

COOPERATING WITH THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

Propagating the Resurrected Christ under the Heavenly Ministry of the Ascended Christ

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32-36; 3:15; 5:30-32; 8:4, 12; 13:1-4

I. The book of Acts reveals a resurrected and ascended Christ who is in the heavens—1:3, 9-11, 22; 2:32-36:

- A. The Lord's living and ministry in the heavens are the content of the book of Acts.
- B. The Lord's ascension was His initiation into His living and ministry in the heavens—5:31:
 - 1. This initiation brought Him into a new realm, that is, into the heavens where He now has His living and His ministry.
 - 2. The book of Acts reveals that the resurrected and ascended Christ is now living in the heavens and ministering there.
- C. Christ's ascension was God's exaltation of Him—2:33-36; 5:31:
 - 1. The Lord was made Lord, the Lord of all to possess all, and He was made Christ, God's Anointed, to carry out God's commission—2:36; 10:36; Heb. 1:9:
 - a. As God, the Lord was the Lord all the time (Luke 1:43), but as man, He was made the Lord in His ascension after He brought His humanity into God in His resurrection.
 - b. As God's sent and anointed One, He was Christ from the time that He was born (2:11; Matt. 1:16; 16:16; John 1:41), but as such a One, He was also officially made the Christ of God in His ascension.
 - 2. God exalted Christ "to His right hand as Leader and Savior"—Acts 5:31:
 - a. The ascended Christ is the Leader, the Originator, the Author, and the Inaugurator—3:15; Heb. 2:10; 12:2:
 - 1) His being the Leader is a matter related to His authority—Matt. 28:18.
 - 2) He rules sovereignly over the earth with His authority so that the environment may be fit for God's chosen people to receive His salvation—Acts 17:26-27; John 17:2.
 - b. The One God has exalted to His right hand is also the Savior—Acts 5:31:
 - 1) Jesus' incarnation made Him a man, His human living qualified Him to be man's Savior, His crucifixion accomplished full redemption for man, His resurrection vindicated His redemptive work, and His exaltation inaugurated Him to be the ruling Leader so that He might be the Savior.
 - 2) We were saved by the Christ on the throne, by the One in glory—3:13; Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:9; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11:
 - a) When we were saved, we were seated with Him in the heavenlies—Eph. 2:6.

b) Christ saved us from the throne and to the throne; this is the ascended Christ as our Savior.

II. In order to cooperate with the heavenly ministry of the ascended Christ for the propagation of the resurrected Christ, we need to know the intrinsic significance of the book of Acts:

- A. The book of Acts is a record of a group of people who are resurrected and ascended with Christ, having Christ within them as their life and Christ upon them as their power and authority; they live by the Triune God within them as their life, and they act by the Triune God upon them as their strength, power, and authority—John 20:22; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.
- B. Acts is a record of a group of people who act and work in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—v. 14; 13:1-4:
 - 1. Acts reveals the move and activity of the Body, not of individual actions unrelated to the Body—8:1-17.
 - 2. Acts contains a beautiful picture of the one accord in the activities and work of the believers who move in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—2:44-47; 4:24, 32; 13:1-4; 16:1-5.
- C. The book of Acts shows us the divine stream, the unique flow; there is only one stream, one current, of the flow—Gen. 2:8-12; Rev. 22:1-2; Acts 2:33.
- D. In Acts there is a group of people who know the meaning of resurrection and ascension, who live by Christ as their life, who act by Christ as their power and authority, and who realize that they are the Body and act in the Body and for the Body in the one divine stream; this is the intrinsic significance of the book of Acts—John 20:22; Acts 1:8-11, 14; 2:1-4, 24, 32-33; 4:33.

