10:33–35). He is ready right now to be such a Savior—to meet all your needs by bringing you into Himself through Himself. Oh, what a wonderful Savior!

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Understanding the basic truths regarding Christ and His person and work in many aspects for our full salvation (II.C.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Luke*, Messages 25, 34–35.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 38, p. 471; *Life-study of Mark*, Message 15, p. 142; *Life-study of Luke*, Messages 25, 34–35; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 48, pp. 512–516.

Lesson 16—Christ’s Teaching in Parables (2)

OBJECTIVE: To learn that in the church life we need to have a proper heart toward God, to be filled with the Spirit of God, and to be faithful in our service to God.

SYNOPSIS: In this lesson we will cover three parables from the Gospel of Matthew—the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23), the parable for watchfulness (Matt. 25:1–13), and the parable for faithfulness (Matt. 25:14–30). In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus shows us that we need a proper heart, the good soil, to receive the word of God so that it may bear fruit in us. In the parable for watchfulness, He teaches us to be ready for His coming by always being filled with the Spirit of God in our whole being. In the parable for faithfulness, the Lord Jesus teaches us that we need to be faithful in our service to Him in order to be rewarded by Him at His coming. These three parables touch our heart, our life, and our service, all of which are vital aspects of our living Christ in the church life.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 13, 25.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

Lesson 15 covered parables from the Gospel of Luke, whereas this lesson covers parables from the Gospel of Matthew. The three parables in this lesson touch our heart, our life, and our service, all of which are vital aspects of our living Christ in the church life.

I. In the parable of the sower, the Lord taught concerning our need to have a proper heart to receive the word of God—Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23

In this first parable, the Lord touches our heart. Our spirit is the organ that receives Christ, but our heart is the soil that grows Christ. The heart is composed of our mind, emotion, will, and conscience.

A. The Lord as the Sower sows Himself as the seed of life (the word)—Matt. 13:3, 19–23; John 10:10b; Mark 4:14; John 6:68

Here, the Lord is not likened to a teacher, but to a sower. As the Sower, He is the Distributor of life (John 10:10b), dispensing Himself into us as the life-seed. This life-seed is the word (Mark 4:14) sown into our human heart as the soil. When we are listening to a message, apparently we are merely listening to teaching; actually the Lord is sowing His life into us.

B. This seed falls on four different kinds of soil (hearts)—Matt. 13:4–8, 19–23

“There is only one kind of seed; the difference is in the soil. The kind of soil you are is determined by you; no one can force you [to be the good soil]” (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 15, Chapter 13, p. 132). The Lord, by this simple yet profound parable, exposes the real situation of our heart.

1. The wayside heart is hardened by worldly traffic so that the birds come and snatch away the word of life—Matt. 13:4, 19

This kind of heart is signified by the soil that is so close to the road that it gets hardened by the worldly traffic (signifying education, commerce, politics, science, business, and other kinds of traffic that occupies us and goes back and forth within our mind, emotion, and will). As a result, the seed (the word) cannot penetrate one’s heart. Those who have this kind of heart are not poor in spirit and pure in heart, but are preoccupied with other things.

2. **The shallow heart has hidden sins, personal desires, self-seeking, and self-pity as rocks hindering the word from taking root—Matt. 13:5–6, 20–21**

The shallow heart has rocks hidden beneath the soil. These rocks (hidden sins, personal desires, self-seeking, self-pity, temper, lusts, the flesh, and all the other negative things in our heart) hinder the growth of life. May the Lord dig out all these things within us.

3. **The thorny heart has the anxieties of this age and the deceitfulness of riches as thorns which choke the word, making it unfruitful—Matt. 13:7, 22**

Thorns grow naturally, without any need of sowing, and crowd the seed of life. Eventually these thorns (anxieties and the deceitfulness of riches) choke the word. We need to give the word of God room within us and not allow it to be choked. Anxieties about the future and aspirations to be rich only cause our heart to be crowded with many "thorns," leaving no room for the word of God to grow. We have no reason to be anxious about anything (Phil. 4:6–7; Matt. 6:25–34), and should not fall into the snare of aspiring to be rich (1 Tim. 6:9–10). The Lord will meet all our needs (Heb. 13:5–6).