III. To carry out His heavenly ministry for the propagating of Himself so that the kingdom of God might be established for the building up of the churches as His fullness, the ascended Christ uses not a group of preachers trained by man's teaching to do a preaching work but a body of His witnesses, who bear a living testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ—1:8:

- A. In His ascension the Lord carries out His ministry in the heavens through these witnesses, in His resurrection life and with His ascension power and authority, as recorded in Acts, to spread Himself as the development of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem unto the uttermost part of the earth—1:8:
 - 1. Testifying requires experiences of seeing and enjoyment concerning the Lord or spiritual things; it is different from merely teaching—2:40.
 - 2. Paul was appointed as a minister and a witness—26:16:
 - a. A minister is for the ministry; a witness, for the testimony.
 - b. The ministry is related mainly to the work, to what a minister does; a testimony is related to the person, to what a witness is.
- B. The Lord's resurrection was the focus of the apostles' testimony—1:22; 2:32; 3:13, 15, 26; 10:39-40; 13:33; 17:3, 18:
 - 1. God glorified His Servant Jesus through His resurrection and in His ascension—Luke 24:46; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11; Acts 3:13, 15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30-31.

2. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus points back to His incarnation, humanity, human living on the earth, and God-ordained death; and His resurrection points forward to His ascension, ministry and administration in heaven, and coming back—2:23; 1:9-11.
3. The Lord is both God and resurrection, possessing the indestructible life—John 1:1; 11:25; Heb. 7:16; Acts 2:24:
 - a. Since He is such an ever-living One, death is not able to hold Him.
 - b. He delivered Himself to death, but death had no way to detain Him; rather, death was defeated by Him, and He rose up from it—Rev. 1:18.
4. The apostles were witnesses of the resurrected Christ, not only in word but also by their life and action, especially bearing witness of His resurrection; bearing witness of Christ's resurrection is the crucial point, the focus, in carrying out God's New Testament economy—Acts 2:32; 4:33; 10:39-40; 17:3.

IV. Our cooperation with the ascended Christ for the propagation of the resurrected Christ is a move in life for the spread of the gospel—8:26-29; 9:10-11; 10:1-3, 9-22:

- A. This move in life corresponds to the Lord's heavenly ministry in His ascension.
- B. In Acts 8, 9, and 10 the Lord moved His disciples outwardly for the preaching of the gospel; He was ministering in the heavens to move some of His disciples:
 1. In response to the Lord's heavenly ministry, Philip left Jerusalem for Gaza (8:26); this was the corresponding on Philip's side to move in life for the preaching of the gospel.
 2. In Acts 9 there was a marvelous triangle of Christ ministering in the heavens, with Ananias and Saul corresponding to it on earth.
 3. In Acts 10 Peter cooperated with the Lord to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.
- C. This is the proper gospel preaching as a move in life under the heavenly ministry of Christ—5:42; 8:4, 12; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32:
 1. Christ as the Head exercised His headship to move His disciples here and there, and they were on the alert, responding to His ministry from the heavens—11:1-18.
 2. The preaching of the gospel in the Lord's recovery should be like this: a prevailing move in life, corresponding to Christ's heavenly ministry under His headship—1:8; 2:32-36; 5:30-32; 13:1-4; Eph. 1:22-23.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE POSITION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Gospels present a completed Redeemer and His accomplished redemption. In Acts we have the propagation of the completed Redeemer and His accomplished redemption for the producing of the churches. Then in the Epistles we have the edifying of the believers and the building up of the churches.

THE PROPAGATION OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

Having seen the position of the book of Acts, let us now go on to see the subject of this book. The subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by

the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God. Acts is concerned with the propagation of the resurrected Christ. Christ is carrying out this propagation in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples. The purpose of Christ's propagation is the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God.

In Acts there is not a single verse that can be taken as a summary of the entire book. The best way to present a summary, or extract, of Acts is to describe its subject. Therefore, once again I would point out that the subject of the book of Acts concerns the propagation of the resurrected Christ. It is of great value for us to have such a phrase as *the propagation of the resurrected Christ*. I do not know of any book on Acts that uses the word *propagation*. Nevertheless, the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God.

The propagation in Acts is not the propagation of Jesus. In Acts we do not have the propagation merely of the One who lived in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth. Rather, in Acts we see the propagation of the resurrected One, the propagation of the resurrected Christ.

CHRIST'S ACTIVITY IN HIS ASCENSION

The propagation of the resurrected Christ is carried out by Christ in His ascension. The Lord Jesus lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, but now He is in ascension. In His ascension the Lord is very active. We should never think that the ascended Christ is sitting passively on the throne, observing the pitiful situation on earth and feeling disappointed about it. No, in His ascension Christ is active in a very positive way. As the ascended One, He is now doing many things.

The case of the stoning of Stephen is an illustration of Christ's activity in His ascension. Speaking of Stephen, Acts 7:55 and 56 say, "Being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." As the Lord was looking at the situation on earth in His ascension, He stood up. Perhaps He was saying, "You persecutors may stone Stephen and put him to death. But I will gain one of you—Saul of Tarsus—and make him much stronger than Stephen. What can you do about this? You do your stoning, and I do My observing. Wait for a period of time, and you will be defeated." Stephen's case illustrates that the resurrected Christ is very active in His ascension.

The fact that Christ is now in ascension means not only that He is in the heavens; it also means that He has power and authority. In His ascension Christ has all the power and all the authority in the universe. According to Matthew 28:18, the resurrected Christ said to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Therefore, with such authority and power in His ascension the Lord is very active. What is He doing? The Lord, as the ascended One, is carrying out His universal and eternal propagation.

Who can explain why the earth today is filled with Christians? Why are there so many believers in the world? Great men have tried to gain control of the earth, but they have failed. Hitler, for example, tried to do this, but eventually he lost everything. Napoleon, after he had been defeated, reportedly looked up to the heavens and confessed that Jesus had beaten him. Napoleon admitted that even though the Lord Jesus did not fight, He gained everything. The point here is that the whole earth is in the hands of the undefeatable One, and this One is carrying out His propagation.

As the ascended Christ is carrying out His propagation, His main work is not fighting. Instead of fighting, the ascended Lord's work is mainly propagating Himself throughout the earth. In the Lord's recovery we have people of different colors: black, white, brown, yellow,

and red. We all are part of Christ's propagation. We have been produced by the resurrected Christ in His ascension.

PRODUCING THE CHURCHES—THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Propagation is a matter of production. To propagate, therefore, is to produce. The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension produces the churches. The churches are the produce of the resurrected Christ in His ascension. Hence, the churches are the produce of Christ's propagation. The first mention of the word *church* in Acts is in 5:11. Thereafter, this book speaks of the church many times (8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28).

The churches produced by the resurrected Christ in His ascension are the kingdom of God. Concerning the kingdom, we should not follow the teachings of those who claim that the kingdom of God is not present today. According to such teachings, the kingdom has been suspended and will come after the church age. In the book of Acts we see that the churches and the kingdom of God go together. In fact, the churches actually are the kingdom of God. In Acts the kingdom of God is first mentioned in 1:3, and then in a number of other verses (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

By now we should be impressed with the subject of the book of Acts, a book that stands as the backbone of the New Testament. Acts unveils Christ in His ascension propagating Himself to produce the churches, which are the kingdom of God on earth today. Following the book of Acts, we have the Epistles. The Epistles, as the continuation of Acts, edify the saints so that the churches may be fully built up as the Body of Christ. The consummation of this edifying and building up will be the New Jerusalem. If we see the place occupied by the book of Acts in the New Testament, we shall realize that this book, the backbone of the New Testament, stands in a crucial position.

A WORK IN ASCENSION

We have emphasized the fact that the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God. We have seen something concerning the propagation of the resurrected Christ (2:24; 3:15; 5:30; 13:33). Now we need to see that this propagation is carried out by the Lord from the throne in the heavens. This means that His work of propagation is in ascension. However, much of today's so-called Christian work is not a work in ascension. We hope that the work in the Lord's recovery will be in His ascension. The ascension is the nature and the sphere of the Lord's work on earth. Therefore, the work of the Lord today should have a heavenly nature and should be in a heavenly sphere.