4. **The good heart is the heart that gives every inch of its ground to receive the word that the word may grow and bear fruit—Matt. 13:8, 23**

The good heart is a heart that is pure, single, and absolute for God. It has no worldly traffic, no hidden sins, no personal desires, no self-seeking, no self-pity, and no choking of the life-seed by the anxieties of this age and the deceitfulness of riches. All of these negative items are the result of Satan's work within a person to make his heart unavailable to God's purpose. However, the good heart as the good soil gives every inch of its ground to the word of life. As a result, this word takes root, grows, and bears fruit within the believer. The Lord can only grow well in this heart. May the Lord's parable inspire us to give every inch of our being to the dispensing of the word of life.

- II. **In the parable of the ten virgins, the Lord taught concerning watchfulness so that we would be ready for His coming—Matt. 25:1–13**

In the parable for watchfulness, the Lord teaches us to be ready for His coming (Matt. 25:10) by always being filled with the Spirit of God in our whole being (Matt. 25:4). The Bridegroom in this parable is Christ as the most pleasant and attractive person (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15), and the virgins are those who are espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). All ten of the virgins have oil (the Spirit—Rom. 8:16) in their lamps (their spirit—Prov. 20:27) and are thus regenerated. However, not all of them are ready for the Lord's coming. Only the five wise virgins who have an extra portion of oil in their vessel (their soul) are ready to meet the Bridegroom.

- A. **The five foolish virgins did not pay the price to have the extra filling of the Spirit (oil) in their soul (vessel) and missed the wedding feast—Matt. 25:3, 10–12**

"The foolish ones were foolish because they had oil only in the lamp, but not the extra portion of oil in the vessel. In addition to the regenerating Spirit, they did not have the infilling Spirit, the extra portion of the Holy Spirit" (Life-study of Matthew, Message 64, p. 750). As a result, they missed the wedding feast (Matt. 25:3, 10–12; Rev. 19:9).

B. The five wise virgins paid the price to have the extra filling of the Spirit (oil) in their soul (vessel) and went into the wedding feast—Matt. 25:4

When the foolish virgins asked the wise virgins to give them some of their oil, the wise virgins said, "Go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matt. 25:9). "Buy" indicates that a price must be paid. Having the filling of the Holy Spirit is at a cost, such as giving up the world, dealing with self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss for Christ. If we do not pay this price today, we will have to pay it after we are resurrected" (Matt. 25:9, footnote 3).

1. The wise virgins redeemed the time—Eph. 5:16–17

The wise virgins redeemed the time by seizing the opportunity to be filled with the Holy Spirit. As a result, when the bridegroom came, they were ready. The foolish virgins eventually paid the price, but were late. When they came later, the door was shut to them (Matt. 25:10, 11). In this parable, time means a great deal. We must redeem the time in these evil days by seizing every opportunity to be filled with the Spirit (see Eph. 5:16, footnotes 1–2). Every time we contact the Lord in the morning, attend the meetings in the evenings, pray with a friend on the phone, and read the Bible, we redeem the time and gain more of the Spirit.

2. The wise virgins were watchful and ready to meet the Lord—Matt. 25:10, 13

The parable ends with the Lord's charge: "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13). We must be watchful by being filled with the Spirit.

III. In the parable of the slaves, the Lord taught concerning faithfulness so that we would be rewarded by Him at His coming—Matt. 25:14–30

The Christian life has two aspects: the aspect of life and the aspect of service. We must take care of both aspects. The parable of the virgins is on the aspect of life and shows how we should be watchful for the coming of the Bridegroom by being filled with the Spirit. This next parable of the slaves is on the aspect of service and shows how we should be faithful to use the talent that the Lord has given us. As virgins, we are watching for the Lord to appear as our Bridegroom (Matt. 25:6). As slaves, we are faithfully serving until the Lord comes as our Master to settle accounts with us (Matt. 25:19). (See Matthew 25:14, footnote 3.)

A. The five-talented slave was faithful with his talents and was rewarded by the Lord—Matt. 25:16, 20–21

In this parable, the Lord, before going abroad (to the heavens), delivers his possessions to His slaves. These possessions signify the gospel, the truth, the believers, and the church. When the Lord delivers these to us, they become our talent. "Talents" refer to spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4; 1 Pet. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:6). For our life, we need oil (the Spirit) to live to the Lord as virgins. For our service, we need talents (spiritual gifts) to work for the Lord as slaves. The Lord delivered these talents to the slaves according to their ability, "which is constituted of God's creation and our learning" (Matt. 25:15, footnote 2). The five-talented slave faithfully traded his talents and gained another five talents. He used his spiritual gift to the full and as a result, was rewarded by the Lord who said, "Well done,

good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21).

B. The two-talented slave was faithful with his talents and was rewarded by the Lord—Matt. 25:17, 22–23

The two-talented slave was also faithful with what the Lord had given him and received the same reward as the five-talented slave. This shows that the Lord's reward is not according to the size and quantity of our work but according to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent. If the one-talented slave had been faithful, he also would have been rewarded in like manner.

C. The one-talented slave was slothful, buried his talent in the earth, and was cast into the outer darkness—Matt. 25:18, 24–30

"The main emphasis in this parable is on the one-talented one, who received the smallest gift. It is very easy for the least gifted to mistreat or ignore their gift" (Matt. 25:18, footnote 1). Rather than using his talent, this slave "went off and dug in the earth and hid his master's money" (Matt. 25:18). The "earth" signifies the world, so burying the talent in the earth is to get into the world. This buries the Lord's gift to us. When the one-talented slave approached the Master, he had nothing but his one talent to offer. As a result, the Lord called him a slothful slave and cast him into the outer darkness. In like manner, we will one day be raptured and settle accounts with the Lord. The Lord will want to know how faithful we were to what He gave us. Unlike the slothful slave, we should have a positive attitude and faithfully use our talent. We can do this by speaking something of the Lord to our friends and shepherding those younger than us. With regard to our heart, we must be absolute for the Lord. With regard to our life as virgins, we must be filled with the Spirit. And with regard to our service as slaves, we must be faithful. Then we will be rewarded and hear the Lord tell us, "Well done, good and faithful slave....Enter into the joy of your master"(Matt. 25:21).

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: By speaking the above parables to the young people we can impress them with how we ought to live the Christian life in view of the Lord's second coming. With each parable, we can make a simple point. The first parable shows that we need a soft, open, and available heart for the Lord. The second parable shows how we need to love the Lord as virgins and be filled with the extra portion of the Spirit. The third parable shows how we need to be faithful in the few things (the Bible, the meetings, etc.) committed to us. The Lord is coming again. May He find us soft in our heart, filled in our vessel, and faithful in our service.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: When the Lord Jesus was on the earth, many times He spoke to the crowds in parables. His speaking in parables was to hide the gospel truths from those who were not seeking, and to unveil the riches of His salvation and care of His heart to those who were seeking. This is because although many heard the words of the parables, only those who sought the truth would seek after their wonderful, hidden significance. Matthew 13:15–16 says, "For the heart of this people has become fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and their eyes they have closed, lest they perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and they turn around, and I will heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear." What a blessing to be a person who can understand the Lord's word in parables! The three parables in this lesson speak of the condition of man's heart toward God and what man should do to prepare himself to face God. Every person must stand before his Creator to give an account of his life (Rev. 20:11–12). In

order to be ready to meet the Lord and be rewarded by Him at His coming, we must first be a person with a soft and open heart to receive His word (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23). Then we must love Him with our first and best love and receive Him as the Spirit to be filled with Him (Matt. 25:1–13). Finally, we must serve Him faithfully throughout our life (Matt. 25:14–30). Receive Him today to begin your life as one who will please the Lord at His coming.

CRUCIAL MATTERS: The Lord's return (II.E.5.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Matthew*, Messages 36, 64–66.

REFERENCES: Ephesians 5:16, footnotes 1–2; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 35, pp. 433–435; Messages 36, 64–66; Matthew 25:14, footnote 3; 25:15, footnote 2; 25:18, footnote 1; *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Volume 15, Chapters 13, 26; *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, Message 46, pp. 496–498; Message 47, p. 509; *The Constitution and the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Chapter 1; Chapter 2, pp. 21–29.

Lesson 17—Training His Disciples (1)

OBJECTIVE: To see the need for training in order to make us useful to the Lord.