It is in His ascension that Christ is propagating Himself. We know that His ascension came after His death and resurrection. Christ's work in His ascension takes place in the nature of His resurrection. Therefore, this work is not natural; it does not have anything of the natural man. Rather, it is of the divine life in resurrection, and it is carried out in the atmosphere and condition of His ascension. Where are we working today? We all should be able to say that we are working in Christ's ascension.

BY THE SPIRIT

The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension is by the Spirit. His propagation is not by any gimmick or human technique. But consider the situation among Christians today concerning the propagation of Christ. Where is the propagation by the Spirit? In many instances, there is very little of the Spirit but much use of human methods and techniques. For example, some even use rock music in their preaching of the gospel. We need to

realize that the propagation of the resurrected Christ is by the Spirit, in particular, the economical Spirit. In the book of Acts we see the economical Spirit for the carrying out of Christ's propagation.

THROUGH THE DISCIPLES

Christ's propagation is through the disciples. Who are the disciples? As we shall see, the disciples are not merely preachers, and in Acts they are not called preachers. Rather, the disciples are witnesses. The Lord's disciples in Acts are witnesses of a wonderful Person, the One who was conceived of God the Spirit, who was born of a human virgin, who lived on earth and ministered, who entered into death and conquered it, and who came out of the tomb in resurrection, becoming the life-giving Spirit. This resurrected One has ascended into the heavens, where He is sitting on the throne. As He is sitting there, He is very active and aggressive in doing the work of propagation. The disciples are witnesses of such a One. This was the reason the Lord said concerning them, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8).

FOR THE PRODUCING OF THE CHURCHES

Through His witnesses the resurrected Christ in His ascension propagates Himself for the producing of the churches. This indicates that the churches should not be raised up and established merely by human hands. Every local church should be produced by Christ's propagation. Every local church must be born of Christ, brought forth by Christ's propagation in His divine and resurrected life.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The churches produced by Christ's propagation are the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a sphere of life produced by the propagation of Christ. Actually the kingdom is the expansion of this resurrected, propagating One. The resurrected Christ, who is propagating Himself in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples, is the reality of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His expansion.

We may use the kingdom of man, the human kingdom, for an illustration of the kingdom of God as the expansion of Christ. In the beginning, there was just one man, Adam. Then Adam began to expand, to increase. The kingdom of man was a couple, and then this couple brought forth children. In this way the kingdom of man expanded from one man to a family. Now the entire human race is part of the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man is simply mankind as the expansion of the man, Adam. From this we see that the kingdom of man is man's expansion.

What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the expansion of God, whose embodiment is Christ. This expansion of Christ is the churches. The churches are the expansion of Christ as the One who came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God. This is revealed in the four Gospels. In the Gospels Christ was the seed of the kingdom. In the book of Acts we have the propagation of this seed to produce the churches as the kingdom of God.

Can you say how many chapters are in the book of Acts? Perhaps you would say that Acts has twenty-eight chapters. This, of course, is correct. However, it is also true to say that the book of Acts is still being written because the propagation of the resurrected Christ is still taking place. By now Acts may have thousands of chapters. Even today a portion of a chapter may have been written. This writing is the propagation of the resurrected Christ, and this propagation is the expansion of Christ to be the kingdom of God. We in the churches are the propagation of Christ and the expansion of Christ, and we are enlarging the kingdom of God.

I hope that we all shall be able to say from memory the subject of the book of Acts: the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God. Here three words are synonyms: propagation, churches, and kingdom. The kingdom is the churches, and the churches are the propagation of Christ.

The more we are impressed with the subject of Acts, the more we shall say, “Lord, we worship You as the resurrected One and the ascended One. We praise You for Your propagation. We thank You, Lord, that we are Your propagation today. We thank You that we are with You in the heavens and that the churches are the kingdom of God.” Let us declare to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus is now in the heavens, and that as the exalted One He is now propagating Himself on earth through us as His witnesses. (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 9-15)