SYNOPSIS: During the years of His ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus not only taught His disciples—He trained them, that is, He prepared them through discipling them to live and serve not according to themselves in their natural life but according to Christ in the divine life. To teach is to impart truth for one's enlightenment; to train is to shape one's character for one's future usefulness. The Lord worked on all the disciples, but in this lesson we will focus (as an example) on a few incidents in the Lord's training of Peter. In Matthew 16 and 17 the Lord, focusing on Peter, trained the disciples regarding several matters: the need of revelation to know Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13–17); the need to deny the self, take up the cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:21–26); the need to recognize Christ as the One in whom God delights and to hear Him (Matt. 17:1–8); the need to pray in faith (Matt. 17:14–21); and the need to apply the revelation and vision of Christ's sonship (Matt. 17:24–27). In these chapters we see the Lord rebuking Peter, God interrupting Peter, and the Lord disciplining Peter by sending him to the sea to fish. In all these matters the Lord Jesus touched the being of His disciples and shaped them, preparing them to serve Him as His continuation. As a result of His training, the disciples not only served Him but also became the foundations of the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER(S): Matthew 16–17.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

The twelve disciples were those whom the Lord chose for the increase and spread of His ministry. They were initially very "raw" material! All but Judas Iscariot (a Judean) were from Galilee, a region which did not have a reputation for producing anything worthwhile (John 7:52). At least four had been fishermen, probably possessing little formal education. One had been a tax collector. At least one had previously been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35–41). Although they likely possessed many outstanding characteristics and loved the Lord, in the years they were with the Lord they could not make the transition into what the Lord was seeking to bring them into due to their strong natural composition and religious concepts. The Lord, however, had picked the disciples to be His continuation. Therefore He had to train them, to disciple them, not merely to understand His teaching so that they could teach others, but to get through in their very being so that they could eventually live the God-man life and minister the divine life to others just as He Himself had done.

I. In the Lord's ministry, He not only taught His disciples the high truth; He also trained them

In the Lord's ministry, He not only taught His disciples the high truth; He also trained them, shaping their character for their future usefulness. To teach is to impart truth for one's enlightenment; to train is to shape one's character for one's future usefulness. Peter was the leading one of the Lord's disciples (cf. Mark 16:7), so we can look at Peter's history as an example of how the Lord trained His disciples. In Matthew 16 and 17 the Lord, focusing on Peter, trained the disciples regarding several matters: the need of revelation to know Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13–17); the need to deny the self, take up the cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:21–26); the need to recognize Christ as the One in whom God delights and to hear Him (Matt. 17:1–8); the need to pray in faith (Matt. 17:14–21); and the need to apply the revelation and vision of Christ's sonship (Matt. 17:24–27). To follow the Lord was to

be in constant training. Throughout the four Gospels, the Lord was continually training Peter and the disciples.

A. To teach is to impart truth for one's enlightenment—Acts 18:11; 1 Cor. 14:6, 26; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:2

There is a difference between teaching and training. To teach is to impart truth for one's enlightenment; to train is to shape one's character for one's future usefulness. It was possible for them to receive revelation through the Lord's teaching, yet still not be affected in their being, as illustrated by Peter's rebuking the Lord right after receiving the revelation that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:16–17, 21–22). Teaching was a major part of the Lord's ministry, but in order to make the disciples useful as His continuation, the Lord needed to train and mold their character.

B. To train is to shape one's character for one's future usefulness—Prov. 22:6; Tit. 2:4, 12

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child according to the way he should go; / Even when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is not a promise so much as a statement of principle: if someone is trained in a particular direction, they will be sure to continue in the way they were trained. This is because training involves the shaping or molding of one's character. The Lord trained His disciples and shaped their character in a way that would make them useful in their future service to God.

C. The Lord worked on all the disciples many times in the Gospels, but the history of Peter gives us an outstanding example of how the Lord trained His disciples—Matt. 16:13–25; 17:1–6, 24–27

The Lord not only gave the disciples high teaching, but He also worked on their character. For example, in John 6:5–6 He trained Philip to trust the Father, and in John 11:1–44 He trained Thomas and all the disciples to be flexible and to know Him as the resurrection life. Since Peter was the leading one of the disciples (cf. Mark 16:7), the Lord's training often focused on Peter. As the Lord worked on Peter, surely the other disciples benefited as well. (For a few additional examples of training, see Matt. 18:1–4; 26:36–45, 50–54, 31–35, 57–58, 69–75; John 21:2–13, 15–17.)

II. The Lord trained the disciples by working on their character

The first way the Lord trained the disciples was by working on their character. The Lord's dealing with Peter and the disciples touched their very being. Three examples from Matthew chapters 16–17 illustrate how the Lord worked on the disciples.

A. The Lord rebuked Peter—Matt. 16:21–25

In Matthew 16:21–22, right after Peter had received the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Lord "began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" However, the Lord "turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (Matt. 16:23). Following this, the Lord gave His disciples a word concerning the denial of the self and the bearing of the cross. In this way the Lord dealt with Peter's natural aggressiveness and opinion, and

from this Peter and the other disciples learned that they needed to learn to deny their self and their natural life. This was the Lord's training of His disciples.

B. God interrupted Peter—Matt. 17:4–5

When the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mountain before three of His disciples, Peter made an absurd proposal to build three tabernacles: one for the Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Matt. 17:1–4). Peter's proposal exposed his natural concept, and immediately God interrupted Peter's foolish talk to declare that Jesus was His Son, the Beloved, and that the disciples should hear only Him (Matt. 17:5). By this Peter and the disciples were trained not to rely on their natural concept.

C. The Lord disciplined Peter by sending him to the sea to fish—Matt. 17:24–27

In Matthew 16, Peter received the revelation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. In Matthew 17:1–3 he saw the vision of Jesus being the Christ in glory and heard God's declaration concerning Christ. However, when the test came from those who collected the temple tax, Peter's natural concept, natural self-confidence, and presumptuousness were again exposed. The Lord corrected Peter and trained him not to act presumptuously (Matt. 17:25–26) but to hear Christ as he had been instructed on the mountain (Matt. 17:5c).

III. The Lord trained the disciples by disciplining them to live and serve not according to themselves in their natural life but according to Christ in the divine life

"Whatever the Lord did on earth in those three and a half years was a sign, signifying something....The Lord...did and said everything as a sign....The followers of Christ were disciplined through Christ's human living on the earth, as the model of a God-man—living God by denying Himself in humanity (John 5:19, 30), revolutionizing their concept concerning man (Phil. 3:10; 1:21a). The concept of the disciples was revolutionized by what they saw of the Lord Jesus living God by denying Himself in His humanity" (The Vital Groups, Message 2, pp. 17–18).

A. The disciples observed how the Lord did things

"The Lord Jesus, in particular, disciplined four people of two families: Peter and Andrew and James and John. He disciplined them for about three and a half years. They followed the Lord and stayed with Him day and night, traveling with Him, eating with Him, and doing everything with Him. They were living with Him and were around Him all the time. They saw how this God-man behaved. They observed Him" (The Vital Groups, Message 2, pp. 16–17). The disciples were disciplined by the Lord by observing His living. "I was in the recovery observing how Brother Watchman Nee acted for eighteen years. All that I observed in him became things disciplining me" (The Vital Groups, Message 2, p. 18).

B. He did not live or serve according to Himself but according to the Father by denying His natural life to live the divine life

"Christ had the human life and nature, but He lived the divine life and nature through the denying of His human life and nature. This was His divine and mystical living to disciple all His followers for three and a half years....A disciple is one who lives the divine life in his human life" (The Vital Groups, Message 2, p. 19).

C. The Lord disciplined His followers by giving Himself as the model and pattern of one who lived the life of a disciple—Luke 14:26–27; John 6:57

The Lord lived before the disciples for three and a half years as a pattern of one who lived a human life by the divine life. "He was a Jew, who no doubt bore a Jewish countenance. He had Jewish blood and Jewish flesh with the human life and nature. But He lived by another life in His human life. This other life is the divine life. Because He lived the divine life in His human life, His human life became mystical, a mystery. Out from His human life came something divine....We all need to be disciplined by the Lord to be divine and mystical persons" (The Vital Groups, Message 2, p. 17).

IV. The Lord's training prepared the disciples to serve Him as His continuation and produced them as the foundation of the walls of the New Jerusalem—Acts 1:12-17; Rev. 21:14

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Peter was probably the most outspoken and impetuous disciple. He was always opening his mouth at the wrong time and saying things he shouldn't have. Many junior highers have this same experience. After the Lord called Peter, He changed his name from Simon to Cephas, which means "a stone." This meant that the Lord chose him from among millions of people to be a part of God's universal building. What an honor! But Peter was so rough. He needed a lot of training and perfecting before the Lord could use him. The way the Lord dealt with Peter was by the things that Peter said and did. When Peter spoke something he shouldn't have, that gave the Lord an opportunity to adjust him. One time the Lord even called him "Satan" because he spoke something satanic. Peter provided many opportunities for the Lord to deal with him. We too have to realize that as junior highers, we are young and also outspoken. Many times we say things from our self that are really just from Satan. The Lord does not deal with us directly as He did with Peter, but deals with us through our parents, teachers, and serving ones. For Peter, when the Lord adjusted him it was not pleasant, but afterward he appreciated it very much. If you read the books of 1 and 2 Peter, you can realize how much he appreciated the Lord's shepherding care over his soul (1 Pet. 2:25). We too have to realize that the ones who exercise authority over us and care for us want the best for our lives. If we can accept their training and discipline as from the Lord, we will be very blessed. It will be a training and preparation from the Lord for our future usefulness. We too are stones for God's building, chosen by God and precious. First Peter 2:5a says, "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house." Like Peter, we have been chosen by God for His universal building. What an honor this is! But in order for Him to carry this out He has to take us through many experiences in order to train us. Use this line to point out ways the young people can benefit from the things that happen to them. Show through your experiences and stories how the Lord has trained you. You can point out stories of the Lord's dealing with complaining, lying, or joking as examples of how the Lord has been training you.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: God's salvation of man has two aspects. One is the objective, judicial (legal) aspect and the other is the subjective, organic aspect (in and through life). The judicial aspect of God's salvation solves man's problem of sin before God. The righteous law of God demands that every man who sins must die (Ezek. 18:20). By the Lord's death on the cross, the judicial aspect of God's salvation was accomplished and the law's righteous demand was met. Now, all those who believe into Christ will be saved from this judgment of death. But man still has an inward problem. This inward problem is the indwelling sin, the flesh with its passions and lusts, and many other inward difficulties. As the apostle Paul described in Romans 7:15-18, he was constantly struggling, doing what he hated and being unable to do what he decided to do. Every person struggles with this same problem. Paul concluded that it was not him who does the evil but "sin that dwells in me" (Rom. 7:17). However, God's salvation is not only objective and judicial, it is also inward, subjective, and organic. It not only saves us from God's

judgment outwardly, but it also saves us from our inward fallen condition that we could never overcome. While He was on the earth, the Lord Jesus gathered together twelve disciples to teach and train them to live in His divine life and experience His marvelous salvation, both judicial and organic. By receiving the Lord we can be saved from God's judgment and become His children with His life and nature to be delivered from the indwelling sin in our members (Rom. 7:23).

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Seeking the human and spiritual education and training that will best equip your vessel to fulfill your goals and ultimately the purpose of your life (IV.A.3.).

BACKGROUND READING: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 24, pp. 216–219; Message 45; Message 63, pp. 533–534, 536–538; *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 50; *The Vital Groups*, Message 2, pp. 16–21.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Mark*, Message 24, pp. 216–219; Message 32, pp. 284–289; Message 33; Message 41, pp. 357–358; Message 45; Message 63, pp. 533–534, 536–538; *Life-study of Matthew*, Messages 48–50; *Crystallization-study of the Epistle of James*, Message 7, pp. 91–95; *The Vital Groups*, Message 2, pp. 16–21.

Lesson 18—Training His Disciples (2)

OBJECTIVE: To see the need for training in order to become useful to the Lord.

SYNOPSIS: In the last lesson, we saw that the Lord Jesus often dealt with Peter in such a way that not only he but all the disciples would be trained by Him. In this lesson, we need to see that the Lord also dealt with John for this purpose. In his natural life John was ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant. However, the Lord trained him and gained him so that eventually he became most useful in His hand, even writing major portions of the New Testament. As a result of training, John became pure, loving, and transparent, a man constituted with the divine life for the divine building. Both Peter and John are outstanding examples of how important it is to be trained by the Lord. What a tremendous difference training makes! We need training in order to be useful to the Lord. The Lord Jesus trained His disciples not to be ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant, and in this way He made them useful to Him.

CHAPTER(S): Mark 9–10; Luke 9.

OUTLINE WITH FACTS TO TEACH:

In the last lesson, we saw that the Lord Jesus often dealt with Peter in such a way that not only he but all the disciples would be trained by Him. In this lesson, we need to see that the Lord also dealt with John for this purpose. John was ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant, but he was thoroughly trained and gained by the Lord.

I. In their natural life the disciples were unfit for the Lord's use, and needed to be trained by Him

The Lord Jesus called the disciples for His purpose (Matt. 9:9; John 1:43; Mark 1:16–20), but in their natural life the disciples were unfit for His use. In their natural life, the disciples were ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant (Mark 10:35–45; Luke 9:51–56; Mark 9:38–50). We all are this way. In our natural life we are crooked, perverted, and completely unfit for the Lord's use. This is why the Apostle Paul would say that those who genuinely serve the Lord are those who "have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Nevertheless, the Lord had a way to make these ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant disciples useful to Him. He took them through a full-time training for at least three years! In this lesson we will see some examples of how the Lord trained the disciples. In training them, He focused His attention on a few particular ones, and by this all the disciples got helped. In this lesson, we will look at the Lord's particular training of John.

- A. In their natural life, the disciples were ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant—Mark 10:35–45; Luke 9:51–56; Mark 9:38–50**
 - B. However, the Lord trained and gained them so that they would become useful in His hand**
 - C. The Lord particularly trained John, and in so doing also helped the other disciples**
- II. The Lord trained John and the other disciples to take the way of the cross, of lowliness, and of service instead of the way of ambition—Mark 10:35–45**

Mark 10:35–45 exposes the fact that John (and the other disciples) were ambitious for position. Because of their ambition they wanted to be the closest ones to Him in the kingdom. Mark 10:35–

37 records that “James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him [the Lord], saying to Him, Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask You. And He said to them, What do you want Me to do for you? And they said to Him, Grant to us to sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” This request exposes the fact that James and John were still natural “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). They even used their natural relationship with the Lord to make such a request (Matt. 20:20–21). The Lord had just been speaking to His disciples about His death (Mark 10:32–34). Yet James and John were blind to what the Lord was saying, and were only concerned for their ambition for a position. The Lord took this opportunity to reveal the way to follow Him and enter into His resurrection. In Mark 10:38–39 the Lord revealed that the way to follow Him is to drink the cup of His death and be baptized with the baptism of His death. To enter into the Lord’s death terminates our natural being that we may live Christ (Phil. 1:21) and not ourselves (Gal. 2:20). Furthermore, the Lord trained them by standing on His position as a Slave of God, saying, “To sit on My right or on My left is not Mine to give” (Mark 10:40). His answer exposed their ambition and independence, and at the same time showed them that He was utterly dependent on the Father as His Master. When the other ten disciples heard about this, they began to be indignant concerning James and John (Mark 10:41). This gave the Lord an opportunity to further train the disciples. The Lord taught them by Himself as the example that the way to be first in the kingdom is to become the slave of all (Mark 10:42–45), “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In this way, the Lord trained the disciples to take the way not of ambition, but of the cross, of lowliness, and of service.

III. The Lord trained John and the other disciples not to be rash and impetuous in judging others but to seek for people’s salvation—Luke 9:51–56

Luke 9:51–56 exposes John’s impetuosity, which was contrary to the virtue and morality of the Savior, who came to save people, not to destroy them. As the Lord Jesus and the disciples were traveling to Jerusalem, they wanted to lodge in a village of the Samaritans. However, the Samaritans would not receive the Lord, because He was headed toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:53). Seeing this, James and John asked the Lord if He wanted them to command fire to come down out of heaven and consume them. This was their rashness and impetuosity in pronouncing judgment on the Samaritans. However, the Lord rebuked them, saying, “You do not know of what kind of spirit you are” (Luke 9:55). Their rash and impetuous judgment of the Samaritans was contrary to the virtue and morality of the Savior. The Lord Jesus, as the Man-Savior, did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them (Luke 9:56). Here the Lord trained the disciples not to be rash and impetuous in pronouncing judgment as a reaction to rejection.

IV. The Lord trained John and the other disciples to be tolerant and enlarged in heart for the sake of keeping the oneness—Mark 9:38–50; Col. 4:6

Mark 9:38–50 exposes John’s narrowness and intolerance, displayed especially in his way of speaking (Mark 9:38). John, therefore, needed to be trained so that he could be tolerant of others and eventually be enlarged in heart for the sake of keeping the oneness. When John saw a brother who was not following with them casting out demons in the Lord’s name, he forbade him. However, the Lord adjusted John in a very wise way (Mark 9:39–40), and taught the disciples to keep peace with one another for the sake of unity (Mark 9:50). John especially needed to be adjusted in his speaking. Therefore, the Lord told the disciples to have salt in themselves in relationship to their speaking (Mark 9:50 and footnote 1; Col. 4:6).

V. As a result of training, John eventually became most useful in the Lord's hand

A. John became pure, loving, and transparent, a man constituted with the divine life for the divine building—2 John 1; 3 John 1, 4–10; 1 John 4:8, 16

The Apostle John, who in his natural life was ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant, became a person who was pure, loving, and transparent, a man constituted with the divine life for the divine building. He became pure, caring only for the Lord's interest, and having "no greater joy than these things," that he would hear that his children (the saints) were walking in truth (3 John 4). He encouraged the saints to support the other workers, but sought nothing for himself (3 John 4–8). When attacked by an evil opposer Diotrephes, John did nothing to fight with him (3 John 9–11). How different he was from the young man who wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans! John became constituted with the love of God and ministered the love of God to the saints (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). He became a person who loved (1 John 4:8), even a person who "abides in love" (1 John 4:16). "To abide in love is to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself, that He may be expressed in us" (1 John 4:16, footnote 4). Such was the result of the Lord's training!

B. John was even used by the Lord to write major portions of the New Testament—John 21:24; Rev. 1:4

The Apostle John was used by the Lord to write three epistles, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. His writings were a mending ministry to the church and were the conclusion to the entire Bible. How useful he became!

C. Training makes a tremendous difference in our being

We need training in order to be useful to the Lord. Both Peter and John are outstanding examples of how important it is to be trained by the Lord. The Lord Jesus trained His disciples not to be ambitious, impetuous, narrow, and intolerant, and in this way He made them useful to Him. What a tremendous difference training makes! For this reason, we all should aspire to receive the spiritual training we need in order to become useful to the Lord.

JUNIOR HIGH APPLICATION: Infuse the young people with an aspiration to be trained for the sake of their usefulness to the Lord. In junior high, they should give themselves to the summer schools of truth and learn to be open to the saints who are older than they in the Lord. Later, in high school, they may start to attend the summer and winter trainings or the video trainings. Finally, they should aspire to finish four years of college and then go to the full-time training for two years to give them a solid foundation for their usefulness to the Lord their entire life.

GOSPEL APPLICATION: Most of the people on the earth believe that God is pleased with man's efforts. We highly esteem people who give their lives for social reform to help the poor, stop oppression, and fight for the underprivileged. Little do we realize that the natural man can never please God. Isaiah 64:6 says, "For all of us became like him who is unclean, / And all our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment." God's estimation of man's righteousness is that it is a "soiled garment." Romans 8:8 tells us, "And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Man thinks that if he loves others he is doing well. But God's Word reveals that he "cannot please God." The sole object of God's delight is His Son, Jesus Christ. Several times in the Gospels it is recorded that the Father spoke from heaven saying that He was well pleased with His Son. Matthew 3:17 says, "And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight." We have to realize that we can only please

God by receiving His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord. When we receive Him, He comes into us to be our life. This is what makes God the happiest. Luke 15:7 says, "I tell you that in the same way there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance." When one sinner repents, heaven rejoices. But when ninety-nine self-righteous people strive to do good apart from Christ, there is no rejoicing. Why is that? Again, it is because God only finds His delight in His Son. We must receive this wonderful One by believing into Him. When we do this, we will be happy, God will be happy, and all the angels in heaven will rejoice!

CRUCIAL MATTERS: Seeking the human and spiritual education and training that will best equip your vessel to fulfill your goals and ultimately the purpose of your life (IV.A.3.).

BACKGROUND READING: *The Vital Groups*, Message 29 (unpublished message from the Spring of 1997); *Life-study of Mark*, Message 27, pp. 243–245; Message 28, pp. 247–248; Message 29, pp. 257–258; Message 33, pp. 291–295; *Life-study of Luke*, Message 23, pp. 195–197.

REFERENCES: *Life-study of Mark*, Messages 27–29, 32–33; *Life-study of Luke*, Message 23, pp. 195–197; *The Vital Groups*, Message 29 (unpublished message from the Spring of 1997); 1 John 4:16, footnote 4.

